

Negroes

THE THRILLER

THE PAPER WITH A THOUSAND THRILLS **2^d**



A BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
OF DRAMATIC ADVENTURE

The
MAN
from
ASHANTI

by *Stacey Blake*



Unconscious of the watchers above them, the three crooks pored over the piece of human skin bearing the secret of the location of the loot.

The Man from Ashanti

Chapter 1. BLIND, DEAF—AND DUMB.

ON the girl's face grew progressive incredulity, conviction, horror. And the last remained, squeezing her fresh face of all colour till it was bloodless and haggard. Her mouth sagged. Her eyes were full to the brim with something like terror.

She stood at the gangway on the quay, watching the old man descend from the ship towards her. Old—perhaps he was not so old, but he was broken—broken as much as any man can be, and yet live. He was clinging to the rail on each side and walking with fearful, hesitating steps, although assisted from behind by a seaman who followed him step by step. He presented a dreadful, scarred face to the pale twilight.

Sightless eyes looked blankly ahead of him. Sprouting white whiskers clung about his chin in an uncared-for manner.

Tragic fragments of tropical clothing, supplemented by warmer garments culled from the tramp-steamer's slop chest, covered his body. This was the homecoming of a man whose name had been once honoured, subsequently notorious, and afterwards a thing hated and execrated. And he came back secretly, no one knowing but the girl who waited there for him with dread on her face.

"Father!" she said under her breath.

The old man did not answer or make any sign that he heard. The sailor behind him spoke for him, answering her with rough sympathy.

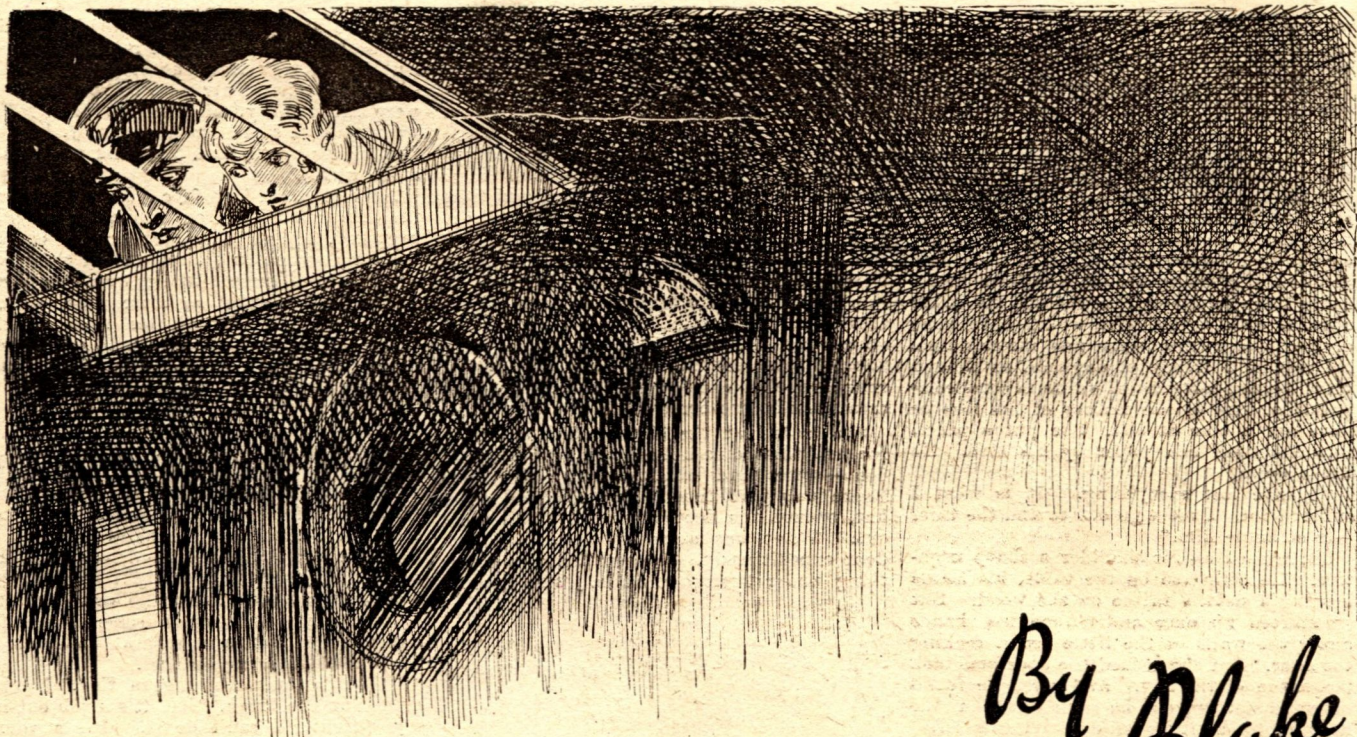
"He can't hear, miss—he's deaf and

he's dumb as well. And he's blind. You can see that."

"Deaf and dumb and blind?" she echoed, with a little wail in her voice. "He will not know me, then. How shall I make him know?"

"He'll know you somehow, miss. He has his ways of knowing. He guessed someone would meet him. He said as much—no, not said. He scribbles on bits of paper, and you have to give him signs by tapping on his shoulder—one for 'yes' and two for 'no,' and like that. It's a bad go for you if you didn't expect him to be like this. Mr. Neville has been a bit of a 'andful this voyage, I can tell you."

She looked at the seaman a moment with a puzzled air. "Neville!" She did not know the name. Was that what her father called



A LONG COMPLETE STORY of MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE

*By
Stacey Blake*

himself now? Then speculation was drowned in the emotion of the next moment, for she was holding him. He was clinging to her, feeling her hands with his own and putting his finger-tips on her face. He made queer little noises that were nothing like speech. He gripped her, while his poor, scarred face worked with excitement. Of a sudden he pulled out a scrap of a notebook from his pocket, and with a pencil scrawled a question across a leaf of it.

"Are you Margaret?"

"Tap once for 'yes' and twice for 'no,' miss," said the sailor over her shoulder.

She tapped his shoulder once. He instantly responded. He was all excitement, clutching her to him. Then he broke away, making the significant sign of a forefinger across his lips, which meant silence. He was silent enough because he could be no other. But she must be silent. He demanded her secrecy. She tapped on his shoulder again in token that she understood and agreed.

But she was not likely to do anything else. In the years that had gone since her father's disappearance she had learned enough of his going to understand what shame was. His coming back now might mean a revival of it. It might mean much worse. Someone might find out he was in England. In spite of the hideous change in him, it might be known!

All at once a great surge of pity for him overwhelmed her. And with it came a great resolution to protect him and to shelter him.

"Come with me, father," she said in a whisper, taking his arm, and forgetting that he could not hear. But he understood the pull on his arm. He accompanied her a little way and then stopped. Again the ragged notebook came out. He wrote:

"Is it safe where we are going?"

She answered with a tap on his shoulder. He nodded and came with her, letting her guide him. Her mind was all turbulent questioning. How could she ever communicate with him? To merely answer him "yes" or "no" was one-sided talk. She could not get at his mind. She could not get to know anything. She was up against something that was beyond her. Just for a moment her reason tottered as though the problem of it all was beyond her mind to grapple with, and then with the need came an effort of resolution. She had to protect him. She must learn to communicate with him. Whatever had to be done she must do.

"Come along," she said, for she could not yet rid herself of the habit of speech to him. She wanted to get him to herself. She wanted to learn of the horror that had befallen him. She clung close to his arm and took him along.

The night was falling. Already over London river the gloom of the twilight mingled with the smoke of the sea-traffic that had come to rest here. The wharves were darkening. Lights flashed here and there, but on this Limehouse wharf, and in the streets beyond, there was as yet no light.

It was under an archway, where the gloom seemed to have gathered like filth in a sewer, that there manifested sudden life of the kind that is spawned in dirt and darkness. An under-sized figure, a human rat of the streets, pushed up.

Before the girl had time to realise what was taking place, she was sent staggering against the wall, while her father was neatly back-heeled and sprawled upon his back.

An arm and a foul paw were thrust under the blind man's coat. There was an

instant's movement, a quick grab of a practised hand, and a swift withdrawal.

Three seconds later there was only the sound of pattering footsteps, and the sight of a dark figure disappearing round the corner. Margaret sprang forward, leaving her father standing there, but she saw nothing. The archway made a twist, and there was more than one way out. She ran fifty yards, but saw no sign of the disappearing thief. She went back to her father. He was making a queer, gurgling noise in his throat while he was feeling frantically into the inner pocket of his coat. Both hands were groping wildly, frenziedly, in his pockets, and then into the inner part of his clothing. He did not find what he sought, and he went over his pockets again in a half-mad and wholly panic-stricken manner that was the more terrible because he could not speak. In place of speech his scarred features worked in demoniac fashion. He thrust up his arms in despair, then clutched his blind eyes with his hands.

"What is it? What have you lost?" the girl gasped.

There was no reply from the man, from whom all sound was shut out. And he could not see her, though he must have sensed she was come back to him, for he seized her by the shoulders and his hands ran over her as though to find out if she had recovered what had been stolen from him.

Suddenly he seemed to collapse in her arms. How she got him out of that dark hole she did not know. Somehow she reached the street with him. She bribed an urchin to get a taxi. Half an hour later she had got him in her room in Lambeth. He was sitting in a chair with his head down on the table, drumming on the table-top with his hands.

Thus came home Samuel Radcliffe, the

man who four years ago stole a hundred thousand pounds and got away with it.

THE SECRET.

WHAT had happened between? Margaret did not know. Between then and now Margaret's own life had been weary and sordid enough, if not tragic. For the life of a girl who had been brought up in a sheltered, luxurious home, and who is suddenly faced with the need to earn her own living, is never easy. But what had befallen her erring father had been manifestly more terrible. She watched his dumb agonies with dread. He would have none of her sympathies. He was inconsolable. He was in a frenzy of anguish, as though what he had lost was of value beyond computation. As to the nature of his loss he gave her a clue at last. She put a pencil into his hand and paper by his side. He wrote down:

"I have lost everything. It is what I suffered for. I must go out to find the thief—to strangle him."

She tapped on his shoulder a sharp negative. He collapsed on the table, his hands beating a devil's tattoo on the wood. But he started up once and clawed his hands along the walls of the little room, seeking the door. But she locked the door and took possession of the key. And when he found he could not get out he sank down on the floor in an attitude of despairing grief.

She gave him food and drink. Afterwards he sat in a chair with his head in his hands, shaking with a monotonous expression of despair. She thought of a means to communicate with him. She took his right hand, and, grasping it in her own hand, made on the table-top the shape of a letter. He nodded in understanding. She formed another imaginary letter. She made words of them. Slowly, and with great tedium, she spelled out a question.

He answered it more quickly with pencil and paper. For conciseness he used a sort of telegraphese.

"Have been in Black River country, Africa—up the river of Hell. All I went away with buried there in safe place. Put it there for safety till trouble was blown over. Went to get it. Native devils. Torture. Hell natives. Priest devil made me blind. Escaped. Lot to tell. Brought home plan where money is buried. Wanted help from someone who could get it and share with me. Packet stolen by riverside is chart—Black river—river of Hell—all lost—must go out and look for thief—"

In these fragmentary sentences she read the bones of the tragedy, and her imagination, aided by the terrible sight her father presented, could fill in the rest of the dreadful and horrific details.

"You can do nothing yourself," she communicated to him slowly. "Shall I go to the police?"

The grimace he made as this idea reached his understanding was horribly significant.

"I can't appeal to the police," he answered on the paper. "I'm going myself to find the thief."

He got up again and tried, in a half-demented fashion, to get the door open. But she led him to the chair again.

"Give me time to think," she conveyed to him. I will see what can be done."

To get his mind off the madness she tried to tell him how his letter, sent from Moanga, announcing that he was coming by the Creole on that vessel's return voyage, came to her via the old address, through someone who knew her. The letter had not been signed, and it simply said that she was to meet the Creole at the London Docks when the shipping news announced her arrival. Nor was the writing the same,

although there were some tricks in the formation of some letters that suggested the identity of the writer and in some ways prepared her.

She told him all this, but he seemed to lose interest. Exhaustion could not be kept back. He was sleeping before she had got to an end of what she had to tell him. That was all to the good. She wanted time to think, time to decide what she should do, time to design some rearrangement of her life to fit in with the new responsibility that had come to her. For she had to shelter him, care for him. She did not think there was any possibility of his arrest, for no one would know him. No one who knew Samuel Radcliffe in his past life would recognise the same man in this broken creature who had come home.

She looked at the clock. She suddenly realised that some little shopping had to be done—some food obtained for breakfast. There was just time. She dragged on a hat, opened the door noiselessly, and went out. What was necessary to do she got done expeditiously. She was back in something under twenty minutes. She entered



The man who was deaf, dumb, and blind collapsed in his daughter's arms.

the sitting-room noiselessly—and, to her discomfort, saw, where her father had been sitting, an empty chair. He was not in the room.

She flung her purchases on the table and passed through into the bed-room beyond. It, too, was empty. Her father had disappeared.

She gave a little cry of anguish and ran outside, down the stairs and into the street. There was no sign of him. She ran along the street in the opposite direction from that which she had just traversed, but she got no sight of him. He had gone. She knew what had sent him out. He was insanely seeking the man who had robbed him.

CROOKED BUSINESS.

THE man who had snatched at the blind man's pocket, seeking to get whatever plunder it might contain, was at this moment examining his loot under the light of a gas burner in a back room of a hostelry that, even in an evil street, suffered under the reputation of being a tough spot.

In the strip of sail-cloth, which was tied up with a cord, he found a couple of ten-shilling notes, almost unrecognisable with dirt, but undoubtedly good currency. Those were satisfactory, and he put them away with his own small stock of money, but the rest of his acquisition he could not understand at all.

He had a rat-like face. He peered into the thing spread in front of him—a roughly-prepared, crinkly and jagged piece of skin with ink marks on it, suggesting some sort of plan, and some writing which he could not make out—with no more than animal intelligence. He shook his head after a while and let the skin return to its original folds. And when he had drunk up his beer he abandoned this part of his plunder as being of no use to him, by the easy way of dropping it under the table, to be found by anyone who was interested in meaningless puzzles.

Thus, a few hours later, it came into the possession of the man who owned this house, one, Alf Finkhill, whose astuteness had so far kept him out of the hands of the police, although his reputation might have hanged some people less fortunate. This individual, after closing hours, spent some thoughtful hours and missed a considerable amount of sleep in considering his find.

"There's something big in this," he concluded at the finish, "but it's a job outside my weight. I can't do it. It's a young man's job. And it needs money. I've got to hand it to someone else and be content with a percentage. Africa, eh? That's it. And something ugly at the end, maybe. There's Africa and Africa. There's the Africa of the tourist, with cool drinks handed to you in a hammock, and there's the Africa that's blistering Hades. I don't like the idea of the Gold Coast. This might easily be Ashanti, too. No, not me. I've passed my years of adventure."

He put the inscribed skin carefully away, and in the morning had another look at it. Into this house of no reputation sometimes strayed broken travellers, and those who had wandered into the less blessed parts of the earth, and he had heard yarns that had made him tolerably familiar with some of the evil that lies behind sections of the coast line and away up some of the lesser known rivers of Africa, and he had no wish to sample adventures there.

Another examination of the skin confirmed his opinion and intention. He started off with it in his pocket, and sought a certain office in an old-fashioned building in the City, where, if the brass sign at the entrance were any indication, operations of a financial character were negotiated. But since the term is loose and the description—"finance"—may be made to cover a multitude of activities, some not always within the law, it may be assumed that the innkeeper knew he was coming to the right spot.

The names on the brass plate were "Stokes & Biskerton." Probably this announcement was the only reliable one that ever came from that office, for the partners in this concern undoubtedly owned those names, although they had been known to temporarily use other ones.

Mr. William Stokes, a florid, rather fleshy and over-dressed man of forty or so, occupied the inner office when Finkhill was ushered in, and being in good humour, for things were easy with him, he pushed over a box of cigars to the innkeeper.

"What have you got on your mind this time, Fink?" he asked familiarly. "If it's jewellery, I'm not buying. Your clients will have to find another channel for disposal. 'Too jolly risky, my lad.'"

"I've got something very different, Mr.

Stokes," Finkhill said, selecting a cigar with care and chewing the end off with sharp teeth. "I'd keep it all to myself, but I think it is a bit above my weight. I've got an idea it's something big and wants a big way of handling. If you are feeling speculative, and if you don't mind risk for big money, I fancy I can show you something."

He put a hand into his inner pocket, and then paused.

"But, understand, it's my possession. Any funny business—"

Stokes waved a fat hand as though to indicate his perfect honesty.

"Between friends, my dear fellow, there should always be trust," he said. "Still, if you'd rather smoke your cigar outside—"

Finkhill clapped on the desk in front of him the folded skin bearing the inked plan and the obscure notes in a language he could only partly read.

"Look at that and tell me what you think of it," he said.

Stokes unfolded it and spread it out on his desk, and looked at it for a long time without speaking.

"A plan," he said; "a chart, shall we call it?—a river leading from another river that leads from still another. It is West Africa. I will show you." And he went to a bookcase, a section of which was devoted to maps, and from this division he took a map, which he spread on the writing-table at his side. He placed a yellow-stained forefinger at a point on the map.

"Here is the spot, but the drawn map on the skin gives a lot more detail of the further river, and it is clear that the man who drew it knew a lot more of the district than the map-engraver did. The printed map is sketchy, and some of it obviously guess-work, but the drawn map looks like the work of someone who knows."

"That's my idea," said Finkhill. "And it marks and shows how to get to a spot that strikes me as being infernally interesting. And for why? There's probably gold there, or diamonds, or something big that's worth running risk for."

"Do you know what these notes—this writing means?" asked Stokes.

"I haven't made all of it out," said Finkhill cautiously.

"You haven't, I'll bet. Well, it's in Spanish. I don't know the language too well myself. I'll let Biskerton have a look at it. He's got that lingo all pat. It may mean that a Spaniard has written this, or it may have been written by an Englishman with an idea of extra caution. You've brought this to the right place, Fink. We'll have the guts out of this document in no time."

"That struck me as being queer," Finkhill said, placing his finger on a strange little drawing at one corner of the skin. It was a sort of representation of a human figure—rather a caricature of that shape with a monstrous head and round, bulbous eyes, a small body, and crooked legs. Underneath it, at the feet of it, was a square shape representing a cube, and underneath it was written the Spanish word "Dinero."

"That word means jewellery, or money, or wealth," said Stokes. "This is a jolly interesting document."

"By gum, I thought so myself," said Finkhill exultantly. "It's worth money, eh?"

"I don't know," said Stokes cautiously. "Central West Africa is a long way off, and some things aren't worth the risk."

"The man who made that map thought it was."

"I don't know. I should like to meet that man. Do you know him?"

"Not me. It was jettisoned in my hotel,



Biskerton whistled through his teeth as he held up the magnifying glass and studied the map. "Oh, yes," he agreed, "it's human skin right enough."

either accidentally or on purpose. I'll bet it was pinched. But it's mine now. Well, what are you going to give for it?"

"Nothing yet. You open your mouth too soon, Fink. I want to know more about it."

"But it sounds good, eh? And that funny figure! It's a statue, or god, or something. Perhaps it's made of gold, being marked 'dinero'? Or perhaps those big eyes are diamonds, or rubies, or pearls, or something?"

"Perhaps nothing of the sort, Fink. You've been reading tales. This isn't fiction—it's life!"

"Which means it may be a jolly sight queerer than fiction, Mr. Stokes. What's the next move?"

"I'll get in touch with my partner. Biskerton will know what this means without any mistakes."

He spoke into the telephone. Biskerton came down from an upstairs room. He was a loose-limbed, untidy-looking man with prominent teeth, which he had an unpleasant way of showing by pulling back his lips. And he had a way of whistling through them.

"What's that you've got?" he asked.

"I've translated most of that," Stokes said. "See if you get the same result."

Biskerton whistled through his teeth. He glanced at the writing with interest. Then he took a magnifying-glass from his pocket and examined the skin through it.

"Queer," he said. "Do you know what this skin is? It's human. Human skin. Very queer. And this inscription. Well, it's a pretty clear instruction how to find a ju-ju idol up a water-way called the Black River. At the foot of the ju-ju idol is buried a hundred thousand pounds."

"Pounds of what?" demanded Finkhill eagerly.

"Pounds sterling—money—dinero it is called here. It is written in words, not figures, *eien mil libra esterlina*."

"Gold, perhaps."

"There's no indication of that."

"Then it looks as though some Spanish Johnny has written this thing."

"Maybe. You can't tell. It is probable. But this cache of plunder is British currency according to statement. Queer. And up an African river, too. How would the stuff get there? Perhaps some niggers robbing a down-coast bank have taken it into the interior as an extra powerful ju-ju. I dunno." He whistled through his teeth while he examined the map and writing again through his powerful magnifying-glass.

"Oh, yes, human skin, right enough. Looks like a slab from a human back between the shoulder-blades, judging from its wrinkles."

"A white man?" asked Finkhill, in an awed voice.

"Yes," said Biskerton, whistling quietly.

"Gosh! I wonder what it all means. I'd like to have the yarn."

"Don't you know anything? Where did you pick this up?"

"Bloke dropped it in my hotel."

"In that low joint of yours, Fink."

"Not too low for you to use sometimes, Mr. Biskerton."

The other chuckled in his throat and nodded. "Well, what's the proposition? Are you handing this to the ethnological department of the British Museum?"

"I'm out to sell it to the best bidder. I reckon you'll give me more than they will for it," Finkhill said cunningly.

Biskerton whistled several bars before replying, while Stokes sat back smoothing his hair with one hand.

"I'm not seeking hazardous speculations myself," he said, putting down his magnifying-glass.

"Nor am I," added Stokes. "Quiet business is my hobby just now."

Finkhill stood up, reached over and grabbed the piece of skin.

"Righto," he said, folding it up. "I'll find someone with some sand in their backbones. If you don't know a good thing when you see it, or if an easy life has

softened your enterprise, I'll move on to someone who has enough tough guts to—"

"Sit down, Fink," said Stokes quietly. "We're the only firm you dare take that to. There may be something in it, or there may be nothing. It's a spec. It's a matter of putting down some money for a start. If you like to do that, and care to come in with us, we might think about a partnership."

"Even shares—eh?" said Finkhill under his breath.

"Even risks make even shares," nodded Biskerton. "But, at the same time, we'd have to spread a bit of thinking on the job before we started anything active. We can't start working in the dark. I'd like to know who owned this skin before you got it."

"I'm pretty sure who dropped it in my hotel. It is a rat-faced lag who comes in sometimes. I could get on his track all right and make him speak. He'll have stolen it from somebody and chucked it away because he couldn't understand it. I could get to know all he knows, anyhow."

"Good, Fink. That's a start. We'll leave the job for a couple of days."

"I can get a start a lot quicker than that. It's a partnership, then?"

"Yes, for what it may bring."

"What about the skin?"

"It's snigger in our safe. You'll perhaps lose it."

Into Finkhill's eyes smouldered a light of suspicion.

"You can trust us," said Stokes. "Honour among—business-men."

"Yes, all right. Perhaps I know too much about you for you to do me down," the innkeeper said confidently. "You keep it, and I'll come to see you when I get to know something. I'll have another cigar."

Messrs. Stokes and Biskerton looked at each other when they were alone.

"What do you think of it? Does it sound good?" asked Stokes.

Biskerton nodded and whistled through his big teeth.

THE KINDLY STRANGER (?)



THE man with a face like a rat answered Finkhill's interrogation with full frankness when he was assured that, far from being faced with trouble as a result of his pocket-picking, information touching the latter might result in a night of free drinks.

"It was just a ornery lay," he said, rubbing his nearly chinless face. "Just a snatch at the pocket and run. It was a old bloke. I seed him come tottering off a ship, and blokes wot come off ships often 'ave a bit of something worth picking. He was met there by a gal—a nice-looking piece. Might have been his daughter. I dunno. I watched him quiet-like, and twigged he was blind. And then I spotted something else. 'E was blind and deaf and dumb as well."

"Blind and deaf and dumb?" echoed Finkhill. "That's pretty steep. Funny a chap like that being on a ship."

"Come from Africa, 'e 'ad, a feller off the ship told me later. He didn't know the rights of the tale, but he reckoned as 'ow Mister Blind and Deaf and Dumb, who was called Mr. Neville, got mixed up with some natives as 'adn't done 'im no good."

"And you robbed this poor bloke," said Finkhill.

"Oh, yes, I've got myself to look after, ain't I? He worn't so poor as me, any way up, but I reckon 'e must 'ave got his money somewhere else, for I only got a couple of ten-bob notes. That's all I know."

"Deaf and dumb and blind, was he?"

"Aye, and wif a face like a piece of pickled pork. Now I'll 'ave a drink. I'll start wif whisky, Mr. Finkhill."

"You'll start with four ale!" rasped Finkhill. "Blind and deaf and dumb! Gosh! Here, what was the ship he came on?"

"Four ale don't let me remember that."

"Curse you, have whisky, then."

"It was the Creole. She's lying in the London Docks now. Now gimme a man's whisky."

This information was in the hands of Messrs. Stokes and Biskerton within a few minutes of the opening of their office in the morning.

"Man, the thing is tumbling into our hands," Stokes said, while Biskerton, whistling joyfully through his teeth, nodded in satisfied agreement. "I'm beginning to see the start of a way through."

"But deaf and dumb and blind!" said the publican with a shiver. "And he'd got into the hands of natives who'd done him a bit of no good. That sounds rotten—eh?"

"Most unpleasant. But we can't help his troubles. And now we've got a start we have to find out more. They'll perhaps know something on that ship. In the guise of a kindly and interested relative I could see the skipper myself; you, Fink, could do some discreet inquiry among the crew, and Biskerton might concentrate on trying to get track of this afflicted man."

"And if you find him, what then? Being blind and deaf and dumb, he'll not hear any questions or be able to answer them. And besides, if he once got the suspicion that we'd got the skin, he'd perhaps set the police on to us."

"I don't know. He might have reasons for secrecy himself."

"How do you make that out?"

"I don't know. I'm only thinking."

Biskerton, who had been idly turning the morning paper in front of him on the desk, broke into a startled whistle.

"Listen to this," he said, as he ringed with a blue pencil an item of news in the paper before him.

"An old man who was knocked down by a taxi at the south end of Waterloo Bridge on Tuesday evening, was found, on being taken to Charing Cross Hospital, to be blind and deaf and dumb."

"By gosh!" murmured Finkhill. "I wonder if it is the same man."

"The chances are that it is. Even London isn't full of old men who are blind and deaf and dumb."

"Then that opens up a fresh field for inquiry," said Stokes thoughtfully.

"But it isn't one to barge into without due consideration," commented Biskerton. "Delicate negotiation is indicated—what?"

"So jolly delicate that I don't know how you can work it," said Finkhill. "Deaf and dumb and blind! Gosh! They said he'd been tortured by rotten niggers in some Hades of a place up a river."

Biskerton whistled a few notes, and then bared his teeth in a grin.

"You've got nerves, Fink. What's that to worry about, except that it's going to give us our chance? Now, there's that girl who met the old man at the ship. Your rat-faced friend suggests that she was his daughter. Perhaps she knows something. She might be worth while finding. That may be done through the hospital, providing—oh, well, we are guessing. This paragraph does not indicate that she was with him. Well, we will just consider our plan of campaign."

Showing the extraordinary engine of publicity that exists in the modern Press, it happened that about the time this trio of earnest workers in the fields of crime

were taking council together, Margaret Radcliffe was reading the same paragraph that had set them into a fresh avenue of activity.

She had spent a bad time since her father's disappearance, two sleepless nights and an agonised day between. Most of that first night she had spent wandering, hoping against hope that she would find him. And the next day she had roamed the streets, still seeking. More from habit than from any interest in the day's news, she scanned the paper this morning, and so came upon the two lines of news that conveyed to her the only thing in the paper that interested her.

She read the paragraph with gleaming eyes, and high hope in her heart. She had no doubt it was her father to whom the paragraph referred. She lost no time in going to the hospital.

"There is already someone with your father—someone who claims relation with him, I think," said the official who came to her after she had been waiting ten minutes or so. "What name did you say—Radcliffe? His name is entered here as Neville. It was the name he wrote on a piece of paper when he recovered consciousness."

"Y-yes, that is right. My own name is a business name," she said.

"Yes, very well. I will take you to the accident ward."

Of that long room in which there were many beds, some with screens round them, Margaret was able to take in very little. Most of the beds were occupied. Nurses moved from one to another, and here and there people, whom she was conscious of without seeing, stood or sat by beds, talking to those who occupied them.

Instinctively her eyes picked out her father. He was in a corner, and a stranger—a tall, loose-limbed man, in the rusty black conventionally associated with philanthropy, stood by his bed. She ignored this stranger and darted to the bed, bending over and seizing her father's hands and pressing her face to his.

"Father! Father!" she murmured, forgetful of the fact that he could not hear. But he knew her. It was evidenced by the expression on his face. He clutched her hands and made queer little noises in his throat. He tried to sit up in bed, but she held a comforting hand on his forehead. And she stroked his head to make him know she was there to comfort him.

So manifest was his excitement at her presence that a man who sat at the next bed, writing down in a note-book a statement that was being made in a low voice to him by the man who lay there, ceased to write, and raised his head. Margaret caught his eyes for a moment. He was a youngish man with very yellow, smooth hair and an angular, good-looking face. Then she had only attention for the old man, who was dumbly clutching at his hands. He was searching for something at his bedside. He made the sign of writing with one hand. She understood. He wanted his note-book. She guessed it was in his clothing, that hung beside his bed. She got it out and the pencil that accompanied it, found a clean page, and put both into his hands. He wrote deliberately.

"Do you know the man who is here at my bedside?"

She looked up at the black-garbed visitor. She saw a rather untidy-looking man with hair that was not well-brushed, and protruding teeth which were bared in a not very prepossessing smile. She turned to her father and tapped twice on his shoulder.

"He's asking about me," said the stranger unctuously. "I am from a philanthropic association. We seek to help the friendless who are in hospital."

"I understood you had claimed to be some relation," Margaret said.

"No, no; that is doubtless the attendant's mistake. Though all those who are in misfortune are our brothers. Now, do not let me interrupt. But if you need help—"

"Thank you. You are very kind," Margaret said, turning to her father again. He was writing furiously.

"Am afraid this man wants to know something."

She tapped disagreement. The stranger's motives were evidently only kindly. Her father had nothing to fear.

"Didn't find the thief," he wrote. "Ruin. Stole from me all chance of getting what I suffered for. And must always be blind. Native devils. Up Black River devil priest of Karmo got cure. No one can guide me there without chart."

She took his right hand and grasped his forefinger like a pen, and shaped letters with it on the coverlet.

"Wait," she wrote. And then she added: "Is there hope for your blindness?"

He answered, writing with such a quick, desperate haste that she had difficulty in deciphering it:

"The priest of Karmo blinded me. It was ju-ju devil's work. But he has the cure. If someone could take me I could get it. And the money is up the Black River—Ashanti—Gold Coast. The power of that could buy—"

He broke off his writing in a kind of frenzy, as though he had so much to say that the cumbersome way of expressing it drove him mad. He flung his arms up in unrestrained anguish, while his scarred face worked pitifully.

The note-book in which he had been writing fell upon the floor, lying open at the foot of the bed. While Margaret tried to restrain him, the stranger picked up the book. He turned it face towards him, and for a moment took in the meaning of the writing that was scrawled on it. But his face gave no sign, and he turned on Margaret, as he handed back the book, a look of beneficent friendliness.

"He needs taking care of, I am sure. I think you would be well advised to leave him here for a while. This mental disturbance may get worse. Who can wonder at it? This accident on the top of his physical disability. Now, if I can do anything at any time?"

"You are very kind, I am sure," Margaret answered him. But she was busy soothing her father, letting her fingers wander over his forehead, and putting her face down to his.

"I shall give

you my address, in case you need help," murmured the stranger.

"Yes, yes, thank you."

"And will you tell me where you live, in case I can—"

"It is No. 15a, Green Street, Lambeth," she said, comforted that at least one friendly soul was in the world.

"Yes, yes, I will make a note of it. And now I had better be going. I have others to visit. But I shall see you again. I hope—oh, I have your address, but I did not catch your name."

"Radcliffe—Margaret Radcliffe."

"Ah, yes, I shall remember, Miss Radcliffe." And he turned away to hide the exultant look that no effort could help coming into his face. He went along the corridor between the beds. Margaret did not look after him, but the yellow-haired man who was taking notes from the patient in the next bed watched him until he was gone. And then he watched Margaret. But she was unaware of his interest. She bent low over her father, trying to calm him.

PREPARATION.

EARLY in the evening, Biskerton, having changed the rusty black of philanthropy to a slack tweed suit, turned into the office in the old-fashioned City building and found both his partner and Finkhill there in conversation.

"I don't know what you two have found out," he said, whistling through his teeth with joyful detachment, "and it doesn't matter, either. I have got all that matters. The luck makes me a bit frightened. It's too good to last. Seems as though there may be a catch in it. It's all as smooth as sugar-stick—"

"Then cough it up, and don't keep us waiting," said Stokes irritably.

"Well, to pack it up small, that man who is blind and deaf and dumb is none other than Samuel Radcliffe, the bank manager, who cleared off with a hundred thousand pounds from the City branch of the Southern Joint Bank nearly four years ago."

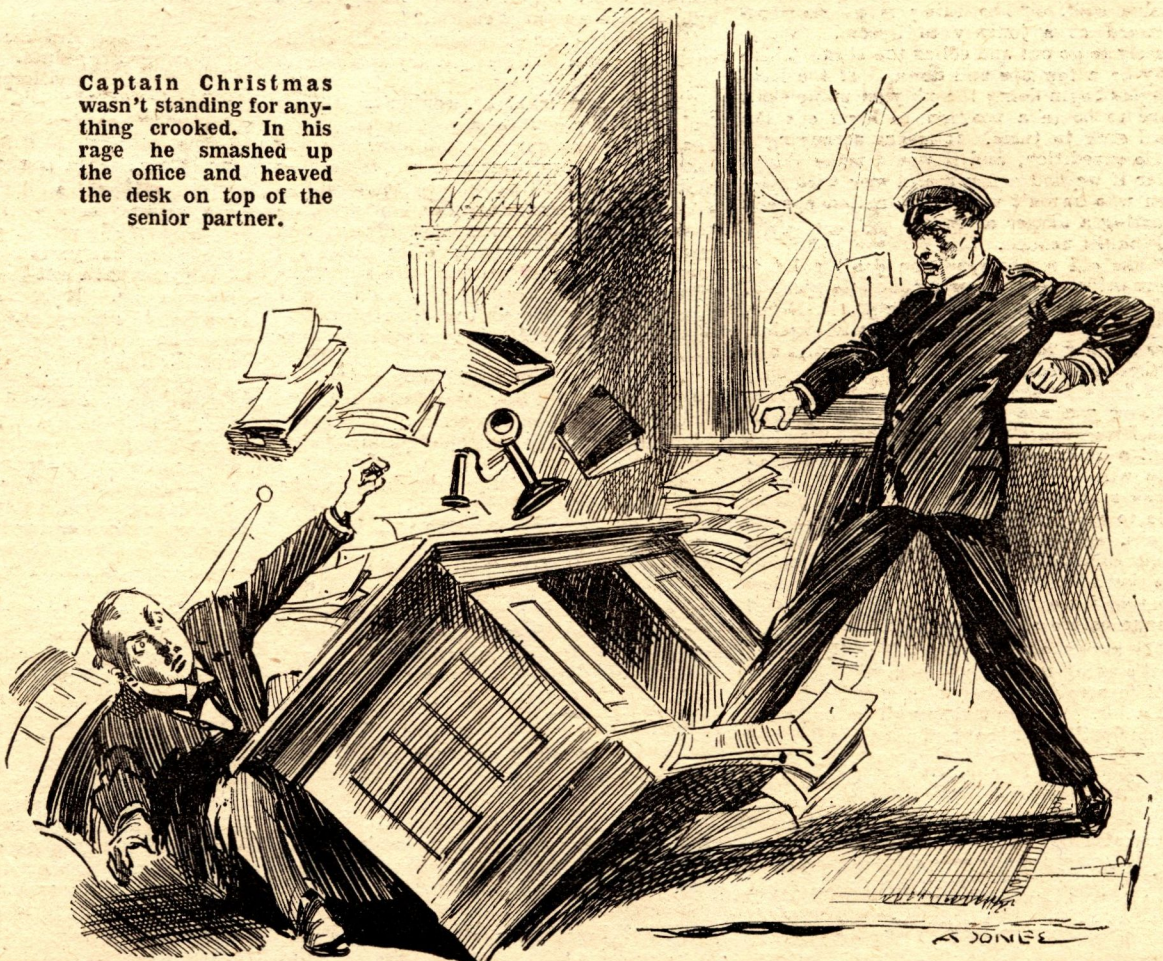
"Gosh!"

"Yes, it's an eye-opener. So it doesn't want much childish reasoning to discover that the skin with the map and the Spanish script refer to the loot that was taken from the bank. You bet he hid it there till the trouble had blown over. Then he got up against trouble in the way of hostile natives when he tried to get hold of it again."

"That comes into the scope of my inquiry," said Stokes. "The skipper of the Creole knew he'd been ill-treated and tortured by some tribe up-country, and he says he was pretty much of a wreck when someone on the coast put him on board. Fink heard mostly the same thing from the crew as well, but we haven't heard any more. They don't know anything about him except that his name is Neville."

"Which it isn't, for his daughter's name is Radcliffe!" said Biskerton, whistling a crescendo bar through his teeth. "And another thing. I recognised him. Took a bit of doing, because he's changed out of all knowledge. But I knew him pretty well in the old days. He once refused me an overdraft. There are a few things that are not altered—that nick on one ear, and thumbs that go back so far that they look as if they were made of indiarubber. And then, of course, I pieced things together. More than this, there is the girl. I can go and see her when I like, if we want more information. But I don't think we do."

Captain Christmas wasn't standing for anything crooked. In his rage he smashed up the office and heaved the desk on top of the senior partner.



There's something else. I'll write it down as near as I can remember it. I got a peep at a few words the old man wrote. It's the only way he has of communicating with the girl:

"Karmo the priest blinded me"—or the priest of Karmo. I'm not sure which it was. "It was ju-ju. But he could cure me. And the money can be found up the Black River. It could buy—" It broke off like that. I don't suppose I'm word perfect, but the meaning was pretty much like that. And I think he wrote something about getting the cure from the priest, if someone would take him up the river. But I'm not sure about that. And anyhow it doesn't matter to us. This note about the money being up there is what we want. You see, it bears out what we've got from the skin."

"It sounds good," said Stokes. "But have you any sort of a notion why the screed was written in Spanish?" asked Stokes.

"Or on human skin?" queried Finkhill uneasily.

"No notion. But does it matter?"

Stokes nodded in agreement, but Finkhill was not satisfied.

"A country where they make maps and write things on human skin doesn't seem a very sweet spot to go to," he said.

"You are weakening, eh?" jeered Biskerton. "A share in a hundred thousand pounds does not attract you."

"By gum, yes, it does. But if I got the whole lot and came home like that bloke, blind and deaf and dumb, it wouldn't be much cop."

"Very well, we'll do the job and give you two and a half per cent. when we come home," suggested Stokes.

"I'll see you incinerated first," answered Finkhill hoarsely. "I'll go through with it."

"Well, it sounds like absolute pie to me," Stokes said. "The thing is as straightforward as a journey to Epsom. We've merely to go out and collar the stuff. There may be a few ups and downs. If the local niggers begin doing the ugly on us we shall have to be in a position to hand out the hard stuff to them. It means arranging a little expedition, and it would make things safer if we had a few useful men with us—men who haven't any fancy notion against shooting a nigger or two."

Finkhill nodded.

"The old man's condition don't point to there being any parlour manners to speak of among those niggers up the Black River, so we've got to see ourselves well heeled. I've a fancy for a couple of automatics and a thousand cartridges for my own ugly stuff."

"Now you are beginning to talk, Fink," said Biskerton. "Stokes is right. We shall want a little expedition. That's where your help will be valuable. You'll know a few tough men of the seafaring type. You'll be able to pick on just the sort we want—not crooks, because we don't want any that might calculate on digging into our plunder, but hard-fisted fellows who'll do as they are told for a union wage and keep a still tongue before and afterwards."

"It means a ship, then, Mr. Biskerton. That's going to cut into money."

"I'm afraid we've got to spend a bit to get a lot. We can't very well go out on a Union Castle mail boat and ask to be dumped on a deserted part of the coast, and then take our chance of going up country on foot. It would be safer to stop at home than that. And if we chanced it by some tramp steamer we shouldn't be much better off. No, we want our own ship—some handy little craft that can go up the first river a few hundred miles."

Stokes nodded in agreement.

"A home away from home," he said. "It should not be very difficult to pick up a bit of a steamer cheap, for there are plenty of 'em waiting to be broken up just now. Something handy like a steam trawler is my fancy. Those beggars can go anywhere. I guess we'll go down river and see what's on the market. As for a crew—we can easily pick up a few men who'd jump at the job."

"I'm thinking about the skipper and mate and the engineers," Biskerton said. "We can't afford to have anything too cheap in that line. They've got to be up to their jobs."

"There are plenty out of employment just now. You can take your pick," Finkhill observed. "In fact, I know a skipper who'd

LISTEN

TO

THE SCREAMING SKULL

NEXT WEEK!

be just the ticket. Tough as blazes, he is, fairly eats trouble when it happens, although he fancies he's a peace-lover and a sucking dove, with no more liking for a fight than a tea-party curate."

"Sounds too fierce," commented Biskerton with a whistle. "He might try to share in the plunder."

"That's just what he wouldn't. He's a fool for being honest—a regular crack-pot. That's why he's out of a job now. He was asked by his late owner to do something that he didn't think was quite in a line with what he was taught at his mother's knee, or something, and he refused, and smashed up the owner's office into the bargain. Not half neither. He slung the office typewriter through the window and chucked the senior partner's writing-table on top of him. But he's been starving ever since."

"Sounds our mark," said Stokes. "We'll get him cheap, I'll bet. What's his name?"

"Christmas—John Christmas."

"Sounds a jolly name—Captain Christmas."

"There's nothing jolly about him, but he knows his work," said Finkhill.

"Righto. You get in touch with him."

"He'll want a bit of an advance note. I should say he's desperately hard up."

"Very well. He shall have it. You find him and send him along here. You'll tell him we are geologists, and that we are prospecting after precious metals. We have got scent of a deposit somewhere and we don't want it talked about. That will keep him quiet."

POLICE ACTION.

CHIEF-INSPECTOR BIRCHDALE SWUNG round in his chair as Desmond Galloway came into the office. This was a snuggery tucked away amid a nest of such apartments in the very ordinary brick building known as New Scotland Yard, and there was nothing in the office to suggest it was any part of the Criminal Investiga-

tion Department. Over the chief's desk was a photograph of a homely woman—his wife. A geranium grew in the window. There was a domestic air about the place.

"Did you have any luck, Galloway?"

"Luck?" said the young man, smoothing his yellow hair, which was already very smooth. "What would you call it if you picked up a thousand pounds in the street when you were only looking for a cigarette-end?"

"Depends what the cigarette-end meant," said Birkdale dryly. "It might lead to more than the thousand pounds."

"What I have found will lead to a jolly sight more," said Galloway. "Oh, about the Jansen case—well, I interviewed the man and got a statement of everything we require. It's here. That's that. Now there's something else."

"You look excited, Galloway," said the senior officer.

"Excited? Man, I'm bursting with excitement. You sit hard on your chair, chief, or you'll find yourself airy with the same emotion. I have found Samuel Radcliffe, the bank manager, who absconded with a hundred thousand out of the strong room of the City branch of the Southern Joint Bank some four years ago."

"Eh, what are you giving me," said the chief-inspector incredulously.

"Just what I say. I've seen him—stood as near to him as I am to you. He's lying in the accident ward of Charing Cross Hospital, and he's deaf, dumb, and blind, and probably more or less mad."

"That sounds pretty steep," commented the chief-inspector, who prided himself on being surprised at nothing. "Are you sure about it?"

"As sure as I am standing here. I was on the case, you know. I was not unacquainted with Radcliffe before he made a hole in things. I've carried the look of his face in my memory ever since. Not that he looks the same. It seems impossible that a face should change so much. It is a diabolical transformation, and there must be some terrible story behind it."

"You are sure it is the same face?"

"Oh, without a doubt. Besides, his daughter was there with him. I remember her—a rather beautiful girl. I had to interview her four years ago, and I was sorry I could not have met her in more pleasant circumstances. It seems he was knocked down by a taxi at the end of Waterloo Bridge some time yesterday and taken into hospital. There's a paragraph in this morning's papers about it."

"I saw that—a man, deaf and dumb, and blind. I thought it a bit curious that such a man should be wandering about. Is he known as Samuel Radcliffe at the hospital?"

"No—as John Neville."

"And you say his daughter was there. Has she been concealing him all this time?"

"No, I don't think so. There's a big story behind it all. I want to get hold of it."

"Simplest move is to arrest him."

"No. There's something else. There was a man visiting him under the guise of a philanthropist from an alleged charitable society. He was nothing of the sort. He is a man we have a record of. His name is Biskerton. He's in partnership with a man named Stokes. A pretty pair of crooks who have managed to keep clear of the law for the best part of six years, since they were both convicted of false pretences. But they have sailed pretty close often enough, and they'll make a slip sooner or later. Anyhow, their reputation is pretty rotten, and anything they have got to do with deserves watching."

Chief-Inspector Birkdale nodded in understanding.

"But do you calculate he is in with Radcliffe?"

"No; I calculate he's doing the vulture act. Where the body is there will the vultures be. I suspect he knows something. He's out to get pickings. Suppose Radcliffe has got some of his plunder hidden away somewhere?"

"Yes, that skunk might be easily after it."

"It's clear that he wouldn't be at the hospital for any other reason than his own good. The girl did not know him, for I heard their conversation, but he got her address out of her and her name. I heard both. So it wasn't even necessary to remember her face. She's Margaret Radcliffe, of 15a, Green Street, Lambeth. He made a note of it, saying he would like to help her if she needed it. Of course, he's out to help himself."

"But he wouldn't be able to get much information from the old fox who was deaf and dumb, and blind."

"No; I don't think he did. I fancy he was there to prove the old man's identity. But he got to know something. The girl communicated with her father by holding his hand and forming letters. He answers by writing in a pocket-book. He was writing and dropped the book. Biskerton, standing by the side of the bed, picked it up and handed it to the girl. But he read what was on the open page while he held it, and his face, as he read it, was an interesting study."

"You've no idea what it was that was written?"

"No; that's just what I lack. I want to know. I must find out."

"That's where you have missed your chance, Galloway. That seems to me the kernel of the whole thing."

"I'll get it. I'll get a good deal more. But this is most important—that the activities of Messrs. Stokes and Biskerton shall be watched. We want to know what moves they are making. The old man can be arrested any time, but—"

"The sooner, the better, I should say."

"But then we shall miss the other crooks. At present Samuel Radcliffe is a decoy for them. He might be left a bit till we know what the others are doing. See the point? We don't want merely to arrest the bank manager, who is but a broken husk of a man, anyhow, but we want to get on the track of the plunder, which, I imagine, Biskerton and his partner are after."

"Yes, I suppose that's so. I'll get a few men watching those fellows. You can go on with the inquiries at the hospital."

Galloway went back to the hospital. He was a privileged visitor, but he made apologies to the surgeon in charge.

"Our cases are like yours, doctor. We start after one trouble and unexpectedly come upon another. My point of interest is the man who is deaf and dumb, and blind. Has he any visitors just now?"

"No, he's alone. His daughter's just gone. But I daresay she may come back soon. He's apt to be violent when she's not there. His struggles to make himself understood are rather dreadful. I fancy he's asleep just now."

Galloway nodded and went in. He went and stood beside the wreck of a man that was Samuel Radcliffe. The poor, scarred face, with its wrinkled skin and pain-lined features, was at rest. There was a world of tragedy in that distorted mask. It was as the face of one dead, one who assuredly had paid heavily for his sins.

The Scotland Yard man looked down quietly at him, compassionately, desiring to avoid waking him. He resolved to wait. But presently he saw protruding from under the pillow a tattered notebook. It needed but a touch to release it. So it came into his hands, and he opened it and saw the scrawling caligraphy, by which the blind man had communicated his dreadful story to his daughter. It was fragmentary. Much of it illegible and over-written, but there was enough to tell the tale of it just as Margaret Radcliffe knew it. He copied it into his own notebook, and finally put the dog-eared book back under the pillow whence he had got it.

In doing this he somehow wakened the man on the bed. He did not touch him or move him. It was probably on the part of the broken man, to compensate for the loss of sight and hearing, a super-sensitiveness to the presence of anyone. He suddenly waved his arms, and his face twisted into an agonised expression as though he were afraid of some horror that he would keep away. He sat up and tore at the sleeping jacket that covered his upper body. The garment, which was big and loose, fell over his shoulders and slipped down to his waist, exposing his naked body.

There were to be seen scars and lacerations on the skin of his chest as well as the deep tan that comes of exposure to a tropic sun. He twisted round and showed his back, which was all pink and streaked with white, as though it were one great scar, and altogether different in colour from the rest of his body. Then a nurse came and pulled on the garment again, while Galloway helped her. And he left her soothing him.

"He generally wakes from sleep like that," the surgeon said, as Galloway came out of the ward. "I'm afraid it is a bad case. He's got something on his mind that pursues him in his sleep."

"Those scars on him. What do you make of them?" Galloway asked.

"I should say he has gone through a terrible experience of some kind that has affected him mentally as well as bodily."

"His back—what do you make of that?"

"I should say he has been flayed."

"Good heavens!" Galloway went out shuddering. He had a look of horror on his face even when he came back to Chief-Inspector Birkdale.

"I'm afraid my imagination fills in what I don't know, and if you ask me I should



They found the man struggling in delirium. His sleeping-jacket had slipped from his shoulders, exposing a great and terrible scar.

A JONES

say he has gone through several kinds of Hell." And he read over his notes and filled them out with reasoned explanation.

"It's all very clear. The money he stole he took and buried up this unknown waterway in Africa called the Black River, on the Gold Coast, until such time as the pursuit had died down. When he tried to get it again he was seized by natives and tortured. This priest of Karmo (whoever or whatever that may mean) is mentioned who blinded him, and who, if he could be got at, has the magic or the method to restore the sight he took away. And then the old man escapes and comes home with a plan of the whereabouts of the hoard, hoping to enlist the help of someone who will go out and get the money and share with him. But the map or plan gets stolen as soon as he lands, and it was in searching for the thief that he was knocked down by a taxi, which brought him to the hospital."

"Your notes can be relied on?" queried Birkdale.

"Absolutely. These are the written words by which he communicated his story to his daughter."

"So the money is up the Black River, wherever that is. While we are marking time we may as well look up the geography of that district. That stolen plan is suggestive. If it's in the hands of someone who understands it there may be someone cutting in to scoop the pool up the Black River."

"The indication is that it is the mixture as before—that we must watch Stokes, Biskerton & Co.," said Galloway.

Chief-Inspector Birkdale nodded.

"And, of course, the daughter," he said. "If there's going to be any attempt to find that plunder she may be in it. We must keep our minds open. There are half a dozen different ways in which the thing might work out."

"But put this question to yourself," said the younger man. "If you concede that Biskerton is interested in the case, and from that you assume his partner is also, what started them? What gave them the first inkling that this broken man was Samuel Radcliffe?"

"But we aren't sure that they know it."

"But what was Biskerton doing at the hospital in disguise, and why was he so interested when he picked up and read what the old man had written? Doesn't it sound as though they may have this missing map or plan that indicates where the plunder is hidden?"

"I've set two men watching Stokes and Biskerton. We may get a pointer in a while. Meanwhile, I still think we ought to arrest the old man. We don't want to lose sight of him. I don't trust that daughter. He'd be safer in the prison infirmary."

"I'll watch him myself."

THE CAPTAIN.



SHAVEN so clean that his angular jaws shone, blue eyes that at first looked mild till a second glance at them showed that what seemed to be mildness was merely quiet confidence, and a lean, well-set-up figure.

That was John Christmas. He was smoking a pipe of undue proportion loaded with a tobacco of strength when he arrived outside the office of Messrs. Stokes & Biskerton. He put the pipe in his pocket as he went in on Finkhill's heels, and he took his hat off and bowed stiffly as he was introduced to his new owners.

"We were so near that I thought I would show our ship to the captain," Finkhill said.

"Of course, we don't commit ourselves in any way, neither does the captain, but in case we fix up it's something already done to know he approves of the craft we've got our eye on."

"Yes, sir, that's right," said Captain Christmas. "She's been a steam trawler used on the Iceland service and doing auxiliary work in the war. She's been lying up mostly ever since, I guess, but she's sound for all that, and with a bit of overhauling would be fit to go anywhere. If she's to be bought at a price to suit you—and that's your palaver, not mine—I don't know that you'll do better if you want an economical voyage."

"Righto, captain. You've said it," returned Stokes heartily. "Have a cigar?"

"Thanks, sir; I'll fill my pipe, if I may," said Christmas. "Where did you propose setting a course to? I understood from Mr. Finkhill here that you'd got a business project on foot—something that you didn't want shouted about."

"That's it. We've got scent of a bit of mineral deposit that we want to make sure of before we shout about it. If it gets known there'll be every dud who can raise the passage money stampeding to get his hand into the pie, and we shall be frozen out before we've had a chance. You can say it's Iceland, if anybody asks you. It isn't there."

"I'm generally used to having my employers trust me, sir," said Christmas, with a little show of stiffness.

"You'll be trusted all right, captain, in due course," said Biskerton, whistling through his teeth. "And to come down to business, you'll get the usual wage, plus a bit on the top if our little expedition pans out O.K."

Christmas nodded, and blew out a poisonous stream of smoke from which Stokes recoiled.

"Gosh! What are you smoking, captain?"

"Well, it isn't exactly boys' tobacco, sir. I'll put it out if you—"

"Oh, carry on, we'll open the window. It smells like insecticide. When should you be ready to start, captain?"

"Now, or as soon as you like."

"Well, we haven't got our crew fixed up yet, and there's some overhauling to be done."

"Well, if you wouldn't mind, I'd rather go on board straight away and get used to my quarters. My present lodgings are not to my taste."

Finkhill winked at Stokes. It was to say that John Christmas, having come to an end of his resources, would probably be lodging in the street this night.

"Righto, captain," Stokes agreed. "And perhaps it would be convenient to draw on your wages up to a fiver?"

A gleam came in Christmas' eyes, although he tried to appear not too eager.

"Very well, sir; I'll have a few things to get for the voyage—soap and matches, and the like. And if I'm on board I can make the refitters—the mechanics and joiners and other lubbers—pull their weight of work. By ginger! I'll make the beggars jump!"

"Fine, captain," said Stokes, reaching for his cheque-book. Now, when you've drawn this money you get along with Finkhill and have another look at the *Matador*, and you tell us what you think is necessary to be done. Her engines are well greased down, and her hull is sound, but there may be a few things."

"So far so good," said Biskerton, when the others had gone. "Chartering and running a ship isn't cheap, but the spec. is good. A hundred thousand of the best isn't to be sneezed at. It seems all very easy. I

wonder whether it isn't too easy, and whether there's a catch in it somewhere. For instance, come here and look out of the window. Do you see that chap out there lighting a cigarette by the lamp-post on the other side of the road. It's my suspicion he's watching this office."

"Good lor! What makes you think that?"

"Well, he's been there mostly all day pretending to be helping those lorry drivers to unload, and pretending to be picking up odd jobs where he can."

"What's that mean—police?"

"Not on your life. How could they have got any sort of a hint? Or, if it is, they're on a mug's game, for we've given nothing away. After all, we've been watched by the police before this, and we've had the laugh out of them. But my notion is that the blind and deaf and dumb man has pals—perhaps some who were going to share the plunder with him—and they have somehow got on the scent."

"But how?"

"Through Finkhill. It may have been suspected that the skin with the writing on was dropped in his place. Perhaps he's been traced here."

"That's a longish shot, but it's possible," agreed Biskerton. "The man who pinched the packet from old Radcliffe may have dropped a hint or sold the information. I think I'll get along to the hospital and see if anything fresh is moving. And then there's the girl. She might usefully be sounded."

Stokes agreed. Biskerton went out. The man who was lounging against a lamp-post casually followed him. He found him on the same bus as himself. He spotted him on the Underground at Mark Lane. He got rid of him by walking out to the end of London Bridge, going down the steps towards the Old Swan Pier, slipping into a yard, and waiting five minutes and then going under the archway towards Billingsgate and up the steps on the other side. He leaped on to a passing bus and was free.

"But we are being watched, that is certain," he said to himself. "It doesn't matter. We have all the cards in our hands. At the same time, if the old man has pals working for him, and with him, they might make it not too easy for us. That's the snag. We ought to have been the old man's friends. We ought to have been in touch with him and working for him—five per cent. profit for him and ninety-five for us." He whistled thoughtfully through his teeth and watched the passing traffic. "Yes, there might be some little item of information we lack that would make all the difference. The dickens is getting into communication with him. This deaf and dumb business is slow. It can only be done through the girl. I've got to get her confidence. And then—"

He had to change into his suit of dark grey, approaching black, which, to his mind, suggested the philanthropic atmosphere, and this he did at a hotel in Bedford Street, Strand, where he had a temporary bed-room. Then he made for the hospital. He made the usual application at the office. The clerk consulted a list.

"Neville—Neville?" he said. "That's the case that was blind and deaf and dumb, sir. Haven't you heard about that? He got up out of bed and dressed himself—at least, put on some clothes and came down here and got as far as the street. There he was arrested by the police, who seemed to have some reason for watching him."

"Arrested?" echoed Biskerton, and dropping into silence with the little fear that something was happening that he did not understand.

"Happened not an hour ago, sir. I've just had a 'phone message through from police headquarters giving us official notice."

"That is very sad. I don't know the man, of course. My interest in him is purely compassionate. His daughter?"

"Was here not half an hour ago. Seemed a bit cut up, sir. She'd hardly believe it, sir, but there it is."

"Dear me. And you don't know anything else—why the poor man was arrested, for example?"

"No, sir. We haven't any information."

"I am very sorry to hear it. I must look up the poor girl, and see if I can be of any assistance. Good-afternoon."

He went to a call office and rang up Stokes and informed him. Stokes' voice came back, somewhat perturbed.

"I'll see you in the Strand Palace coffee-room in half an hour," he said.

Under cover of a strident rendering by the band of a "Lohengrin" selection, Stokes expressed his principal fear.

"It's clear the police have guessed his identity, and so much the worse for him, though I can't see them attempting to bring him to trial, considering his condition. But what concerns us is whether they have got hold of that note-book in which he wrote down his conversation with the girl—the one you had a peep at. It seems to me that if they've got that, they'll have a pretty good clue to where the plunder is hidden. In that case they may butt in, and where shall we be?"

"But they haven't got the skin," pointed out Biskerton. "They may be pretty sure the stuff is hidden somewhere, and they may know it is in Africa, but they aren't going to find it on such slender information. Nobody knows where it is but us and the old man, and he couldn't direct anybody without the map, otherwise he wouldn't have been so keen in sticking to it."

"Yes, I believe that sounds sense," said Stokes. "I've been frightening myself unnecessarily. But you'd better go and see the girl, and find if she knows anything about that note-book."

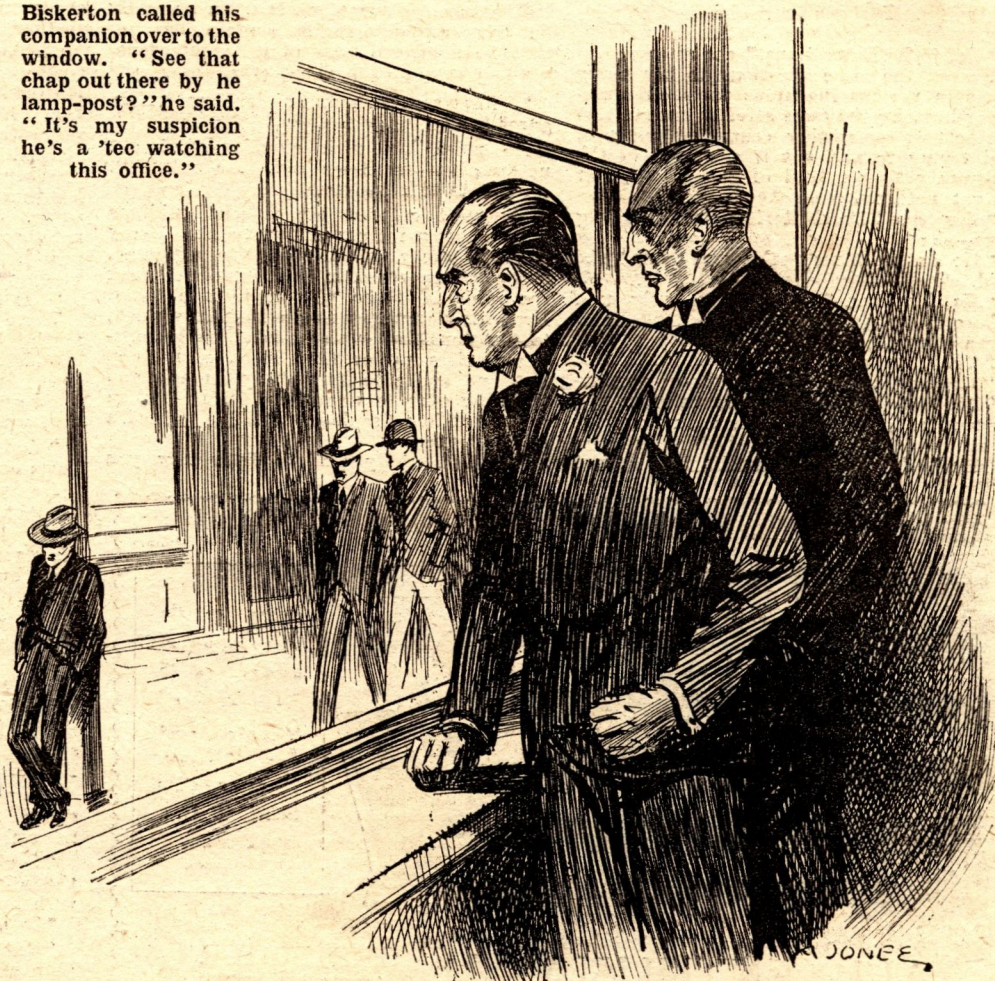
PENTONVILLE.

MARGARET had spent some pretty bad days, following that on which she had discovered her father in the hospital. A problem here confronted her to which she could find no satisfactory solution. Additional to the difficulty of what she was to do with her father when he came out of hospital was the one of his future. He must be protected. He had to be sheltered. There was the burden of getting his living now, as well as her own.

Employed in a City house which was temporarily smitten with a bad season, she had easily got a few days' holiday, but presently she must go back to work, and when that compulsion came she wondered how to manage the care of her father in her absence.

And then in one stroke she was relieved of that need, and terribly so. She knew his fear of the police. She knew he had reason to fear. But the tragic change in him, she was confident, would be enough protection, for no one who knew him before would ever recognise him now. When, at the

Biskerton called his companion over to the window. "See that chap out there by the lamp-post?" he said. "It's my suspicion he's a 'tec watching this office."



hospital, she was informed that he had been arrested, she was incredulous.

"I don't know whether you'd call it arrest," said the man at the hospital, seeking to soften the blow. "Perhaps it's only detention. They are taking care of him, and I am sure he needed it."

Margaret went away, staggering under the blow. Afterwards, summoning up courage, she went to a district police-station and asked questions. The inspector in charge got on the telephone to headquarters.

"He's just being taken care of," the inspector said, with an economy of information. "If you'll leave me your address I'll get to know if you can see him, if that's what you want. If you can, I'll send along to you, or they will communicate with you from headquarters. What's your name?"

"Margaret Radcliffe."

"Eh, what's that? You said his name was Neville. If you are his daughter—oh, perhaps you are married?"

"No, it is my business name," Margaret said hastily. "And the address is 15a, Green Street, Lambeth."

"Um, yes, all right."

She went back to her lodgings later on, to learn that she had had a caller.

"A gent with a come-to-meeting manner and teeth that stuck out, miss," said her landlady. "He seems to have visited your father in the 'ospital. He'll come to see you again sometime."

Margaret recognised the description. She had no doubt this visitor meant well, but she was glad she had missed him. She wanted to be alone in this time of anxiety. Early in the evening a plain-clothes man came from the local police-station, saying that if she wished she could visit her

father, who was at that moment detained in Pentonville prison.

"He's in the hospital there, miss. If you say the word, Chief-inspector Birkland, from the Yard, will come along in a taxi and take you straight there."

She was agreeable. She wanted nothing better. To be conveyed and escorted there seemed likely to save her a lot of trouble. But she had not prepared herself for the inquiry that Inspector Birkland proposed to put her under during the journey. He was a homely man, and treated her in a severely fatherly manner, but his questions were persistent.

"It's no good trying to hide things," he said. "We know all about it."

"Then you know more than I do," she said, "so why question me?"

"We know his name is not Neville. He is Samuel Radcliffe, who stole one hundred thousand pounds and got away with it. He hid the money in Ashanti, on the Gold Coast, and I guess it's there now—up the Black River. He got blinded there. There is a map missing—"

He jerked out in little disconnected sentences the story such as he knew it, leaving suggestive blanks for her to fill in, which she did not.

"Where did you get all this story from?" she asked.

"Oh, you are beginning to question me, my dear. No, that won't do. I am questioning. But you'll see it is no good telling me anything but the truth, as I already know so much."

"It is no good telling you anything at all, as you think you know so much," she parried.

"What about that money? He can't go and get it now. Perhaps you are thinking

of trying. Perhaps someone is helping you."

"No, to both questions," she answered.

He put the same questions to her many times in various ingenious ways. He zig-zagged among the facts already known, trying to find some other crumb of evidence, and trying to find out if she were in the conspiracy to get hold of the money, but he got nothing.

"You have been sheltering him for a long time—eh?"

"He was with me perhaps an hour," she said.

"Ha, how was that? He had only been ashore so long, then," said Birkland, making a stray shot.

"Yes."

"He came by what ship?"

"The Creole," answered Margaret, seeing no need to hide that. "She is in the river now."

"Ha." Inspector Birkland's face showed

indifference. He went on to other subjects, but came round to the ship again, showing that he neglected none of its significance.

"And that map or plan, that was lost?"

"I have seen no map or plan," said Margaret firmly.

He plied her with questions, but got nothing further from her. He subsided, content to bide his time.

Margaret entered the prison buildings with a queer feeling of heart-sink. Every corridor, every room and, she supposed, every cell appeared to be designed to break the souls of those who came into them. Even the men nurses in the hospital seemed, to her sensitive consciousness, to be pitiless gaolers rather than merciful healers. But one spoke to her gently enough and took her over to where her father lay, in a bed beside a fireplace, in which burned a cheerful fire.

"We'd be jolly glad to know how you

communicate with him, miss," he said. "We've been at our wits' end."

She bent over her father. What instinct told him she was there she did not know. He suddenly lifted up his hands and touched her. His excitement was manifest. His poor face strained and convulsed. He clasped her frantically as a man clasps his one hope of salvation. He made signs to her that she knew quite well. He wished to write. She put into his hands a penny note-book she had brought, and a sharpened pencil. He seized both with avidity and wrote a rapid question.

"Am I in prison?"

There was little use in concealing the truth. She tapped his shoulder once. He shuddered. She watched the agony on his face. She seized the forefinger of his right hand and traced letters on the brown sheet that was turned over the brown blanket.

"You are in hospital, well cared for. No harm can come to you."

He seized the pencil again.

"End of everything. No hope. That money lost. Must always be blind. Priest of Karmo up Black River—Ashanti—has cure, but can't get. Would give all money for it. If could find someone to trust—"

She turned the leaf of the paper for him, for his writing was overlapping, and as she did so she met Inspector Birkland's eyes watching her intently. She knew what that official wanted and expected.

"Shall go mad to dwell in darkness and silence always—that cure—the priest of Karmo who blinded me—"

He reiterated this plaint all over many sheets of paper. Her thoughts were working quickly.

"Could I get the cure?" she asked him by the infinitely slow method of forming letters with his forefinger.

"It is a man's work," he wrote.

"But suppose I could find someone who could do it?"

He answered frantically over many sheets of paper. She tore them out in a sheaf in a moment when Inspector Birkland's eyes were off her. She was sitting close to the bed, on a low stool. With one hand she folded the slips of paper and put them inside her shoe under her foot, and then strapped her shoe securely again.

To her father her last words were:

"If I do not come again for a long time, you will know that I am doing something to help you."

He started to write again, but she stopped him with a signal as the inspector came across the room.

"Time I looked at what he is writing," that officer said, taking the note-book. "Hallo, you have torn out some pages."

"I usually do so," she answered calmly. "It saves confusion, and he has a clean place to write."

"You will please give me those sheets."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I am not under arrest, inspector."

"Then you may soon be," he retorted, with a flash of anger.

"Very well; make your demands when I am."

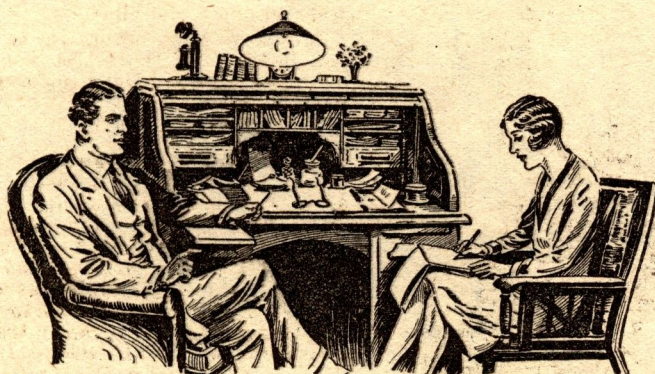
"Look here, you are making it worse for him."

"Who could make it worse for him than this?"

"Look here, you must give up those slips of paper."

"They are already disposed of." She indicated the fire. He stepped forward hastily. There were some ashes of paper among the coals. He stabbed the poker into them.

"Where's that tattered note-book he wrote in when he was in Charing Cross Hospital?" he pursued.



Letters to the Editor should be addressed to "The Thriller" Office, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

ALL ENTHUSIASM! THE EDITOR GREETES YOU

GOOD! I am glad that last week's story, "The Secret of Beacon Inn," was so much appreciated. Keen approval is unstintingly expressed in the many letters I have received. In selecting Mr. Leslie Charteris' novel for that issue I knew it maintained the ambitious standard which **THE THRILLER** has created, and that it would be received in the same enthusiastic manner as the stories preceding it. I note with interest that some readers commented particularly upon the intriguing note with which Mr. Charteris opened his story, others seemed to be more interested in the breezy personality of Detective-Inspector Smith, and many in the sensational crook element. Apparently every taste was catered for, and it is evident that "The Secret of Beacon Inn" was a complete success, as it rightly deserved to be.

In next week's issue, the book-length novel, "The Screaming Skull," will be yet another exceptional offer to readers of **THE THRILLER**—a long, complete story by a popular author for the outlay of twopence. To introduce a little novelty into the feature, the author is using a nom-de-plume—viz., Fenton Arnold. Apart from the story being something in the way of a "gift," it will give added interest for readers to endeavour to designate the authorship. I shall be keenly interested to see how many subscribers of **THE THRILLER** give the right name. I can assure you that this writer's name is well known to all readers of thriller stories, though he has not previously contributed to **THE THRILLER**.

Now a little word about our artist, Mr. Arthur Jones, who has illustrated all the

stories that have appeared in **THE THRILLER** (with the exception of one) with such dramatic imagination. His work has been deservedly commented upon by readers, who anxiously desire Mr. Jones to be employed every week. It will please you to know that Arthur Jones has been specially retained to work for this paper. Naturally, it is a strain upon him to complete so many illustrations each week, and only in the event of his incapacity will other artists be introduced.

Our serial, "The Trapper," by George Dilnot, is obviously very popular, and many readers express the hope that this story will not conclude for many weeks to come. Unfortunately, the dramatic story of the night-haunts of London cannot last for ever, and as I anticipate it concluding fairly soon, I am arranging for something else to take its place. When I am more certain about the date of the conclusion of "The Trapper," I shall be able to make a definite announcement. Of this you can be certain, the next serial will be written by an author whose name is well known as a best seller.

Therefore, keep a sharp eye upon the announcements in **THE THRILLER**—you will be sorry if you miss any of the excellent stories awaiting publication.

Yours sincerely,

The Editor

"I took it the last day he was there. I carried it home with me and burnt it."

Inspector Birkland thought a volume of oaths, but it was a credit to his self-control that he said nothing. In the taxi he asked her why she had burnt it.

"It was my father's suggestion. He had an idea someone might have been looking at it."

The inspector's face was blank.

PHILANTHROPY.

"HERE'S that gent with the kind smile that visited your father in the hospital, miss," said Margaret's landlady in the middle of the morning. She had breakfasted, been out and bought a newspaper, and was engaged in searching the columns for any reference to her father's arrest. There was none there. It was evident the police were keeping the fact quiet for a bit. She went to the door to meet Mr. Biskerton, who was dressed for philanthropy. He grinned with his teeth pushed out, and then composed his face to a gravity consistent with his errand.

"I have been to the hospital. I know what has happened," he said. "I am very grieved for you. I ventured to come to offer you my sympathy. I wonder what can be done? It is a great tragedy that he should be snatched out of your care. He will be among those who cannot communicate with him."

Margaret nodded. It was only too true. She thanked her visitor for his solicitude.

"Yes, it was interesting to see how you conversed with him, he writing in that book and you guiding his hand to simulate letters. Can you always read his writing? Since he writes in the dark, is it not often illegible?"

"No, I can always read it," Margaret answered him.

"It is incredible. I am very interested. Have you a scrap of his writing that I could look at?"

"I am afraid not. You see, I destroy it the moment it is finished with."

"Ha! That book he wrote in that was under his pillow—perhaps the police got that?"

"No, I got it. I burnt it," Margaret said.

"Very wise, my dear—very wise," he said, with what she thought was a sigh of relief. "Poor man! He has suffered. He has paid heavily. Of course, you know a good deal about his adventures."

"I know something," she admitted.

"Ha! If you could only turn that knowledge to advantage," he said insinuatingly.

"I don't understand," she answered, looking at him.

But his eyes were turned away, thoughtfully regarding the wallpaper.

"You would like to help your poor father."

"It is my dearest desire."

"Then you will keep from the police what you know."

"I shall. But I am afraid that will not help my father much. He is arrested. They seem to know everything."

"Do they know where the money is hidden?" he asked in a significant whisper. Their eyes met. He was looking at her with none of the meekness and greasy amiability of the professional philanthropist. There was cunning in his eyes. In her gaze he surprised astonishment. "Be-

tween friends," he said, "nothing need be hidden. I know what is up the Black River. Friends of mine are going with me to get possession of it. You tell us what you know, and there may be some of it for you, that you can apply to the comfort of your poor father when he is released from prison."

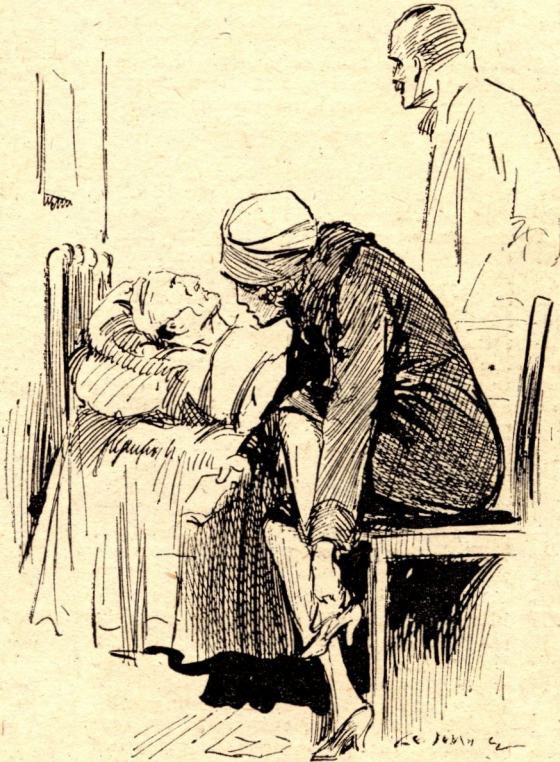
"Are you—going—up the Black River?" she articulated, amazement unsteady her speech.

"It is possible, though the risk is great, and we may not think it worth while," he said cautiously.

"I want to go up the Black River," she broke out.

"You? Not after that plunder?" he exclaimed.

"No. I don't want to touch that," she cried earnestly. "I would not put my hand



Immediately the inspector's eyes were turned, she slipped the incriminating message inside her shoe.

on it if I found it. It is for something else—something that will cure my father's blindness. There is a witch-doctor up that river who can give me something to cure it."

He suddenly stood up as though he had made a quick resolution.

"You can go with us," he said, "but keep it dark. If the police get an inkling of it you will be stopped. They'll clap you under arrest on suspicion. Nor must you be seen with me or my partners. The police are the very dickens. I'll communicate with you when we are ready. But are you sure? Is your mind made up?"

"I would start now if I could," she said unwaveringly.

"Righto. We'll do a deal," Biskerton said. And he went out whistling. By circuitous ways he reached the office and found Stokes and Finkhill engaged on some accounts.

"It's all O.K.," he said. "The police didn't get that notebook because the girl burnt it. She's all alive. It's my opinion she knows a lot. She can fill in all the blanks we cannot."

"Yes, but will she? How are you going

to get round her 'enough for that?' asked Stokes irritably.

"I'm coming to it," answered Biskerton, whistling cheerfully. "She's going to join us in the expedition. She's coming to the Black River with us."

"But we don't want anyone else to share," said Finkhill.

"That's just it. She wants no share. She's going for something else." And he went on to explain further.

"Sounds good," said Stokes. "She's bound to know a lot. She perhaps doesn't know enough to go on the expedition or to guide it by herself, but she may know bits of essential matters that we lack. As for her finding any particular native who'd have a cure for the old man's blindness, well, I should think that's part of his madness. But that'll be her palaver. We can't carry her troubles. We shall have plenty of our own."

"Yes, I dunno as it's going to be all pie," said Finkhill uneasily. "We'll look fine if we all come home deaf and dumb, and blind."

"Chuck it, man. You tire me," said Biskerton. "Look here, you'd better go east and hurry up those infernal ship-fitters. We are about ready to go to sea."

THE WOMAN PASSENGER.

UNDER the driving methods of Captain Christmas the s.s. *Matador* was quickly made to

look ship-shape. It must be confessed that he transgressed a bunch of trade union laws, and that he frightened several worthy workmen into labouring at greater speed than they were accustomed. One or two slipped ashore for drinks at midday and did not come back, but one hung on because he appeared to like working at that speed. At least, he said so.

"I like to keep warm at my job, captain," he said, as he put paint on at a terrific speed. "Hanged if I wouldn't like a job on a ship like this. I'd like to go to sea again."

"There's no job for painters at sea, my lad," Captain Christmas said. "This craft won't get a lick of paint till she's back again, if that."

"No, sir, I'm not meaning that. I've been a steward and a cook, and I once did a spell in the stokehold."

Christmas looked at the man favourably. In appearance he was youngish, with very yellow, smooth hair, and an angular face that would not be described as ill-looking.

"There's not room here for a cook and a steward as well," Christmas said. "One man's got to do the lot. Are you capable of handling both jobs?"

"Not half," said the man, laying on paint furiously.

"Well, I'm not satisfied with the man I've got," Christmas said. "My owners sent him along. I'll see if I can fire that other one. But how do I know if you can cook?"

"Well, gov'nor—I mean, captain—the best way is to try me. You are living aboard. I'm not particularly pleased with my own lodgings, so if you like I'll stop aboard and cook your breakfast for you in the morning. I can bring my own rations aboard."

"It's a fair offer, my lad, but I can't promise you. It depends what my owners say. But you can come aboard to-night."

"Righto, sir. My name is Smith. Long time since this craft had any paint. Hallo, I'm sorry, sir, if I splashed you."

The man, Smith, came aboard that evening and temporarily took possession of the galley and of the modest provender Christmas had supplied for himself. From these materials, plus several penny herrings and some packets of dried eggs, the painter produced a supper that made Christmas open his eyes. There was an omelette. There were fried herring fillets, and there was a cheese savoury. It was quite clear the fellow could cook, and Christmas was impressed. When Finkhill came aboard he mentioned the matter.

"The crew you've sent me seem all right, Mr. Finkhill," he said behind a barrier of heavy tobacco-smoke, "all but that grub-spoiler. He's no good. Now, I've got the very man. If you insist on that man you've sent me there'll be no comfort on this voyage, and you'll all feel sorry for yourselves. Your partner, Mr. Stokes, doesn't look like a gent who'll care for his bacon burnt and his potatoes under-cooked."

"Same here," said Finkhill. "You sign on this man of yours, if you have confidence in him. Now when can we be ready for sea?"

"The day after to-morrow," said Christmas confidently.

"Well, there's one thing I've got to mention. There's a lady coming with us. We've got to get her accommodation somehow."

"I'm dashed. Well, if it comes to it, I can make shift in the chart-room, and she can have my cabin."

And in intimating to Smith later that it was likely he would be signed on, he mentioned the additional and unexpected passenger.

Smith made no comment. His face was expressionless. But up on deck by himself he was thoughtful.

THE OPEN SEA.

THE Matador dropped down river on a misty evening. Margaret saw the lights go by—the wharves at Limehouse—the mysterious region of Dockland with its strange shapes against the sky—masses of factories and chimneys—and on the river formless clusters of barges and the looming silhouettes of great ships.

"I've got your berth ready, Miss Radcliffe," said a voice behind her.

She turned to see Smith. He had waited at table during the dinner only just concluded, and that was her only acquaintance with him. "I am sorry to have been so late in getting it ready, but there's been rather a rush of things to do."

"I should think so, if you are doing the cooking as well as the work of a steward," she said. "I am afraid you must be busy. I really don't expect you to wait on me, you know."

"Oh, it's a pleasure," he said, in a manner that struck her as not being at all the style of a cook-steward. But he appeared immediately to correct himself, for he added ungrammatically: "I likes plenty o' work, miss. Keeps me 'appy if I haven't time to brood."

He stood looking at her intently. He appeared to have the impulse to say more to her, but he moved away when the skipper hove in sight and disappeared into the galley.

"If everything isn't quite as you'd like it, just let me know, miss," Captain Christmas said with some ceremony, as he passed.

There came up through the saloon skylight a gust of laughter and the sound of glasses clinking together. The three partners were drinking success to the great venture. Amid the laughter came foul words. She shrank back a little.

These men, with whom she had been forced by fate into a sort of partnership,

were not her sort. They were crooks and plotters. She realised now that, from the first, the visits of the man, Biskerton, to the hospital in the guise of a charitable visitor had been merely a ruse to get information from her father, and then that led her to the consideration of how they had got on the scent to begin with. She could only conclude that they would not start on such an expedition as this without ample information, and that led her to the belief that in some way they had come into possession of the plan that was stolen from her father's pocket a few minutes after he landed.

All this convinced her that she was sharing quarters with a crook combination who, in the accomplishment of their design, would not study her interests against their own. For it was quite clear to her that she was given passage with them because they thought she had knowledge of facts that would assist them. Such knowledge as she had must be used sparingly. She had to trade it, giving it out in discreet portions to ensure her continued usefulness to them so that her claims to a passage might be maintained.

Her thoughts went back to her father. Would he miss her much? Would he conclude, because she did not visit him, that she had gone on the journey to find the stuff to bring him from darkness? Would that belief comfort him in his loneliness? Of his immediate future—she did not think anything would happen to him. Some formal proceedings would be instituted by the police as a matter of course, but he would doubtless be remanded, and, as an accused person unfit to plead, would be placed under surveillance somewhere. Thus she had no need to worry about him in that sense.

The lights were getting fewer now, and there were greater stretches of darkness and a sense of wider water. There was a little lift in the ship as though she smelt the sea.

Down Channel the Matador ran into a blow, and, though she was a handy enough sea-boat, her small tonnage made her pretty lively. In spite of wind and sea Margaret was out on deck early, revelling in the fresh breeze and in the green, running hills of water. Smith came out of the galley and intimated that coffee would be ready in five minutes.

"Will you have it with a biscuit, miss?"

"If you please."

"And served in the saloon?"

"Up here for preference. I'll have it by the galley door. I think Mr. Biskerton is sleeping in the saloon."

"I am afraid they were celebrating overmuch last night, drinking success to something."

She nodded.

"To what were they drinking success?" he asked casually.

"To the success of the voyage, I suppose," she said.

"What are the objects of the voyage, I wonder?" he observed. It was left for her to answer, and she suddenly felt the need for caution.

"I am not exactly in their confidence," she answered discreetly. "I have my own purpose for making the voyage."

"You are not in partnership with them, then?"

"No."

She did not see it, for his face was turned away, but an expression something like relief passed over his features. He busied himself with putting coffee into the tin coffee-pot.

EAVESDROPPING.

NAUSEATES me the way that girl spends her time with the cook," said Stokes irritably.

"You've said that for the last fortnight," observed Biskerton.

"All the better that she's not with us," remarked Finkhill. "We don't have to mind our blooming conversation so much. We don't want her to know all we know. My only fear is that if she gets over-friendly with that cook she'll tell him what our game is. The skipper's got it that we are prospecting after minerals. She knows we are not. That's where the risk comes in."

"She'll have sense enough to know that if we fail she will also, and she's keen enough on getting that stuff for her father's blindness," said Biskerton.

"Aye. Deaf and dumb, and blind!" murmured Finkhill with a shudder. "Rotten, that. I suppose we'll be near the place in another day or two. That's Africa, over there to port. What about having another



look at that skin? We want to get the route in our minds. We don't want to waste time mucking about when we get there."

Stokes nodded. He adjusted the saloon lamp and then went to his berth, and presently came back with the piece of crumpled yellow skin, on which was marked the chart and the Spanish script.

"It's that ju-ju god we've got to find," said Biskerton, putting a forefinger on the queer little caricature of a human shape drawn on the skin. It's called the god, Karmo."

"How did you find that out?"

"The girl told me. I've got a few bits of information from her while Stokes here has been sulking and you have been swilling whisky. The old man told her, in bits, a good lot of things that aren't on here. For instance, when we get to the second river—come close and have a look, I don't want to shout. There may be longer ears on this craft than you'd guess."

He talked in a low voice of the many details he had obtained and dove-tailed together. The three of them slanted their faces over the skin. Suddenly Stokes lifted his head at a sound above.

"Hades! If that isn't someone listening at the skylight I'm struck deaf myself!" And he jumped to his feet and made for the companion. He came up on deck, but found no one there, although the skylight was open.

At that moment Margaret and Smith were behind the wheel-house. He was standing rigidly against the iron. She was breathing hard, as though she had just undergone great physical effort and was under the stress of fear. They were both listening intently. When the sound of Stokes, cursing under his breath, had subsided into the wash

of the sea, she spoke, in little jerks, as though she laboured under great emotion.

"Why were you listening? What is it you wish to find out? Who are you?" She had found him lying half over the cabin skylight. It was her touching him that had caused him to make the noise that alarmed Stokes.

"I was listening, to add to my stock of information," he answered. "I've found out one thing that relieves me intensely. You are not in with them."

"But I told you that," she answered swiftly.

"Did you? Forgive me if—I was glad to have corroboration."

"You did not believe me, then?"

"I would believe anything you told me."

"That might not be wise. I might lie to you if I were desperate and I could gain something by it."

"My dear, I would prefer to trust you," he said.

"Then trust me in another sense. Tell me who you are."

He paused a moment, then whispered in her ear. She took a swift breath, and was silent.

"And while I am telling secrets I'll add another," he said slowly. "It may not interest you. If it doesn't, forget it and think me a fool. I love you. Now I am going before you have time to be angry with me."

She found herself alone. She went to the rail and looked astern at the foaming water, which seemed to be running out like life—a disappearing pathway that told of journeys done, a road that could not be retraced. Thought, dark as the night, fell about her and submerged her. Suddenly, with a new resolution, she moved away and went to the galley, where she could hear him raking at the fire.

"I want to say this," she said, in a voice that sounded as though there were a sigh



A gun in each hand, Smith rushed forward, firing rapidly at the gibbering blacks who leapt round the grim sacrificial stone on which Margaret lay.

on every word. "You will not love me when you know who I am."

He chuckled in his throat, as though the idea were a great joke.

"My dear, I knew who you were from the very beginning," he said. Her head was inside the doorway. He held her face in his hands. He discovered tears on her cheek as he kissed her.

"But there may be no happiness in it," she said, as she left him.

BLACK RIVER.

THIRTY-SIX hours later the *Matador* nosed her way over a muddy bar and bore up a wide waterway that was the colour of pea-soup and bore the smells of the

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NEXT WEEK

land in its great current. From the mud-bank on each side sprouted palms with the solid green of mangroves filling the background. Over the vast greenery of the equatorial forest floated scarves of white vapour as the dawn light flooded it, and the river was misty as though ghosts were left over from the night.

"This mist tastes of mud," Captain Christmas said. "Pretty filthy stunk. It spells fever of sorts for those who are ripe for that kind of thing. But the sun will shift it."

He went into the bows himself with lead and line and coned the deep-water channel. Now and again he shouted out a change of course to the man at the wheel. There were mud-banks about, stretches of slimy-looking stuff where trunks of trees and grey logs were stranded. Margaret saw one of those grey logs move, slide off the mud, and take to the water as the steamer approached. It gave her a little thrill when she realised it was a crocodile.

Of sight of habitation there was none, nor of living creatures, save the gruesome reptiles and many birds. Once, close into the bank, they saw the ruins of a dwelling of corrugated iron and thatch, with a broken-down compound and a rotted jetty of tree-trunks sprawling in the mud. It was the melancholy remains of some trader's house.

"Somebody who's given up the job," said Smith to Margaret. "He'll be buried somewhere at the back of there, or perhaps there wasn't anybody to bury him. This is a bad country for white men."

"You've been here before?" queried Margaret.

"Not up this river, but I've been on the coast. I've seen good men die in scores."

She thought of her father, who had come up this river. She felt a shuddering dread of what might lie before her now. Smith saw and understood the shadow that crossed her face.

"But we shall not be here long, anyhow," he said. "And I will look after you."

Then twelve hours later Smith was smitten down by sickness, and he went to his berth with a green face and a temperature of 105 degrees.

"It's the local swamp fever," he said to Margaret and to the man who was put on to attend to him. "It's bad while it lasts, but I shall pull through. Give me time. I've had it once before. I'm afraid the cooking will be all sixes and sevens."

"I'll manage that," Margaret said. And she did. She took over the galley, and got a man from the crew to give her assistance under her instructions. And the pressure of work drove out anxiety and fear of what might lie ahead. Not so the three men who had staked so much on this plunder-seeking expedition. The sickness that had come on board terrified at least two of them, and Stokes and Finkhill sweated fear.

"He ought to be landed somewhere," Finkhill said under his breath. "We shall get the infection."

"Landed—where? In the forest, and left for beasts to eat?" said Biskerton scornfully. "Don't talk like a fool!"

"We're running a risk, anyhow," declared Stokes.

"You'll run a bigger risk if you talk that stuff to the skipper. Oh, yes, we employ him, but he's top-dog while we are aboard. That's the law. And I can reckon him up pretty well. You've lost your nerve. Whisky and this climate doesn't agree. You'd better buck up. When the final dash comes you'll want all your guts to keep you going."

"Are you talking to me as well?" asked Stokes.

"I'm talking to anyone it can apply to," answered Biskerton irritably. The climate did not help to mildness of temper. The heat, the plague of insects, the inaction, and the threat of an indefinite danger, had an irritant effect on them.

"I look upon that blooming steward as a sort of Jonah aboard," Stokes persisted. "A Jonah that isn't going to bring us any luck."

"By about to-morrow or the next day you'll have something more important to think about," Biskerton promised him. "We'll be up the second river and well up towards the mouth of the Black River. The ship won't go much higher after to-morrow. The skipper is complaining now that the water is low."

The river was narrowing. The twisting roots of the mangroves writhed out like grey snakes far into the water. The forest seemed to be closing them in. Of life they still saw nothing, save a furtive crocodile here and there, but at night, when they anchored, for it was no longer safe to forge ahead in the darkness, they heard many weird sounds coming from the forest. There were yells and shrieks, probably from monkeys, but by no means sure, and more than once the sounds of paddles from the far side of the river reached their ears. They could see nothing, but there was always the shuddering sense of the darkness being populated by dreadful things.

At last the second river. More and more the waterway began to take on the nature of a tunnel through the forest. The banks came close. The trees hung out further. Here and there creepers, with grey, fringing stuff pendulous from them, leaped the space from one bank to another. Still the ship climbed up, churning the mud from the bottom, ripping away the trails of creeper with her foremast.

During the first night up the second river there came a new sound—a drumming noise that at times might have been low thunder and then was distinctly a sound of per-

cussion. It reached Smith's ears as he lay in his bunk.

"It's native devilry, sir," he said to Christmas, when that officer was visiting him and disinfecting him with smoke of the strongest tobacco grown. "I've heard that sound before. It's ju-ju, which is another name for magic attached to devilry."

"I know," said Christmas. "I've smelt Africa before myself. I've fancied for days we have been watched from the jungle. But I've got weapons on board—in case. Shall you be able to take a hand if there is trouble?"

"I'm past the worst, sir. I can shoot, if necessary," said Smith.

In the morning, the *Matador* grounded softly on a mud-bank opposite the opening of a tributary stream that wound up, like a black sewer, into the dark forest.

"We stop here, anyhow," said Christmas to Biskerton. "I'll pull her back and tie her up in deep water. But there's the opening to the Black River. That's where you are going prospecting for minerals, eh? Now you'll want a boat, with arms and provisions aboard. How many men will you want?"

Four men should be enough. It's a day's pull, I calculate. But the actual work, where we propose to prospect, will be done by ourselves. We don't want the thing shouted about. We want to get our specimens and come away. Catch that idea, skipper?"

"Then you'll be away, say, three days. I'll let out the fires to save coal."

The ship's long boat was thrust out-board and lowered, and she was fitted with all that was necessary.

"I also am going, captain," Margaret said.

"The deuce you are. I'll tell off a man to look after you, if you like."

"I think what I have to do I can only do by myself," she answered. She looked below. She had thought to go and tell Smith she was going. Then she changed her mind and looked after what she would need for the journey.

"You are going with us, eh?" said Stokes, as she prepared to descend into the boat.

"You must know I am. What did I come for?"

"Righto. It's your palaver!"

"Do you think it's worth the risk, anyhow—for you?" Biskerton asked.

"It's worth anything," she answered as she swung down the ladder.

Captain Christmas saw the boat disappear up the evil-looking waterway.

"Like a river going direct into hell," he commented, and set about his own job, getting the ship free of the mudbank and turning her round, ready to descend the river. This promised to be a bigger job than he anticipated. He reversed engine for half an hour and turned the river to soup, but she would not move. And in the end he had to fasten warps to tree-trunks on the bank and put strain on them via the after-winch. In the end, after half a day's sweating work, she was afloat and turned with her nose down the river.

"But may the angels that have pity on poor sailor-men keep enough water in the river, or we'll never get back to the sea again," he said. He had been so intensely occupied during the day that he had forgotten about the sick steward. He went amidships, purposing to go below, when he met that individual, fully dressed, clinging to the door-frame of the companion in a rather shaky manner.

"I thought I'd try if my pins would support me, sir," Smith said. "I've had a gem of a sleep all day. I'm very much on the mend." He was white-faced and haggard, but he walked out on deck, reached the rail and leaned against it.

"You've turned the ship round, sir."
"We steamed up as far as we can. We haven't too much water under us, and I'll not be sorry to see that boat again."

"Boat, sir?" His eyes saw the empty davits where the boat had hung. "Have they gone?"

Christmas jerked his pipe in the direction of the hole in the forest wall where the water went away in a dark gully.

"That's the Black River. They started off this morning, Miss Radcliffe with them."

"Miss Radcliffe?" echoed Smith, with a sudden change of voice, and swift apprehension sharpening his strained face. "Has she gone in the boat with them?"

"That's so. She said she had a job of her own to do."

"Oh, by heaven, captain, this is bad! I meant to go with her if she was determined to go. You should have stopped her."

"My lad, who the deuce are you to tell me what I should do?" rapped out Christmas, in the interests of discipline.

Smith reeled a little as he let go of the rail.

"I'll tell you who I am, skipper," he said, with a quietness come into his voice. "It's about time. Perhaps I ought to have told you a bit earlier, but I wasn't too sure whether you were in with the crowd or not, and I had to wait. My name's not Smith. I'm Galloway. I'm a Scotland Yard man. I'm out to get hold of the plunder that those crooks are after—which is stolen money taken from a London bank nearly four years ago, and hidden up that river by the thief."

"Man, they're prospecting—mineral deposits, they're after. They told me that to start with."

"Did they? That's where they fooled

you, captain, guessing you would want a hand in the plunder if—"

"By ginger, you're a sick man, or I'd handle you for insulting me! I'm no dirty thief!"

"Then you're a servant of thieves."

"By gosh, mister, tell me the whole caboodle!" gasped Christmas. "You've got me guessing. And how do I know you aren't putting over a tale on me? And how do I know you are who you say you are?"

"It's a right and proper question, captain. I'll show you my authority—my papers. Then I'll tell you my story from end to end."

"Stop a bit, I'll give you a drink. You look pretty rotten."

"No, wait a bit. I'll have food directly. I believe that's what I'm ready for."

HADES!

FROM the vague darkness of the forest came the queer drumming noise that was sometimes like distant thunder, and sometimes like the weird mechanics of a menacing barbarism, not wholly human, but compact of devilish influences from the nether world.

"Listen to that!" groaned Galloway. "It sounds satanic. There's diabolic work going on somewhere! She's out there! In

you wonder I'm half-crazy with apprehension?"

"She's got men with her. I don't know that you've got much to worry about. Those fellows being crooks won't make any difference to them making a scrap of it if they are attacked."

"Yes, I dare say you are right. But I feel like starting after them. I am afraid, skipper. I'd mad with fear."

"You can't do anything, my lad. You couldn't pull an oar. And if you could—if I came with you and took every man we've got, what could we do in the darkness? Besides, we'd look a lot of fools."

Christmas argued reasonably. Galloway admitted it.

"I know I'm all nerves, captain. Something is dragging at me. I feel she needs me. It's as though she were gone into hell and were calling to me for aid."

"Don't forget there are seamen with guns there," said Christmas, with matter-of-fact sense. "If any of those nigger drummers try to weigh in with any funny business, there'll be some sudden lead-poisoning handed to them."

"I think you are right, captain. I am sure you must be right. But—"

"You must sleep," Captain Christmas said. "I'll give you a pill out of the

As Smith drew level with the ship's long boat, he saw three men in the stern. Each one appeared to be in terrible agony, his hands clasped to his eyes.





Cackling like monkeys, the blind natives were upon her. Gasping with terror, she shrank back as one hideous creature laid hands on her.

medicine-chest to make you shut your eyes and keep them shut."

But Christmas himself kept watch on deck all night, with a pair of automatic pistols in his pockets. And he listened to the forest noises with a grip on his nerves.

"I'm good enough to go, captain. At any rate, I'm going," Galloway said twenty-four hours later. "I'll take that light dinghy. I can pull it up the river at speed."

"I'd go with you myself," Christmas said, "but I've got my duty to the ship. I can scent we are being watched day and night. If the ship were overwhelmed in a surprise attack we'd all be in queer street."

"I guess I can handle myself what I have to do," said Galloway. And he set about preparing his own little expedition. His strength had come back to him amazingly, yet his features looked strained, as though he were working on pluck more than stamina. It was pretty near sunset when he started, but he said he would welcome the coolness, and that he would work better in the night. But he had not reckoned on the density of the darkness up that grim, sewer-like river.

"It's own brother to the infernal Styx," he said when he had been pulling a while. Half the time the trees met overhead, so that he was roofed in and the sky was hidden, and no light of stars could reach him. Dark curtains of creepers hung down so that often he was entangled in them, finding his head and neck and sometimes his arms netted about with matted growth that he had to blindly cut at with a knife before he could be free. And then sometimes he drove his boat into the side or into beds of water-weed, and more than once he found he had left the main stream and was navigating through drowned forest.

He thought this night journeying would be cool. Instead, it was hot with an in-

he had missed the main waterway and was in a tangle of the forest, so he waited till daylight. When at last the grey light of dawn filtered through the roof of leaves he was able to find his way back through the ghostly curtains of creepers to the main waterway, and here he put his back into the work and forged ahead.

Hour after hour he sweated at the work. Once when he paused to disentangle the forepart of his boat from a clutching river-plant he was attracted by a sound. He listened. It was the noise of dipping oars. He could see nothing, for the river twisted ahead of him, and a shaggy creeper festooned down from bank to bank at the bend, trailing its lowest twigs in the water. The sound came nearer. He waited, on the edge of expectation. And then he saw the prow of a boat break through the creeper—the ship's long-boat and four seamen stripped to their waists, pulling at the oars.

There were other figures in the boat. He pulled over to greet them, his eyes seeking only one figure. He saw three men, all doubled up curiously, but there was no sign of Margaret. He shouted as he pulled alongside.

"Where is Miss Radcliffe?"

"She's not here, steward," answered one of the seamen.

"Eh, what do you mean?" he cried. "Why is she not with you? Why have you left her behind?"

The same seaman answered: "She went off on her own, and she didn't turn up again. We couldn't wait! We've got enough awfulness. We've got three blind men on board."

"Eh, what's that?"

His eyes turned to Stokes and Finkhill, who were bent over, holding hands to their eyes, and to Biskerton, who was scooping up water from the river with both hands and dashing it in his face. It was the latter's voice that answered him.

"We're blind—the three of us," he cried in an agonised voice. And, as though he were too desperate to try to conceal anything: "We were at the ju-ju idol in the

sufferably clammy heat that made the perspiration pour from him. All about him brooded the evil threat of the mysterious forest. The feetid smell of mud was in his nostrils. There were occasional shrieks from the formless darkness, and always the threatening murmur—the booming of the drums of doom.

In the end he found himself hemmed in on all sides by tree-trunks, evidencing that

forest by the river and something happened. Something—came out—out of the trees—powdery stuff flung at us. It hurt. Night seemed to come suddenly. We were blind—"

"I heard 'em yell," broke in the seaman. "I found 'em staggering about as though they were blind drunk."

"Only blind," cried Finkhill, raising slobbering mouth and showing for a moment eyes that were set amid puckering, inflamed skin.

"But where is Miss Radcliffe?" cried Galloway in a hoarse, broken voice.

"Haven't we got enough?" bellowed Stokes. "Could we wait for her?"

"You've deserted her, you skunks!"

"We'll come back," said the seaman. "We'd better take these gents to the ship. Maybe the skipper will know what to do with 'em."

"Yes, go!" And Galloway, with a face of a man who has looked into Hades, started up the river.

There are agonies that may be felt and so understood, but not conveyed in words, because words are feeble things. Galloway suffered sheer torture as he pulled on the oars. At first a sort of panic got him so that he spent his strength so prodigally over the oars that his body was unequal to the tasks his furious spirit would have driven out of it, and he came to an agonised stop, gasping for breath, every muscle and sinew of his body in torment.

He conquered his panic. He tried to think clearly what he had to do, how best to conserve his strength. He tried to rid himself of the fear that she was in dreadful straits, perhaps facing the torture that had broken the man at home who was deaf and dumb, and blind. He knew that if he let himself believe this was possible, his own brain would break down under the strain. Indeed, at times he doubted his own sanity. Through the screen of diabolical forest he saw foul visions that set him biting his lips till he found blood on his face—that started him madly pulling at the oars till he collapsed in exhaustion.

The time went on unrecorded. It was to him just an unmeasured period of hours. He lost his way once or twice, getting up side channels away from the main stream, and only discovering his mistake when his prow drove into swamp.

Up the sinister, sweating river, he toiled hour after hour, the horror of it claiming him like the ocean fastening on a drowned man. Towards evening he was working mechanically like an automaton, a man lacking the power to think or to hope, only dimly conscious that he was seeking something.

Some sort of reasoning nudged at his senses. There was food in the boat, and for a long time he had not eaten. In an exhausted state he would be useless in face of a possible emergency. He crammed food into his mouth and washed it down with tepid water from a flask. Strength came with eating, and more hunger. He was ravenous. He ate and kept the boat moving at the same time. His whole body seemed to respond to the food. He was lifting the boat powerfully through the water.

When daylight winked out, there rose from the gloom the sinister drumming noise, with its maddening monotony and its diabolical significance. It boomed out from the mysterious forest depths like a gong of doom. Of a sudden it was answered from a spot near at hand—quick, vibrant notes merging one into another.

He swung round as though something hooked into his nerves. He suddenly saw—what had not been visible before—a glowing light hovering over the trees no great

distance away. In the same instant he saw a break in the angle of the forest—a piece of bank flattened down into a landing-place, and a dug-out canoe drawn up on the mud. The opening extended into a lane which led away somewhere.

This was the place he had to look for!

He pulled his boat round and drove it at the mud. In the instant that the keel passed softly over the slime there arose, from among the trees where the light gleamed, an animal-like cackling, broken by peals of insane laughter. And then there stabbed through this sound a scream that was like the despairing utterance of a soul in torment. It was the voice of a woman.

He leaped ashore and ran down the lane towards the light.

INTO THE INFERNO.

MARGARET, from the first, was under no misapprehension about the risk that tended her enterprise. When she came ashore with Stokes, Biskerton, and Finkhill, her presence was forgotten, and she was instantly left to her own devices. She lost sight of the three men within a minute. They went up a scarcely discernible track in the jungle, Stokes, with the skin chart in his hand, feverishly leading.

So she was left alone, although through the screen of forest between her and the river she could hear the voices of the seamen in the boat. She was free to pursue her own work, and she wanted nothing better. She went along this broken jungle lane, whose origin was probably a wild-beast track to a drinking-place, her courage keyed up to the ultimate limit, every nerve and fibre of her strained to the last notch of resolution.

Her brain gave back again what it had absorbed—the details of things she must look for—the precautions she must observe—her methods of approach. She had learned it all slowly, word by word, from her father.

Psoko, the high priest of Karmo, the hideous god of the blind, lived in a dwelling of mud and thatch a mile or so away from the idol. Between his dwelling and the dreadful god was a straight path cut through the forest and marked by posts. Each post top was crowned by a skull. The whitened relics had been owned by men sacrificed to the idol.

"Everyone blinded first," her father had written. "They are blind men who tend the idol. They are blind men who are about him. Karmo is called the blind god, and all who do the hideous ceremonial are also blind, all save Psoko, who has the secret of sight and of blindness. With a touch of the stuff he keeps in his little bottles made of gourds he can make men blind."

"With other stuff he can restore the sight he has taken away. Magic? I don't know. Perhaps he has more knowledge than anyone else. And blindness comes from the trees. Something falls. Men look up, and the poison is in their eyes before they know. No man is safe there, because only blind men may come into this territory of Karmo. But a woman may go. A woman, who is only held to be on the level of a beast, is safe.

"Psoko, who is a great, fat elephant of a man, has a horde of women waiting on him, tending him and supplying him with food, but the men about him are blind. He is a cunning beast, full of knowledge. He can speak some English, for he has lived on the coast and come in contact with traders. Offer him jewellery, anything you have. But keep a bullet for him in the last event—"

All this ran through her brain like a sound-film going through a projecting machine. It was all so familiar to her, for her mind had held it so long that she could have recited it mechanically and without conscious effort. But here, so near to the fearful place, here on the very ground where her father had been tortured, it all presented a dreadful significance.

Of jewellery she had not much save a wrist-watch, an old-fashioned bracelet or two, and a necklace of imitation pearls. But she had the other thing—a tiny revolver, ready at hand in the leather bag that was hung from her waist and contained the other objects.

She went resolutely ahead, crushing down the fears that gripped at her heart. She came to a pathway cutting across the one she traversed, a dark lane, almost in twilight because of the thickness of the growth. She saw pieces of tree-trunk, left and right, driven into the ground as posts. Something white was at the top of each. They were set up at every twenty yards or so, each with its grisly decoration, and between one post and another was stretched a rope of twisted creepers.

The reason of it—the posts and the rope—she understood a moment later. She saw four men coming along behind her. They were naked save for loin-cloths. They shambled curiously as they walked along, one following another. They clutched at the guide-rope that stretched from post to post. These men were blind! That was

the reason of the rope—to guide them from where they dwelt to the foul idol they served.

Cackling like monkeys, they approached her. She shrank back and remained still, holding her breath, her heart almost stilled with the clutch of a cold, unnameable fear. One creature stopped suddenly in front of her, his nose lifted up as though he perceived the strange perfume of her. And he stepped forward with as much sureness as though he could see, and gripped her with skinny arms.

Her fortitude broke down. She gasped in sheer terror. She could not shriek, although every nerve of her body wanted that expression. She could only make a hoarse noise. She looked at the creature's dreadful face. Sightless eyes looked at hers. And the puckered skin about them was like the scars around her father's eyes.

The blind men babbled with excitement. They fastened upon her. Their foul hands crawled over her. They pulled at her clothing. Their fingers ran through her hair.

She made a desperate effort to escape, struggling, striking at them with her hands. She had as much chance as a gazelle in the claws of a lion. She thought of the little weapon in her bag, but she could not get hold of it.

She was hurried along the dark lane, where the skulls on the top of the posts seemed to grin at her terror. She was hardly sure she was alive. The horror fastened upon her so that this seemed not reality, but a nightmare straight out of Hades itself. A few yards further, more blind men were met. A gabble of words passed between them and her captors, and more loathsome hands were passed over her.

Again she was hurried forward, with the whole gang of blind creatures about her. The semi-darkness of the lane was broken by light ahead. There was an opening, a

As the big black lumbered threateningly towards her, Margaret fired. Roaring like a maniac, he staggered back.



clearing in the jungle, and in the middle of it a shapeless, warren-like construction of mud and thatch. A distance away were small huts like ant-hills. Figures crouched, sprawled and crept among them like great insects crawling among festering filth-heaps. The great hut of mud suggested a gigantic wasp-nest with many entrances.

She was rushed to one cave-like opening, where a crowd of women lay on the ground. They rolled away as the mob of blind men staggered up. For a moment Margaret struggled desperately, and then she was carried inside, gripped in the foul hands that were all about her.

She was in gloom—in darkness. She could see nothing. Just for a moment she had the fear that the all-pervading blindness that cursed this satanic territory had smitten her.

Then she was flung forward, and saw light again as something struck her face—a screen of hanging reeds that let her through as she fell against it. She tumbled forward on her knees. For an instant she did not know what sort of place she was thrown into, then she saw a dozen things at once, mechanically registering them on her consciousness while her terror had full possession of her.

She saw first a glimmering flare of a fire on the floor, with a bubbling pot over it. This threw out a little illumination, which merged into the light of day that came through a hole in the roof. A circle of mud walls enclosed her.

There were objects—shapes—all sorts of dimly-seen things that she could not identify, half hidden in the shadows. One of the shapes moved and made a sound. It rose up and showed a human form—was it entirely human?—for it was monstrous, colossal in size, a great, fat-bellied, black creature more suggestive of a gorged gorilla than of any human man.

The thing moved towards her on legs like pillars. The noise it made was like the gurgling of a boiling kettle. Then the mouth opened cavernously and laughed, and she saw that truly this was some sort of a man.

She was shocked into a kind of courage when from the fleshy lips came talk in words she understood—coast-English.

"You come—eh?" he mouthed gutturally. "You white girl come see me, he-he-he! This very much great. You from ship on big river. Know all 'bout that. And fool white men! My ju-ju plenty too much big for them, he-he-he! I chop now. You have chop with me, white girl?"

He dragged her with a huge paw over to where he had been sitting, and she saw he was feeding from a calabash which contained some stew-like stuff, meat with grain among it. A distinct shape of a small hand poked up from it. The sight gave her a shudder. It was probably the limb of a monkey, but she was not sure. He squatted down and thrust a huge paw into the stuff, shovelled it up to his mouth, and invited her to do the same.

She shook her head dumbly, all the while struggling to fight down her terror. At last she found her voice.

"You are Psoko?" she gasped, in a voice that was little better than a whisper.

"Oh, aye; you heard of me—eh?"

"I come a long way to see you, Psoko," she said, recovering her voice as she used it.

"Oh, aye, yes. What you want? I big man here. Make every man tremble. Great worship palaver here. If you missionary woman, I show you better worship palaver."

He filled his mouth with the chop from the calabash, and, while food oozed from the corners of his lips, continued to talk. "Ugh! I great man. Plenty big chief.

Plenty big ju-ju priest. Plenty wife-palaver."

"Your name is known in England, Psoko. I come from there to see you, because you are great man and very wise," she said, following his line of conversation.

"Very wise," he echoed, with his mouth full. "Know more ju-ju magic than any man."

And to prove his assertion he pulled out from under a skin a very battered old gramophone, which he proceeded to wind up. A worn-out record scratched by a worn-out needle emitted a lamentable noise that was only faintly recognisable as a jazz band tune, and during the performance of it he sat back with an ecstatic look on his beast-like face. Thus the juxtaposition of the horrific and the ridiculous.

"Ju-ju fine," he said, spluttering food from his lips. "I smash heads of ten men other day with that tune playing. You want ju-ju?"

"Yes. You can make men blind, Psoko. And you can make blind men to see. I want your ju-ju to make a blind man see."

His voice altered. His whole manner changed. He spoke in a menacing growl. His eyes half closed in their rolls of fat.

"Oh, aye, yes," he murmured. "I can do. Who your blind man?"

"My father—in England. I have come from there because you are a great wonder-worker—great ju-ju man. I want the ointment that can give sight."

"From England! Ugh, I seen plenty ship come from there. What you give for stuff cure blindness?"

She held out her wrist-watch, which he grabbed eagerly.

"I know him—tik-tak. What else?"

She pulled out her bracelets and other trinkets.

"Oh, aye, but what else you got in bag?"

"No—not that!"

She stepped back, holding the little revolver she had come armed with. He paused and looked at her cunningly.

"You no can use that?" he said.

She got the courage of desperation. "It is my ju-ju," she said significantly. "I can use it quicker than you can snap your eye, Psoko."

She spoke without a quiver in her voice, though deep down she was desperately afraid that things were not going as she wanted. But then he opened his great mouth in a laugh again, and he giggled so much that his flesh lifted and fell as though he enjoyed a mighty joke that was for himself alone.

"Yes, I show you what you want. I give you, p'raps." And he staggered to his feet and took hold of a cord that was fastened to a peg by the mud wall. It held suspended to the roof a wicker basket. He lowered the basket and took off the cover. It contained scores of little packets wrapped in skin and fastened up with tree-gum. And there was a great number of little dried gourds used as bottles, with stoppers in their narrow necks, and tied up with strips of skin, some of which were dyed blue and some red, as if to differentiate them. He took one of each out and held them in his palm.

"One make man see; one make man not see," he said, with a malevolent grin. "And I make more," he added, pointing to the bubbling pot on the fire.

"I want make man see," she said desperately.

"You take both," he said, still enjoying the grim humour of it.

"Which is which?"

"You find out."

"But I want to make my father see! He is already blind!"

"Why he blind, eh? Him blind up here in this country?"

"Yes," she answered, making a false step. "You blinded him."

"Oh!" he murmured, with a soft snarl, like a leopard that is just about to spring. "That blind man here. Got away, eh? Not stay for worship palaver." He snapped his teeth together like a trap and looked at her with glaring eyes. He dropped the gourds into the basket again. "No can," he said. "No can have."

She was about to snatch them when he pulled her away.

"That palaver no good. You come here talk wife palaver. Hey, I got plenty wife, but no white girl. Hey, you got skin like ivory. Hey, you got hair like gold. What you want struggle—"

He clutched her in a grasp that made her heart leap with terror. He snorted into her face like a wild beast.

She pulled the trigger of her little revolver without taking aim, knowing only his great bulk was before it. He gripped her tighter and roared like a murderous maniac. She fired again and he fell away, helpless, and collapsed, a mountain of flesh, over the calabash of food.

She stepped swiftly across to the basket that contained the gourds. She snatched at two—one of each kind—thrust them into her bag, and darted for the reed curtain. In the darkness beyond she crashed into a mud wall, but staggered on while the bellowing roar of the wounded monster followed her. She reeled into an obstruction, and arms grasped her. She fired blindly. There was a shriek, and she was free again.

She bore on, and saw daylight. She rushed out into the glaring day, fervent terror giving her wings. And so to the dim lane where the white skulls leered at her as she fled. Voices followed her, but they gradually grew fainter. Narrowly avoiding a troop of blind men, who came crawling along, she reached the track that led to the river.

She arrived at the muddy landing—to find the boat gone.

THE RESCUE.



SHE could not believe her eyes. She looked at the empty place with growing horror. She thought she had come to the wrong place, but then she saw in the mud the print of shoes pointing outwards. And there was the old dug-out native canoe, lying in the mud, that she had noticed on landing.

Her heart fell. For the first time her courage failed. She sank down on a fallen log and tried frantically to think what she could do. She gripped at her failing courage and reasoned herself into confidence. The boat would come back. Smith would see to that, and she was sure Captain Christmas would back him up.

So she settled down to wait, and the day stole on; and, because she was waiting, the sweating horrors of the place settled on her soul. Occasionally she heard sounds of voices inshore, screams and yells that may have been animal or human. And there were queer sounds in the trees above her. She felt as though eyes looked at her from the branches above. She grew frightened.

How the last dreadful thing happened she did not know. She had dozed with fatigue. She broke into sudden wakefulness to find

hands on her. She screamed and looked into a blinded face horribly scarred. The face gibbered at her and cackled. Another pair of hands gripped her. She tried to break away and found herself surrounded by clutching hands. She was in the grip of the blind men who had come to the river for water and had tumbled over her.

She struggled desperately. She succeeded in getting her revolver out, but dropped it. She was borne off her feet and hurried away down the lane she had come.

She must have lost consciousness, as though the last link in the fine chain of her endurance had snapped. Her brain throbbed into life after an unrecorded blank. On her ears fell a drumming noise. Voices gabbled about her. Night had come, but there was a light of a fire somewhere behind her. It threw a glow on a great black stone figure—a misshapen caricature of a human body with a head that had no eyes! The idol, Karmo, the blind god!

She did not move, because she could not. She was bound fast to a stone. With a sudden dreadful realisation she knew she was fastened there for sacrifice to the eyeless god. A blind man staggered by her between the idol and herself. He was swinging a club in the air. He went on, and another followed, similarly armed, thrashing the air like the first. In a moment of swift horror she realised that she was the sport of these blind priests. They were playing a ghastly form of blindman's buff, starting from a point and trying to kill her with a blind blow.

She heard their insane cackling laughter. She had no more control over herself, and she shrieked.

That shriek should have been fatal—a guide to the next blind killer, but miserly chance put a root of a tree in the path of him and he tripped up. Half a minute later there was a crashing explosion of a pistol not fifty yards from her. Then another quickly, and another. She saw two blind men fall forward on their faces, clawing the ground with their hands. Another collapsed at her feet. A figure rushed between her and the idol.

"It is I—Smith," he said, firing once again. "I mean Galloway. I've got a boat for you!"

She did not answer. She lay over limply. He cut the cords about her and carried her to the boat, but she showed no signs of life. He thought she was dead, and he had the momentary impulse to go back and to kill some more of those blind fiends and make a sufficient sacrifice to the blind god. But then he thought he would come back and do that after he had taken her to the ship.

He spoke to her occasionally, as he pulled away downstream, but no answer came. Sometimes he cried out to her in desperation, begging her, if she loved him, to

reply. But there came no response. He was convinced that he was taking to the ship a dead woman.

Sometimes when he implored her to speak there came mocking replies from the forest—peals of demoniac laughter that may have come from apes or men, but seemed to him to be the voices of fiends from Hades. And always there was the diabolical drumming, now faint, now loud, like a perpetual symphony from the infernal. Once he got up in the boat and cursed aloud and shook his fist at the forest. He sat down on the thwart trembling.

"I'm mad myself!" he muttered.

At dawn Captain Christmas, with four men pulling the long-boat, met him.

"I thought I might be wanted," Christmas said. "How are things?"

Galloway's face was enough answer. "I think they've killed her," he said.

"Nothing of the sort; she's very much alive!" the skipper exclaimed.

Margaret was moving. She was struggling into a sitting position. She got up and looked into Galloway's face.

"You—you saved me!" she exclaimed.

"Yes—I—I thought it was too late!"

"I—I think it was a pretty near thing," she answered tremulously. "I am afraid I collapsed. I didn't hold on as well as I should, and I—"

She began to feel with frantic haste for the leather bag that was suspended to her waist. She had dropped her revolver from it. Just for a moment she had the ghastly fear that the bag might be quite empty. She found what she sought, the two little stoppered gourds.

"What have you got there?" Galloway asked.

"What I went to get."

"By ginger, you have a story to tell!" exclaimed Captain Christmas.

"I have a story I would rather forget," she said with a shudder.

"Do those gourds hold the stuff that is a cure for the blindness?"

"One does, but I don't know which one," she answered in a weak voice.

"Because there are three blind men on board," Christmas said.

She looked at him with affright as he told the story in a dozen words, and she hastily put the gourd-bottles back into her leather bag.

THE CURE.

For eight hours Galloway lay on deck under the poop awning, deep in a sleep of utter exhaustion. Then Christmas waked him.

"She's improving finely," he said. "She'll be all right in a bit. It's just a case of going all out and collapsing under a strain that she had not enough strength to bear. You know what strain is yourself."

"By Heaven, yes!" Galloway murmured.

"But I don't know all that happened to her," Christmas continued, "and I'm not asking. And if you'll take my tip you'll not press her memory either. Some things are best forgotten. Things can happen in this country that white men can't understand, and there's more in this ju-ju than European philosophy has ever dreamed of. This is a country of devils."

"But is it devils, captain?—I mean, is it supernatural, or just infernal trickery of some sort?"



The digging before the idol ceased. In mortal agony, the crooks clapped their hands over their eyes, torn with a pain that nearly drove them mad.

"I give it up. It may be nigger science. But there's something queer in this blindness they produce by peppering powder from the trees or by smearing the eyes with a touch of ointment. And there's something queer in that stuff she's got for the cure of the blindness. Has it occurred to you that she may need protection on that account?"

"Protection?"

"There are three blind men on board."

"By gad, yes. That had been driven out of my memory. I think I've been more than half-way towards the breaking-point myself, captain. Does she know that Biskerton, Stokes, and Finkhill are blind?"

"Yes, she knows that. I told her. But she hangs on to the stuff. She says it is for her father. It is what she came for. And

when you come to think of it—considering what she must have gone through—I guess it's her call."

Galloway nodded

"And what is their story?" he asked.

"They didn't get what they went for. It's still up there where old Samuel Radcliffe buried it, thinking it would be safe. It's safer than he thought. I doubt if anybody will ever get it. I can show you the chart that set these merchants off. I found it in the boat when they came back. It's on a bit of skin, and the directions are written in Spanish. I got a bit of the tale from Biskerton. I just let him talk, and I hadn't the heart to tell him that I was pretty wild about being brought on a thieves' expedition, under the guise of something quite different. The ju-ju idol is a big stone figure cut out of a black basalt outcrop. It's in a grove of trees not many yards from the river. It is Biskerton's notion that when Samuel Radcliffe buried his loot there—choosing the spot because it was well marked—the worship of the idol was in abeyance, or suspended for some reason. Perhaps the tribe had been driven off by war, or pestilence, or something. Anyhow, when he returned to get possession of what he had buried, the tribe and priests were back again, and so they collared him and did their worst. I reckon that's pretty good guessing. And about themselves—they seem hardly to have been out of the boat and under the trees when their eyes began to hurt. They saw not a soul on the ground, but Biskerton says he saw black faces up the trees gibbering down on them. They got to the idol and began to dig, but they didn't stick it ten minutes. They got pains in their eyes that sent them nearly mad, and when they staggered back to the boat they were blind as dead men."

"Where are they now?"

"They are lying where they've been all day—on the lockers in the saloon. What's to be done?"

"Do they know Miss Radcliffe has the cure?"

"They know. They knew when you and she were brought aboard. They wanted to know instantly if she had succeeded. I quietened them by telling them she was three parts dead, and that they'd have to wait. Finkhill has been along the alley-way to her cabin since and spoken to her through the door, and, not knowing who was speaking, she told him. So they know. She may want protecting from them."

"That should be easy. Blind men need not be very dangerous."

"Except if they appeal to her for mercy. It's her pity for them that may rob her father."

"It's perhaps a question of how much stuff she's got. She has two gourds."

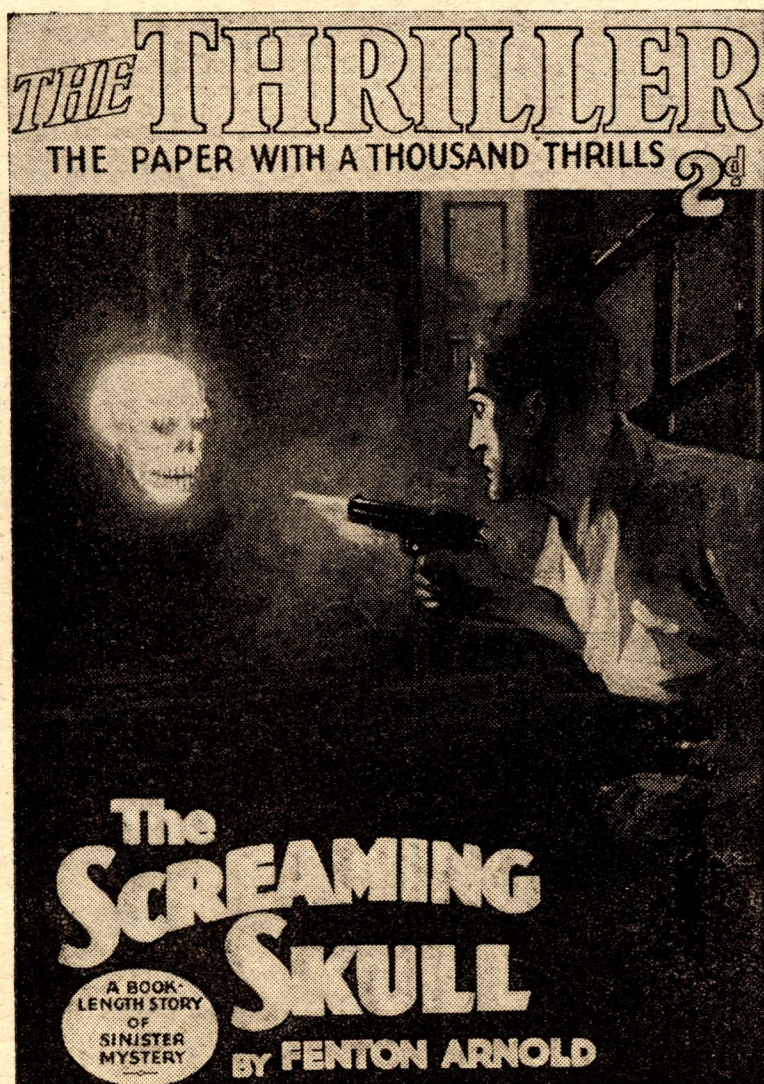
"That's the trouble. Only one is a right one. It looks like a devilish sort of trick the chief ju-ju merchant has played on her. One gourd contains the right stuff to cure the blindness, and the other the hell-concoction that burns holes in their eyes, or something to that effect. I've been piecing things together in my mind. I was once up the Mpopo River, in this country, and a trader there told me a grisly yarn. He said somewhere up-country in the back lands was a god called the blind god, who was said to have no eyes. And the way of worshipping this very powerful ju-ju was to have around it a crowd of blind men. Every man these priests up there could collar was made blind and kept around this idol, worshipping day and night, until they were sacrificed. I never believed that yarn, but I do now. This is it. This is the blind god. Anyone who ventures into that territory is going to run the risk of being made blind. And, if it is right what

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she was told, one of the gourds contains stuff used for blinding the poor wretches that fall into the priests' hands. So it looks as though some careful experimentation were needed."

Galloway nodded gravely.

"But I've got to run the risk, anyhow," he said. "It's my job. I've got to go up to that idol to get the stuff that's there—the plunder that Samuel Radcliffe buried."

"By ginger, I don't like that idea. Hallo, what the—"

A cry fell on their ears—the girl's voice. She was protesting loudly, violently. Her cry ended in a shriek. There was the sound of a door banging, moving feet and men's voices below. Christmas leaped towards the companion stairs, with Galloway following unsteadily at his heels. They both stopped at the top, for half-way down was Finkhill. He was holding to the rail with one hand, and with the other he was holding one of Margaret Radcliffe's gourds, from which the stopper had been torn away. It seemed that he had already applied some of the contents to his eyes, for they were wet, and a yellow, gummy-looking substance was trickling down his face. He was frantically scrambling up the stairs, with Stokes in pursuit.

"My share! Let me have my share!" Stokes was gasping.

"Wait a bit! I've got to soak my own eyes first, and then—oh, heaven!"

At the top of the companion Finkhill stopped, his face becoming distorted, as though he were seized with the most diabolical agony. He swayed, clapping one hand to his eyes, and clutching the unstoppered gourd to him with the other. And he cried out a jumble of incoherent words that ended in a shriek. A second later Stokes, stumbling up the stairs and guided by his voice, came upon him and seized him from behind.

"My share of the stuff, you thieving hound! I got it, and you snatched it from me—"

He clutched Finkhill. The latter, in a frenzy of agony, tried to break away. There were two seconds of frantic struggle when Finkhill made a blind rush, with the other clinging to him. They banged up against the rail, over-balanced, and, before anyone could put out a hand to stay them, tumbled over and splashed into the river like jettisoned cargo.

They fell beside a boat, and Christmas was in the boat long before the ripples had died down, but they sank like lead, and not a head came up above the water again. And there followed swiftly other splashes from the muddy bank, and streaks on the surface indicating the movement of shapes beneath the water. Where the two men had disappeared came up bubbles. And some of them were red.

"I think," said Christmas to Galloway, "you had better go below and tell Miss Radcliffe what has happened. There isn't a doubt that he picked the wrong gourd."

DESPERATION.

"It's part of my job," Galloway said stubbornly, "and I'd better go and get it done."

"But they have failed, so why should you succeed?" Margaret declared, at the end of a long argument. "Suppose you, too, are blinded?"

"I may escape it. I am forewarned, anyhow. In case I am unlucky, how much of the cure have you?"

"Enough for two. But half of it is for my father."

"Yes, of course. Anyhow, whatever happens, I've got to go through with this. That buried plunder has to be delivered where it belongs. You must see that."

Fighting savagely, they crashed against the ship's rail and pitched over the side into the river.

"I don't see anything of the sort," Margaret said. "The risk is enormous."

"Oh, who are you to talk of risk?" he said. "Put it to yourself. Could I go back to the Yard with the story that I was too frightened to attempt to do less than you have done?"

"I don't want you to go," she answered, with the illogical unreason of love. But he went, because there was no way out, and because, as he had stated simply, it was his job, which is the reason for a good many heroisms performed in the world by men who would laugh at the claim to be heroes.

"He's business-like enough, and a capable lad," commented Christmas after Galloway had departed, "and he may get through. Four men have gone with him to do the pulling up and down river, but the digging at the idol is his palaver alone. He won't have it any other way. He wants all the risk. Well, it's a pity, in a way, that he's a detective. Good cooks are scarce and useful, and if he comes back with his eyes—"

"Oh, don't, captain! I can't bear it!" Margaret gasped. And she went to her cabin to look at the gourd of precious stuff, and wondered if truly there was enough here to cure more than one of the mysterious blindness. She locked it away in her valise as she heard the scuffling noise of Biskerton feeling his way up the com-

panion-stairs. Most of the day he sat on deck, scarcely speaking, although occasionally he muttered a despairing philosophy to Christmas.

"I'd sooner be with Stokes and Fink," he said. "What's the good taking me home a mere useless log? Who's going to take care of me? Well, I can confess to one or two misdemeanours that no one knows anything about that will make the police take care of me. Perhaps I shall join old Radcliffe. But I'd sooner join Stokes and Fink." And in the direction of the river he turned eyes that did not see anything.

That day passed, a night and another day. That night Margaret sat late on deck, because it was too hopeless to expect to sleep, but when midnight was passed she went at last to her cabin. She struck a match and put a light to the swinging candle, but with the first glimmering of light she saw that something dreadful had happened. On her bunk her valise was



lying, torn open at the lock by the insertion of some powerful lever. Its contents were scattered about the bunk. The sealed gourd was gone!

For a moment she looked about the berth with despairing eyes. She needed no prompting. She ran out into the alleyway, and met Captain Christmas coming down into the saloon. She blundered out news of her discovery in frantic accents.

"Come with me," said Christmas swiftly.

They went into Biskerton's berth. They found him sitting up in his bunk. He was looking at them open-eyed.

"I can see, captain," he said. "I took the blooming risk. If I'd had my eyes burnt out like Fink I should have followed him. But the stuff is right. It may be ju-ju magic, and I don't pretend to understand it, but I'm beginning to see, and my sight is improving every minute!"

"Have you used it all?" screamed Margaret.

"No, there's half of it left," said Biskerton, pointing to the gourd, which was propped up in a bottle-holder above his bunk. "There'll be enough for your father."

She snatched hold of the gourd and ran out of the cabin, murmuring a desperate prayer that no one save her father might need it. She reached her berth, and through the open port heard the sound of oars, and a moment later the sound of a man's voice hailing the ship. She heard the bump of a boat on the ship's side.

She felt a paralysis of fear upon her. Her joints seemed to give way. Her heart sank. She forced herself to movement. She came out on deck to see Galloway standing there in the light of a deck-lamp, carrying a metal case of some sort.

"Dear!" she cried, running to him. "Are you all right?"

"I've succeeded," he said. "It's in hundred-pound notes, all packed in a case."

"But you?" she gasped.

"I can hardly see anything," he answered in a level voice. "I found myself going blind on my way back. It's getting worse every minute."

CIVILISATION.



THE little *Matador* went down the evil river to the sea, bearing the most poignant human drama that ever Fate produced on so small a stage. It was Captain Christmas who in bald, unsoftened, seaman-like words

told Galloway the position.

"I'll tell you straight, my lad," Christmas said, as the latter sat in the chart-room, "she's got a terrible choice to make that you've got to help her with. It's not going to be easy for you. If you remain blind, your life is done, and you can't think of marrying her, not even if she's willing. And though you might argue—and it would be reasonable enough for you to do it—that it was economically sounder for you, a man in your full vigour, to have your sight given back to you, rather than the same restored to a man who in other respects is broken, and whose usefulness in life is ended, you are not going to do it."

"He is mad, too," Galloway said. "What is sight to him? While to me—but you are right, skipper. She's got to take the stuff home to her father. What remains is his share. I can only reckon that Biskerton has got my share. I shall tell her, even as

she loves me, that she is to take the stuff to her father."

"Has she offered it to you?"

"No, but I seem to sense things. She has talked of her father. She has wondered if her father cares for her happiness. Women do strange things for love. She has even said she would dare going to the priest of Karmo again. I said I would sooner jump overboard at sea than she should think of it."

"That's the right view," Christmas said. "You've got to play the game. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. When we get out of this river I'm going to call at the coast town of Baloa. There is a doctor there, a friend of mine, who has been on this coast longer than any white doctor who takes his quinine pill every day. He knows tons about this country. I'm going to hear what he says."

"You're a good sort, skipper. Where's Biskerton?"

"In his cabin. He's all right, but he doesn't come out much. He prefers to keep to himself. Hush! She's at the door."

Margaret came in, and Christmas went out as she entered. Galloway looked up at her blindly, with a smile that she could not help knowing was forced.

"My dear, I am getting resigned already," he said.

"No, you are not," she answered him brokenly. "It is impossible that you should be."

She put her hands on his face and stroked her fingers round his eyebrows.

"Oh, my love, what am I to do? Perhaps my father will understand. Perhaps he will think of my happiness. Sight to him now cannot be so great a thing, but for you—and for me—"

And then a dreadful temptation came into her mind.

"He would never know I had succeeded in getting the stuff—"

"But you would know and I should know always," he answered huskily. "Happiness is not to be got that way." His arms were round her. He felt her tears on his cheek. "And, besides, there may be another way. The skipper knows a doctor at Baloa."

Dr. Angus Ferguson, of Baloa, specialist in African diseases, received Captain Christmas with all joy.

"Mon, I'm glad tae see ye," he said.



"But ye're looking drawn and haggard. Are ye seriously sick?"

"No," said Christmas, "I'm only worried."

"In that case, and if ye're just hame-sick, I'll introduce ye to a voice from London. I've got a six-valve set that'll pour out the finest limpid English straight from Savoy Hill that you've ever heard. Not that I wadnae rather hear a voice from Edinburgh talking Scottish. Listen, mon; ye'll hear Big Ben. Ah, no, it's a minute or twa too late. Ye'll hear the news from London town, then."

He switched on, and from the loud-speaker there boomed the rag-end of some Parliamentary news, and then:

"Among the general news is a report of the death in prison hospital of the once notorious absconding bank-manager, Samuel Radcliffe, who four years ago robbed the Southern Joint Bank of one hundred thousand pounds. He was discovered in London, deaf and dumb and blind, and—"

"I'm going!" roared Christmas, springing to his feet.

"What's the matter, mon?"

"That news," gasped Christmas, cramming on his hat, "is going to make all the difference to two lives! Come along with me if you want to see a miracle."

Africa, the land that still contains so many mysteries, lay astern. In the chart room sat Galloway and Captain Christmas. Before them on the table lay the crumpled piece of skin that Samuel Radcliffe brought to London.

"It's the queerest chart I've ever seen," Christmas commented. "And you say it human skin."

"It was torn from the back of Samuel Radcliffe himself," Galloway said.

"By ginger!"

"You will notice the script is written in Spanish. When I was ashore in Balboa Dr. Ferguson introduced me to a Spaniard who had been up-country with Radcliffe. It was this man who helped to hide the plunder to begin with. It was he who drew the chart and wrote the directions in Spanish (because he knew no other tongue) on Radcliffe's back in an indelible native stain. This, they judged, was the only safe way of keeping a record of the route up the Black River. We can guess that the priests of the ju-ju idol, subsequently capturing Radcliffe, tore the skin from his back. How Radcliffe, in escaping, got hold of the piece of skin, can only be guessed. There is a doctor at Charing Cross Hospital who noticed the pink scar on the old man's back, and will be interested to see this skin."

"Does she know this?" asked Christmas. "No, I shall not tell her. She has enough to forget."

"You'll make her forget."

"I hope so."

"What's going to happen to Biskerton?"

"From this affair, nothing. He's failed. I've succeeded. I fancy he put his last penny into this expedition, so he'll get his punishment."

THE END.

("The Screaming Skull" is another novel-length story of powerful thriller fiction by a star author. Appearing in next Saturday's issue of *The THRILLER*. Order your copy to-day.)

THE MYSTERY OF THE JAPANNED BOX

Problem No. 10 of— BAFFLERS!

The Popular Detective Story Game.



THE theft of the celebrated Elgin emerald occurred under circumstances most embarrassing to Mr. Stephan Lorian, owner of the unique gem. Lorian had been entertaining a house party at his Sevenoaks estate. The guests were five in number: Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Hay; their niece, Charlotte Grainger; Colonel Alexander Blue, D.S.O.; and Mrs. Eleanor Standish, widow of one of Lorian's college chums at Oxford.

With what he himself later characterised as inexcusable carelessness, Lorian, the host, had left the emerald in a small black japanned box upon a table in the living-room after exhibiting it to the assembled guests one evening. He had been trying for some time to get through a telephone call to Paris, and when finally summoned to the telephone in an adjacent room absent-mindedly laid the box on the table and hurried out. When he returned five minutes afterwards, the box was empty.

Assuming that the party was playing a joke on him, Lorian, in mock-serious tones, demanded that the thief step forward. For several minutes he could scarcely believe his senses when each of the company, with utmost emphasis, denied any knowledge of the missing jewel. Judson, the butler, had

been in the room during Lorian's absence, as had Ada Gowan, Ethel Smith, and May Jones, maids, but these servants were of good character, and denied all knowledge of the matter.

For two hours the entire household was in the throes of an excited search on the theory that the jewel had been accidentally lost. But at last Lorian was compelled to face the truth—*someone had taken it.*

To call in the police on so obviously an "inside job" was revolting to Lorian's nature. Absolving everyone from blame in the matter except himself, and insisting that he must have spilled it from the box, he forbade further discussion of the subject, and with remarkable *sang-froid* swept his guests into a game of bridge. It would "turn up," said Lorian.

Afterwards, in his own room, with the japanned box before him, Lorian, who was something of an amateur detective, examined the box carefully. Its surface was highly polished. On the outer rim of the inside of the cover he discovered a remarkably clear thumbprint, which he believed was not his own. He sprinkled it with the white powder used to bring out fingerprints on black surfaces, and found it belonged to someone else. Then he set the box carefully aside.

Lorian knew that none of the company had laid hands on the inside when he had first showed it to them. He reasoned—and subsequent events justified his reasoning—that this must be the thumbprint of the thief. But whose thumbprint? The innocent ones must not suffer suspicion. He resorted to a stratagem.

Lorian put the japanned box carefully away in a wall safe. He then took from his Oriental collection a nest of small black lacquered boxes, whose surfaces were even more tell-tale than the jewel case. The following morning Lorian contrived to exhibit to each guest and each servant a different one of the lacquered boxes. To each person separately he told an attractive story of the history of the box, and got each to

test the strength of the apparently fragile sides by squeezing them between finger and thumb of the left hand; for the thief's thumbprint, as placed on the cover of the jewel indicated that a left hand had made it.

Each box, bearing a different thumbmark, Lorian duly secreted in his bureau. When this was done he withdrew to his room and treated the nine small lacquered boxes with white powder. Each, of course, he had subsequently labelled for purposes of identification.

In the accompanying diagram, you will notice a reproduction of the thumbprint on the lid of the japanned jewel case, and the thumbprints on the nine lacquered boxes.

What do you deduce? The questions to be answered are:

1. Did a guest or a servant steal Stephan Lorian's emerald? (Marks 5).
2. Who was the thief? (Marks 5).

THE RULES.

The rules are simplicity itself. On this page you are given details of Baffler Problem No. 10—there will be another next week. Briefly, you are told the story of a crime and given ALL the clues necessary for its solution. Be your own detective. Read the problem through very carefully, giving consideration to every detail, then try to answer the questions at the end.

Award yourself marks as indicated after comparing your answers with those given on page 28. These answers are printed upside-down so that they may not catch your eye before you have had a chance to test your skill. Remember, it is the sense of your solution, not its exact wording, that counts.

Try a baffler on your friends. Read the problem to them and see what they can make of it, awarding a small prize—if you like—to the first to give the correct solution.

FINGERPRINT OF THE THIEF ON THE JAPANNED BOX



MRS. HAY'S



MR. HAY'S



JUDSON'S



ETHEL SMITH'S



COL. BLUE'S



MAY JONES'



MRS. STANDISH'S



MISS GRAINGER'S



ADA GOWAN'S

The fingerprints of those present on the night of the theft.

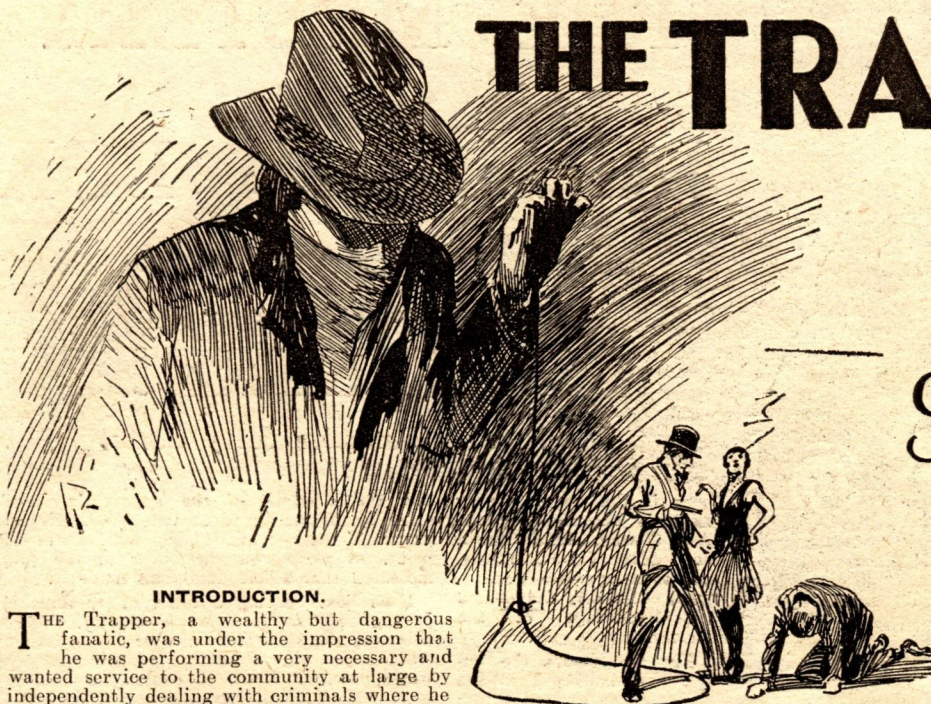
SENSATIONAL HAPPENINGS OCCUR AT SCOTLAND YARD IN THIS WEEK'S INSTALMENT OF

THE TRAPPER!

A DRAMA
OF THE NIGHT-HAUNTS
OF LONDON

By
GEORGE DILNOT

Author of "Scotland Yard," etc.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Trapper, a wealthy but dangerous fanatic, was under the impression that he was performing a very necessary and wanted service to the community at large by independently dealing with criminals where he considered the police powerless or incompetent to deal with.

Entirely ruthless in his methods, he is trying to organise a gang, one of the first members of which is Dick Estrehan, an ex-clerk of the firm of Hint, Hint, Sons & Barter.

Estrehan, after embezzling £20,000 of his employers' money, had hit the high spots in the West End, and fallen victim to the wiles of Stella Cliffe and Velvet Grimshaw, two crooks who, ignorant of his real position, fleece him of the money.

In the hands of the Trapper, Dick is promised that the £20,000 shall be paid back in payment for one year of his life. For that period he must give his life and reputation to the Trapper, the alternative being prison and disgrace.

Meanwhile, Velvet Grimshaw is murdered under strange circumstances at a West End night club. On his coat is found a wire noose such as is used for trapping rabbits.

This was not the first appearance of the wire noose. Several previous crimes had borne this trade-mark, and Chief Constable Winter, of the C.I.D., is determined to get the mysterious criminal known as the Trapper. The job is given to Detective Martin Wilde.

Wilde is obliged to accept the assistance, although in only an unofficial capacity, of Quenton Thorold and Patricia Langton. Thorold, an American millionaire, was already known to the Yard on account of valuable services he had previously rendered. On the night that Grimshaw was murdered at the Gnomes Club, it was Thorold who handed to Detective Wilde a flash-lamp belonging to the murderer, and curiously enough Thorold was the only person present that night who possessed a revolver. Following incidents lead Wilde to become suspicious of the American and his partner, but he is unable to prove anything.

Stella Cliffe again meets Dick Estrehan, but they both fall foul of the Trapper and are found by the police, gagged and bound, in a cellar. Their conditions necessitates them going to hospital, where they are interrogated by Wilde. Their information, particularly Stella's, leads him to informally arrest Quenton Thorold.

Later, Wilde hears that Stella, who had been out in the charge of a woman detective, has been shot at. She is not seriously injured, however, and he goes to see her in an infirmary. She tells him her story, and says that the man who fired the shot was—Quenton Thorold.

(Now continue the story.)

PATRICIA LANGTON CALLS A TRUCE.

MARTIN WILDE made no immediate comment. The girl thoroughly believed that her assailant was Quenton Thorold. But that was impossible. Quenton Thorold had been in a police-station cell at the moment she was attacked. This, then, must have been the other man, the man whom Wilde himself had encountered in Farringdon Street. A momentary doubt crossed the detective's mind. He dismissed it instantly. Whoever had tried to murder the girl, Quenton Thorold was the Trapper. The facts were too plain. But the value of Stella's evidence was heavily discounted from the legal point of view. She had declared Thorold to be the Trapper. Now she was positive that some other man was Thorold.

"You saw him plainly," he said slowly, "and you're sure that it was Thorold?"

She jerked her head vigorously, and gave a little cry of pain.

"Ouch! I hurt my arm that time. Yes, I'm as sure that it was him as that you are you. I'd got cause to notice him, hadn't I? Say, you're a live man, Mr. Wilde, but you're wasting your time here. Why don't you go and gather him in before he gets wise?"

He gathered his hat and stick.

"I'll see about it, Stella," he said. "Look after yourself, my girl, and do what the doctor tells you. I'll look in and see you again some time soon."

"Toodlee-oo!" she smiled.

A man was sitting outside the door, engrossed in a newspaper. Wilde menaced him with a forefinger.

"Miss Poining says that no one's to blame for this business," he said sternly in a low voice. "I'm not so sure. If Jackson and you had had your wits about you, that bird couldn't have made a getaway. But let me tell you that if anything goes wrong with that kid in there after this—he jerked his thumb backwards over his shoulder—"you'll be for the high jump." He strode away without waiting for a reply to his threat.

Downstairs, at the main entrance, a woman was arguing with an attendant. Wilde caught the tail end of her words:

"I tell you I must see her. I am a friend and—"

"Good-evening, Miss Langton," interposed the detective.

"Patricia Langton wheeled impetuously about. "Good-evening, Mr. Wilde. I had a suspicion I might find you here. This man tells me I cannot see Stella. There is surely some mistake."

"She is not allowed to receive visitors at present," said Wilde mildly.

The woman's face became smooth and smiling.

"I see. Quite as you like." She laid a small gloved hand on his arm. "Do you mind if I walk a little way with you, Mr. Wilde?"

Almost before he had assented, her hand was in the crook of his arm and they were walking familiarly down the grey street.

"As a fact, I was really looking for you. I had a suspicion that I might find you here, but I did not care to ask for you directly. I have been to Scotland Yard, and all that they would say was that you were out."

"I am flattered," he returned gravely. "What can I do for you?"

"I want to know why you have arrested Quenton Thorold, and where I can see him?" she said, thrusting the question quickly at him with the determined air of one who had no doubt of her facts.

He had expected something of this sort at her first words, but, even so, he was a little at a loss for a reply. She could have no absolute knowledge of what he had done that day. Unquestionably she was guessing.

"What makes you think that I have arrested him?"

There was ever such a tiny increase in the pressure on his arm. The woman laughed.

"I am not a child, Mr. Wilde. For one thing, you were inquiring for him at his house this morning. For another, you took him away from his club a little before lunch, and he has not been seen since. For a third a verbal message has been received at his house that he is unexpectedly detained, and will not be home to-night. Two and two make four, Mr. Wilde. Your intentions in regard to him have been obvious for quite a while."

"This is my car," he said, halting by the police touner that had brought him from the Yard. "Can I give you a lift?"

"My time is my own," she agreed, and allowed herself to be assisted to a seat. "You have not answered my question."

"I assume," he said, settling himself by her side, and nodding to the driver to proceed, "that you have been talking to Mr. Watkins. He told you that I had gone on to the club, and the club servants told you that Thorold and I had left together."

She shifted her position with a kind of abrupt impatience, so that she was sitting sideways with a full view of him.

"And then I saw this account of this attack on Stella in the papers, and guessed where I might get word of you. Why can't you answer me plainly? You know why I have come to you."

"Oh, yes," he agreed, "it's pretty evident. You are on a fishing excursion. You want to learn how much I know and what I intend to do. Possibly you are a little anxious about yourself. I am afraid of you, Miss Langton. I own it freely. As I said once before, you have brains. But I'll tell you this, since you are not likely to believe any denials. I have detained Thorold on suspicion of being concerned in murder and other crimes—in short,

of being the criminal who calls himself the Trapper."

"What childish rubbish!" she ejaculated with an asperity that was foreign to her. "Why, Quenton is the last man in the world—The thing is absurd. What have you got against him?"

A grim smile shaped on his face at the naivete of the question, and he wagged his head tolerantly. "A lot, I am afraid," he replied. "You will learn in due time. Here we are at Scotland Yard. I am at your disposal, if you would care to continue this talk."

It was at the back of his mind that this meeting had fallen apropos. If Patricia Langton had not sought him out, he would have had to find her. In her present mood she might be easier to handle than if he had taken the initiative. He had hoped to keep Thorold's friends for a time in ignorance of the fate that had befallen him.

Since, however, this woman now knew, there was no real point in preserving the traditional secretiveness of Scotland Yard. Certainly there was little possibility of any great harm being done. He might even disclose some portion of his case, in the hope of eliciting an unguarded comment. He did not believe it probable that, in the circumstances, she and her associates would remain idle while their chief was behind the bars. Perhaps she might be incautious enough to give some hint of their future activities.

Although Scotland Yard is always open, night and day, the bulk of its active duties conclude at six in the evening. At that hour, like other well-ordered business houses, it closes down, leaving a skeleton staff to deal with emergencies. As every detective off duty is compelled to sleep at his home, failing special permission, and the whole nine hundred men of the Criminal Investigation Department can be mobilised within half an hour, this is not so reckless as it sounds.

But as Wilde led her within the building, she noted how curiously deserted the place seemed, save for the occasional charwoman they stumbled across, who were here and there pursuing their nightly avocations.

Wilde thrust open a door as they passed along a corridor and addressed the inspector in charge.

"I shall be about for a little, Grey. I don't want to be disturbed."

Patricia Langton settled herself with a quizzical smile as they reached the chief inspector's severely furnished office. She was keen enough to realise something of what was passing in the man's mind. Nevertheless, she was serenely confident that whatever was gained during the interview, the balance would be on her side.

"Well," she said easily, "may I resume my fishing? What is the case against Quenton?"

He pressed the tips of his fingers together and leaned back in his chair.

"My dear lady, you know perfectly well that if I played the game as I ought, according to the official rules, to refuse to tell you anything. But there are certain things we both know. Why should we pretend to each other? We are on opposite sides. Say, if you like, that I propose to land you in gaol sooner or later. There is nothing personal in that. I rather like you, but I have to do my job. You, on the other hand, naturally propose to prevent me, if you can, and, incidentally, to save your friends. The difference is that I am hampered by rules, while you, and those on your side, are not concerned what you do to preserve your own safety. Shall we talk on that basis?"

The toe of her shoe tapped the floor gently during this opening, and her face expressed a half-puzzled amusement.

"I am one of a gang of criminals, and you are hinting at some sort of

a bargain with me? Is that it?" she asked slowly. "You are trying to get some admission from me?"

He grinned at the quickness with which she had blocked his gambit.

"There could be no bargain," he retorted. "I was merely suggesting that we meet on common ground."

"I quite appreciate that," she answered, with a meaning that was not lost on the detective, and rose with dignity. "No doubt I am wasting my time. You have made up your mind. Had you adopted a different line, Mr. Wilde, I might have saved you making the most egregious blunder of your life."

He put out a protesting hand.

"I am sorry you take it like that. Please don't go, Miss Langton. I apologise. You wanted to hear about Thorold, you know."

She sat down again, and her eyes met his firmly.

"As long as you understand that I shall resent any insinuation that I am a criminal."

Wilde's mind was moving swiftly. What an actress she was! Her air of outraged dignity might have shaken his convictions had they been less well grounded. How cleverly she had contrived to shift the ground so that he was almost put upon his defence.

"I will be careful of your susceptibilities," he pleaded, with a touch of irony that was rather in the words than in the tone. "Now, in regard to Quenton Thorold. These are the facts that have led me to take action. They are almost irresistible to my mind." He quietly recited the main heads of his case, and she listened without interruption, her cheek leaning against the palm of her hand.

"That is all?" she asked contemptuously when he had finished. "You think that you can hang a man like Quenton Thorold on that?"

"I don't care whether he hangs or not," he retorted. "That is a matter for the courts. It is circumstantial evidence, but it's da—very black."

"Damning you were about to say," she remarked.

He nodded without comment. She got to her feet.

"May I make one suggestion? I shouldn't be in any hurry to prefer a formal charge, if I were you. For within twenty-four hours I will show you how utterly and preposterously wrong you are. A blind and deaf idiot would see farther in front of his nose than you."

He bowed and strolled casually to the door as though to open it for her. Instead of doing so, he placed his broad back against the panels and faced her.

"I think I see far enough," he said mildly. "Just one moment, please. Before you go I must insist on one or two explanations."

She gripped the little bag she was carrying so tightly that her knuckles showed white.

"Insist!" she repeated.

"Yes, insist," he retorted sternly. "Even without that last remark I should have known you were keeping back something. You have been in constant and close association with Thorold. An attempt has been made to murder a witness who could give evidence on that point to-night. Believing what I believe, I cannot expose any more people to these risks. I am not satisfied. I call your bluff, Miss Langton. Unless you can give me some satisfactory explanation I shall have to detain you."

Although her face was white, there was an angry blaze in her grey eyes, and her slim form seemed to quiver with a suppressed emotion.

"You wouldn't dare. You had better let me pass," she said tensely.

Wilde leaned firmly against the door and shook his head. Her bag dropped unheeded to the floor, and he became aware that the grim muzzle of a small automatic-pistol was pointed unwaveringly at his chest.

"I shall shoot if you compel me," she said resolutely, and he believed her.

A quick smile leapt to his face as he stood away and opened the door.

"This is very silly of you, Miss Langton," he said in matter-of-fact tones. "It will do you no good. But—go." He waved a hand to the open door.

She moved forward a step and then hesitated, regarding him suspiciously. His ready capitulation had alarmed her.

"Please close that door again," she ordered sharply, and, as he obeyed, went on: "Of course, you meant to raise the alarm directly this pistol was off you. It would be impossible for me to get out of this place."

"Touché," he admitted. "You guessed it. You can't get away, not even by shooting me—which you aren't foolish enough to do. You might have pulled the trigger on a first impulse, but not now that you have had a few seconds to think."



Standing with his back firmly against the door, Inspector Wilde suddenly found the grim muzzle of Patricia Langton's gun pointed unwaveringly at his chest.

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and looked nonchalantly down upon her. The weapon remained steady. If just for one split fraction of a second he could distract her attention the rest would be easy. He calculated the distance between them. But the opportunity did not come. The grey eyes did not falter. She was vividly alert.

"I'd hate to wing you," she declared, "but if I must I must. It would spoil everything if I were tied up now. I know I can't get away without one of two things. The choice is yours, Mr. Wilde. Either I've got to make you incapable of interference, or you've got to give me your word that you'll make no move against my liberty till this time to-morrow. After that you can do what you like. Which shall it be?"

"That would allow you time to get out of the country," he said thoughtfully.

"I shall not attempt to escape," she asserted impatiently. "Well?"

He noted the slight, gloved finger slowly increasing the tension on the trigger. His first inclination was laughingly to defy her. The probability was that her courage would fail at the point of shooting him down in cold blood. But was it such a probability? He realised that she was desperate, and no one can say how far a desperate woman will go. After all, he was beginning to see the end. Why boggle at a little delay. Less harm would probably happen that way than if he was placed out of action.

"You win," he declared. "I leave you alone for twenty-four hours."

THE FIRE AT CLARGES STREET.

It is a strange habit of Scotland Yard detectives, justified by generations of immunity in the face of threats, never to worry unduly about their personal security. What ever menaces a crook may make against a police-officer, he never goes out of his way to carry them into effect. At the worst he will use violence to escape imminent arrest, but so long as a detective lets him alone, so long will he let a detective alone.

Since his encounter with the Trapper, Wilde had carried a revolver. He had even gone so far as to spend half an hour at target practice at a gunsmith's gallery near the Strand, and had come to the conclusion that marksmanship was not among his accomplishments. He even doubted if he could lug the gun quickly enough from his pocket if he was ever faced with instant occasion for its use. Nevertheless, he continued to carry it because, in case of questions, he would be able to assert that he had taken the precaution. But beyond that he took no special steps to guard himself.

He was as regular in his habits as his profession would allow, and the landlady from whom he rented a couple of rooms in Bloomsbury had a vague notion that he was connected with the police. All she cared about was that he was a genial and considerate gentleman, who never gave any trouble, even though, once in a while, his business took him out or brought him in at odd hours.

So it was with surprise that she was roused from her bed in the vicinity of midnight, and discovered the disturber of her slumbers to be none other than her lodger.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," he declared. "Has anyone called for me during the day?"

She huddled her dressing-gown more closely about her for the night was chilly.

"I don't mind," she said. "Yes, a man did call, a couple of hours ago, but it was only a policeman. He brought a note from you, asking me to let him into your rooms to find a paper. Is anything wrong? I wouldn't have done it unless you had written. Besides, it was a policeman."

"It's quite all right," he reassured her. "Have you got that note?"

She thought for an instant.

"I don't know what I did with it. I believe I threw it away."

He thanked her, and with renewed apologies withdrew to his bed-room. There, seated on his bed, he again read the note he had found pinned to his pillow.

"My dear Wilde,—I hate to see a man of sense wasting his energy. I also hate to see an innocent person put to trouble and inconvenience. You have, in short, got the wrong man. Forgive the little stroke of melodrama used with the intention of emphasising this letter. Had I sent it by mail, it might be less convincing to your mind. As a further piece of evidence, I enclose one of your cards—you will remember that you lost your case at the Gnomes Club."

"Please take this as a friendly hint. You entertain me. In the unlikely event of your becoming a real danger, you will see how easy it would be for me to remove you. But I think that such a necessity is remote."

The letter was typed and unsigned, but there was the usual thin wire noose fastened to one of Wilde's cards. He thrust the envelope and its contents impatiently into his pocket, and made a tour of his rooms. There were plenty of trifling signs which showed that the intruder had made a careful examination of the place, and the detective guessed that the search had been for papers in connection with the investigation. Since he never left documents out of his sight, apart from the office, this could have had no result. Some private correspondence had been disarranged, but nothing was missing.

He undressed, and before he got into bed locked the door of his room, sneering at himself for a fool as he did so. For half an hour before he dropped to sleep he lay in the dark considering the situation. It was physically impossible that either Thorold or Miss Langton could have been concerned in this exploit. The one was in a cell, and the other had been with him most of the evening.

The audacity of the incident more than the incident itself weighed on his mind. It showed that the initiative and daring of the gang was not entirely inspired from Thorold. There was

another brain with the ability to plan and execute at work. To some extent that jumped against the theory which had possessed him. He had guessed at a person physically resembling Thorold who was used by the millionaire, but he had assumed only one directing mind. That idea had been shattered. Who was this other person?

He flung his mind back over the case. No one of the persons whom he knew or believed to be mixed up in the affair seemed to him to carry guns enough. Strangely enough, he gave scarcely a thought to the ostensible reason of the letter—the suggestion that Thorold was innocent.

If anyone thought that he was to be shaken into disbelieving plain facts they were mistaken. There was the evidence. Let Thorold answer it if he could. So he fell asleep.

It was while he was splashing joyously in his bath the next morning that he became aware of an insistent tapping at the door. His landlady raised her voice shrilly to reply to his question.

"Scotland Yard wish to speak to you very urgently, sir. They are waiting on the phone. I told 'em—"

"In one minute!" he shouted, and reached for a towel.

It was less than that time when, half dried and with a dressing-gown clinging clammy about him he took the receiver.

"Wilde speaking," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"That house in Clarges Street," came from the other end of the wire. "Thorold's house. We've just had word that it's been completely burnt out. Thought you'd like to know."

"Thanks," returned Wilde, his voice carrying no more emotion than if he had been told it was a fine day. "Send a car for me. I'll be right down."

(Where does Thorold come in? Is he the Trapper? Events are getting more and more exciting and are working up to a climax. Don't miss next week's gripping instalment of this great story.)

The Solution of this week's 'BAFFLER' PROBLEM

on page 25.

DO NOT READ THIS ANSWER until you have
made your effort to solve the crime. To this
end the facts are printed upside-down.

1. A guest stole the Elgin emerald from the japanned box which the owner, Stephen Lertan, had left carelessly upon the living-room table. (Marks 5).
2. The thief was Miss Charlotte Granger, as indicated by the tell-tale thumb-mark on the rim of the inside of the cover of the japanned box. (Marks 5).
Charlotte Granger's thumb-print was the only one which was identical in its ridge markings with the thumb-print on the japanned box cover.
The distinctive feature of both prints is the arch formation of the ridges. For instance, Colonel Blue's thumb-print would be classified as distinguished by its arches. The ridges are classified according to types—loops, whorls, arches. (Marks 5).
Mr. Hay by its loops, and Charlotte Granger's was particularly distinguished by its arches. The dangerous aftermath of Stephen Lertan's private investigation into the disappearance of his emerald was no fault of his. The unfortunate girl, whose kleptomaniacal impulses were unknown even to her uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Archibald Hay, was herself the cause of the unpleasant publicity which the whole case received. Lertan retained from broaching his shocking discovery to the girl's uncle until she and the Hays had returned to the Hay home. Her uncle decided to search her room. The niece, coming upon her uncle just as he had located the missing jewel in her dresser, flew at him in a desperate assault and seriously injured him with a paper-knife which she had snatched up. Every effort was made to hush up the affair, but it was revealed to the police through servants who had suffered from the girl's unmanageable bursts of temper. It was this that forced the Hays to agree to her confinement in a private sanatorium. The Hays, it must be recorded, placed no blame whatever upon Lertan for his methods in detecting the thief.