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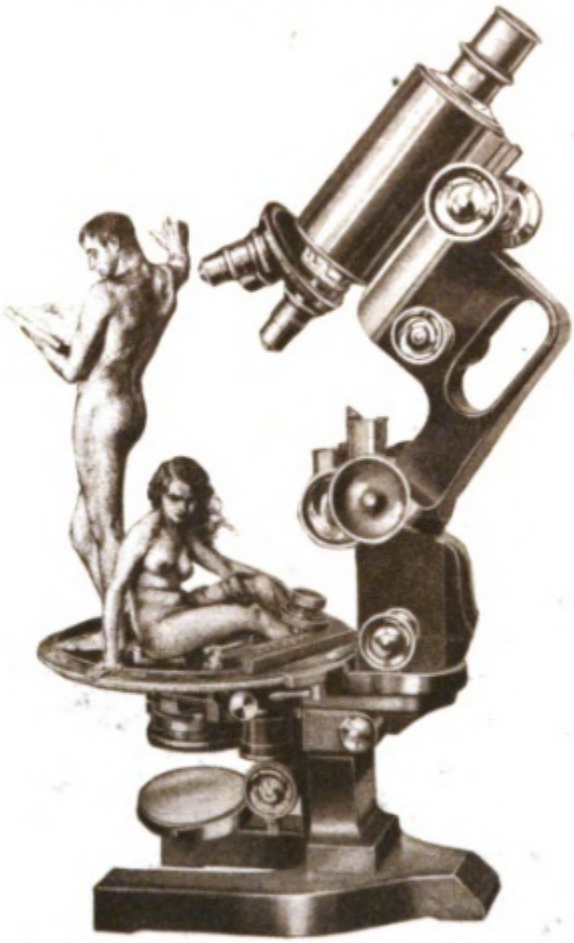

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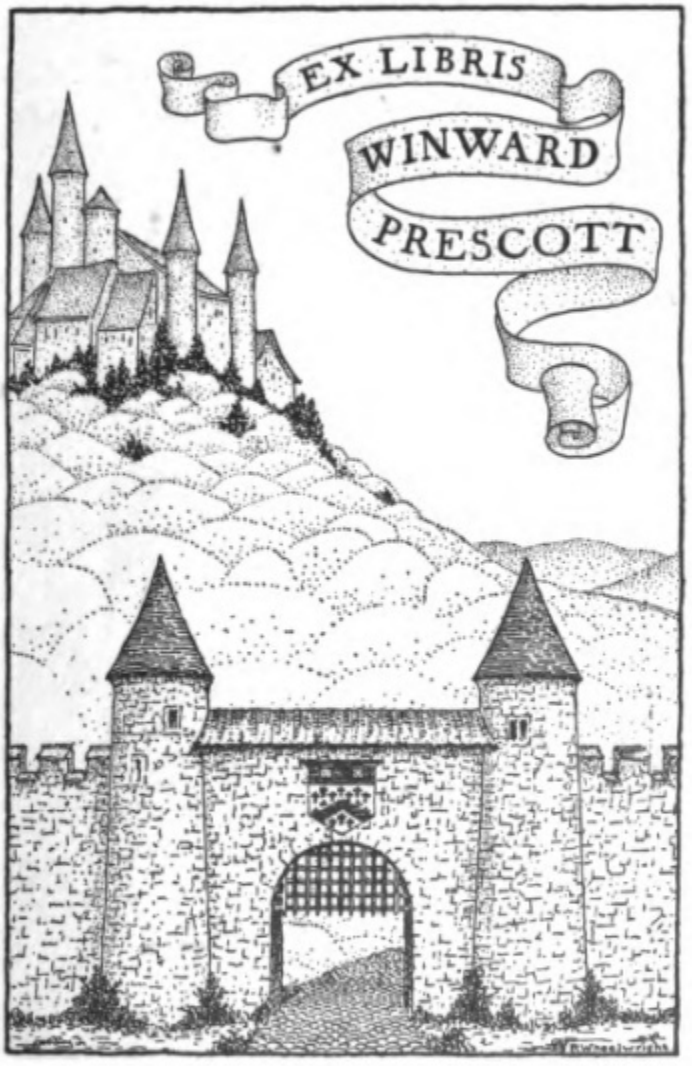

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A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

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I think she must have seen us, even in the dim light.

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A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF
A. J. RAFFLES
CRICKETER AND CRACKSMAN

BY

E. W. HORNUNG

ILLUSTRATED BY
CYRUS CUNEO

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK:::::::::::::: 1908

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A Thief in the Night

Out of Paradise

IF I must tell more tales of Raffles, I can but go back to our earliest days together, and fill in the blanks left by discretion in existing annals. In so doing I may indeed fill some small part of an infinitely greater blank, across which you may conceive me to have stretched my canvas for the first frank portrait of my friend. The whole truth cannot harm him now. I shall paint in every wart. Raffles was a villain, when all is written; it is no service to his memory to gloze the fact; yet I have done so myself before to-day. I have omitted whole heinous episodes. I have dwelt unduly on the redeeming side. And this I may do again, blinded even as I write by the gallant glamour that made my villain more to me than any hero. But at least there shall be no more reservations, and as an earnest I shall make no further secret of the greatest wrong that even Raffles ever did me.

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A Thief in the Night

I pick my words with care and pain, loyal as I still would be to my friend, and yet remembering as I must those Ides of March when he led me blindfold into temptation and crime. That was an ugly office, if you will. It was a moral bagatelle to the treacherous trick he was to play me a few weeks later. The second offence, on the other hand, was to prove the less serious of the two against society, and might in itself have been published to the world years ago. There have been private reasons for my reticence. The affair was not only too intimately mine, and too discreditable to Raffles. One other was involved in it, one dearer to me than Raffles himself, one whose name shall not even now be sullied by association with ours.

Suffice it that I had been engaged to her before that mad March deed. True, her people called it "an understanding," and frowned even upon that, as well they might. But their authority was not direct; we bowed to it as an act of politic grace; between us, all was well but my unworthiness. That may be gauged when I confess that this was how the matter stood on the night I gave a worthless check for my losses at baccarat, and afterward turned to Raffles in my need. Even after that I saw her sometimes. But I let her

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guess that there was more upon my soul than she must ever share, and at last I had written to end it all. I remember that week so well! It was the close of such a May as we had never had since, and I was too miserable even to follow the heavy scoring in the papers. Raffles was the only man who could get a wicket up at Lord's, and I never once went to see him play. Against Yorkshire, however, he helped himself to a hundred runs as well; and that brought Raffles round to me, on his way home to the Albany.

"We must dine and celebrate the rare event," said he. "A century takes it out of one at my time of life; and you, Bunny, you look quite as much in need of your end of a worthy bottle. Suppose we make it the Café Royal, and eight sharp? I'll be there first to fix up the table and the wine."

And at the Café Royal I incontinently told him of the trouble I was in. It was the first he had ever heard of my affair, and I told him all, though not before our bottle had been succeeded by a pint of the same exemplary brand. Raffles heard me out with grave attention. His sympathy was the more grateful for the tactful brevity with which it was indicated rather than expressed. He only wished that I had told him of this complication in the beginning; as I had not, he agreed with me

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that the only course was a candid and complete renunciation. It was not as though my divinity had a penny of her own, or I could earn an honest one. I had explained to Raffles that she was an orphan, who spent most of her time with an aristocratic aunt in the country, and the remainder under the repressive roof of a pompous politician in Palace Gardens. The aunt had, I believed, still a sneaking softness for me, but her illustrious brother had set his face against me from the first.

"Hector Carruthers!" murmured Raffles, repeating the detested name with his clear, cold eye on mine. "I suppose you haven't seen much of him?"

"Not a thing for ages," I replied. "I was at the house two or three days last year, but they've neither asked me since nor been at home to me when I've called. The old beast seems a judge of men."

And I laughed bitterly in my glass.

"Nice house?" said Raffles, glancing at himself in his silver cigarette-case.

"Top shelf," said I. "You know the houses in Palace Gardens, don't you?"

"Not so well as I should like to know them, Bunny."

"Well, it's about the most palatial of the lot.

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The old ruffian is as rich as Crœsus. It's a country-place in town."

"What about the window-fastenings?" asked Raffles casually.

I recoiled from the open cigarette-case that he proffered as he spoke. Our eyes met; and in his there was that starry twinkle of mirth and mischief, that sunny beam of audacious devilment, which had been my undoing two months before, which was to undo me as often as he chose until the chapter's end. Yet for once I withstood its glamour; for once I turned aside that luminous glance with front of steel. There was no need for Raffles to voice his plans. I read them all between the strong lines of his smiling, eager face. And I pushed back my chair in the equal eagerness of my own resolve.

"Not if I know it!" said I. "A house I've dined in—a house I've seen *her* in—a house where *she* stays by the month together! Don't put it into words, Raffles, or I'll get up and go."

"You mustn't do that before the coffee and liqueur," said Raffles laughing. "Have a small Sullivan first: it's the royal road to a cigar. And now let me observe that your scruples would do you honor if old Carruthers still lived in the house in question."

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"Do you mean to say he doesn't?"

Raffles struck a match, and handed it first to me. "I mean to say, my dear Bunny, that Palace Gardens knows the very name no more. You began by telling me you had heard nothing of these people all this year. That's quite enough to account for our little misunderstanding. I was thinking of the house, and you were thinking of the people in the house."

"But who are they, Raffles? Who has taken the house, if old Carruthers has moved, and how do you know that it is still worth a visit?"

"In answer to your first question—Lord Lochmaben," replied Raffles, blowing bracelets of smoke toward the ceiling. "You look as though you had never heard of him; but as the cricket and racing are the only part of your paper that you condescend to read, you can't be expected to keep track of all the peers created in your time. Your other question is not worth answering. How do you suppose that I know these things? It's my business to get to know them, and that's all there is to it. As a matter of fact, Lady Lochmaben has just as good diamonds as Mrs. Carruthers ever had; and the chances are that she keeps them where Mrs. Carruthers kept hers, if you could enlighten me on that point."

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As it happened, I could, since I knew from his niece that it was one on which Mr. Carruthers had been a faddist in his time. He had made quite a study of the cracksman's craft, in a resolve to circumvent it with his own. I remembered myself how the ground-floor windows were elaborately bolted and shuttered, and how the doors of all the rooms opening upon the square inner hall were fitted with extra Yale locks, at an unlikely height, not to be discovered by one within the room. It had been the butler's business to turn and to collect all these keys before retiring for the night. But the key of the safe in the study was supposed to be in the jealous keeping of the master of the house himself. That safe was in its turn so ingeniously hidden that I never should have found it for myself. I well remember how one who showed it to me (in the innocence of her heart) laughed as she assured me that even her little trinkets were solemnly locked up in it every night. It had been let into the wall behind one end of the book-case, expressly to preserve the barbaric splendor of Mrs. Carruthers; without a doubt these Lochmabens would use it for the same purpose; and in the altered circumstances I had no hesitation in giving Raffles all the information he desired. I even drew him a rough plan

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of the ground-floor on the back of my menu-card.

"It was rather clever of you to notice the kind of locks on the inner doors," he remarked as he put it in his pocket. "I suppose you don't remember if it was a Yale on the front door as well?"

"It was not," I was able to answer quite promptly. "I happen to know because I once had the key when—when we went to a theatre together."

"Thank you, old chap," said Raffles sympathetically. "That's all I shall want from you, Bunny, my boy. There's no night like to-night!"

It was one of his sayings when bent upon his worst. I looked at him aghast. Our cigars were just in blast, yet already he was signalling for his bill. It was impossible to remonstrate with him until we were both outside in the street.

"I'm coming with you," said I, running my arm through his.

"Nonsense, Bunny!"

"Why is it nonsense? I know every inch of the ground, and since the house has changed hands I have no compunction. Besides, 'I have been there' in the other sense as well: once a thief, you know! In for a penny, in for a pound!"

It was ever my mood when the blood was up.

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But my old friend failed to appreciate the characteristic as he usually did. We crossed Regent Street in silence. I had to catch his sleeve to keep a hand in his inhospitable arm.

"I really think you had better stay away," said Raffles as we reached the other curb. "I've no use for you this time."

"Yet I thought I had been so useful up to now?"

"That may be, Bunny, but I tell you frankly, I don't want you to-night."

"Yet I know the ground and you don't! I tell you what," said I: "I'll come just to show you the ropes, and I won't take a pennyweight of the swag."

Such was the teasing fashion in which he invariably prevailed upon me; it was delightful to note how it caused him to yield in his turn. But Raffles had the grace to give in with a laugh, whereas I too often lost my temper with my point.

"You little rabbit!" he chuckled. "You shall have your share, whether you come or not; but, seriously, don't you think you might remember the girl?"

"What's the use?" I groaned. "You agree there is nothing for it but to give her up. I am

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glad to say that for myself before I asked you, and wrote to tell her so on Sunday. Now it's Wednesday, and she hasn't answered by line or sign. It's waiting for one word from her that's driving me mad."

"Perhaps you wrote to Palace Gardens?"

"No, I sent it to the country. There's been time for an answer, wherever she may be."

We had reached the Albany, and halted with one accord at the Piccadilly portico, red cigar to red cigar.

"You wouldn't like to go and see if the answer's in your rooms?" he asked.

"No. What's the good? Where's the point in giving her up if I'm going to straighten out when it's too late? It *is* too late, I *have* given her up, and I *am* coming with you!"

The hand that bowled the most puzzling ball in England (once it found its length) descended on my shoulder with surprising promptitude.

"Very well, Bunny! That's finished; but your blood be on your own pate if evil comes of it. Meanwhile we can't do better than turn in here till you have finished your cigar as it deserves, and topped up with such a cup of tea as you must learn to like if you hope to get on in your new profession. And when the hours are small

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enough, Bunny, my boy, I don't mind admitting I shall be very glad to have you with me."

I have a vivid memory of the interim in his rooms. I think it must have been the first and last of its kind that I was called upon to sustain with so much knowledge of what lay before me. I passed the time with one restless eye upon the clock, and the other on the Tantalus which Raffles ruthlessly declined to unlock. He admitted that it was like waiting with one's pads on; and in my slender experience of the game of which he was a world's master, that was an ordeal not to be endured without a general quaking of the inner man. I was, on the other hand, all right when I got to the metaphorical wicket; and half the surprises that Raffles sprung on me were doubtless due to his early recognition of the fact.

On this occasion I fell swiftly and hopelessly out of love with the prospect I had so gratuitously embraced. It was not only my repugnance to enter that house in that way, which grew upon my better judgment as the artificial enthusiasm of the evening evaporated from my veins. Strong as that repugnance became, I had an even stronger feeling that we were embarking on an important enterprise far too much upon the spur of the moment. The latter qualm I had the

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temerity to confess to Raffles; nor have I often loved him more than when he freely admitted it to be the most natural feeling in the world. He assured me, however, that he had had my Lady Lochmaben and her jewels in his mind for several months; he had sat behind them at first nights; and long ago determined what to take or to reject; in fine, he had only been waiting for those topographical details which it had been my chance privilege to supply. I now learned that he had numerous houses in a similar state upon his list; something or other was wanting in each case in order to complete his plans. In that of the Bond Street jeweller it was a trusty accomplice; in the present instance, a more intimate knowledge of the house. And lastly, this was a Wednesday night, when the tired legislator gets early to his bed.

How I wish I could make the whole world see and hear him, and smell the smoke of his beloved Sullivan, as he took me into these, the secrets of his infamous trade! Neither look nor language would betray the infamy. As a mere talker, I shall never listen to the like of Raffles on this side of the sod; and his talk was seldom garnished by an oath, never in my remembrance by the unclean word. Then he looked like a man who had

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dressed to dine out, not like one who had long since dined; for his curly hair, though longer than another's, was never untidy in its length; and these were the days when it was still as black as ink. Nor were there many lines as yet upon the smooth and mobile face; and its frame was still that dear den of disorder and good taste, with the carved book-case, the dresser and chests of still older oak, and the Wattses and Rossettis hung anyhow on the walls.

It must have been one o'clock before we drove in a hansom as far as Kensington Church, instead of getting down at the gates of our private road to ruin. Constitutionally shy of the direct approach, Raffles was further deterred by a ball in full swing at the Empress Rooms, whence potential witnesses were pouring between dances into the cool deserted street. Instead he led me a little way up Church Street, and so through the narrow passage into Palace Gardens. He knew the house as well as I did. We made our first survey from the other side of the road. And the house was not quite in darkness; there was a dim light over the door, a brighter one in the stables, which stood still farther back from the road.

"That's a bit of a bore," said Raffles. "The ladies have been out somewhere—trust them to

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spoil the show! They would get to bed before the stable folk, but insomnia is the curse of their sex and our profession. Somebody's not home yet; that will be the son of the house; but he's a beauty, who may not come home at all."

"Another Alick Carruthers," I murmured, recalling the one I liked least of all the household, as I remembered it.

"They might be brothers," rejoined Raffles, who knew all the loose fish about town. "Well, I'm not sure that I shall want you after all, Bunny."

"Why not?"

"If the front door's only on the latch, and you're right about the lock, I shall walk in as though I were the son of the house myself."

And he jingled the skeleton bunch that he carried on a chain as honest men carry their latch-keys.

"You forget the inner doors and the safe."

"True. You might be useful to me there. But I still don't like leading you in where it isn't absolutely necessary, Bunny."

"Then let me lead you, I answered, and forthwith marched across the broad, secluded road, with the great houses standing back on either side in their ample gardens, as though the one oppo-

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site belonged to me. I thought Raffles had stayed behind, for I never heard him at my heels, yet there he was when I turned round at the gate.

"I must teach you the step," he whispered, shaking his head. "You shouldn't use your heel at all. Here's a grass border for you: walk it as you would the plank! Gravel makes a noise, and flower-beds tell a tale. Wait—I must carry you across this."

It was the sweep of the drive, and in the dim light from above the door, the soft gravel, ploughed into ridges by the night's wheels, threatened an alarm at every step. Yet Raffles, with me in his arms, crossed the zone of peril softly as the pard.

"Shoes in your pocket—that's the beauty of pumps!" he whispered on the step; his light bunch tinkled faintly; a couple of keys he stooped and tried, with the touch of a humane dentist; the third let us into the porch. And as we stood together on the mat, as he was gradually closing the door, a clock within chimed a half-hour in fashion so thrillingly familiar to me that I caught Raffles by the arm. My half-hours of happiness had flown to just such chimes! I looked wildly about me in the dim light. Hat-stand and oak settee belonged equally to my past. And Raffles

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was smiling in my face as he held the door wide for my escape.

"You told me a lie!" I gasped in whispers.

"I did nothing of the sort," he replied. "The furniture's the furniture of Hector Carruthers, but the house is the house of Lord Lochmaben. Look here!"

He had stooped, and was smoothing out the discarded envelope of a telegram. "Lord Lochmaben," I read in pencil by the dim light; and the case was plain to me on the spot. My friends had let their house, furnished, as anybody but Raffles would have explained to me in the beginning.

"All right," I said. "Shut the door."

And he not only shut it without a sound, but drew a bolt that might have been sheathed in rubber.

In another minute we were at work upon the study-door, I with the tiny lantern and the bottle of rock-oil, he with the brace and the largest bit. The Yale lock he had given up at a glance. It was placed high up in the door, feet above the handle, and the chain of holes with which Raffles had soon surrounded it were bored on a level with his eyes. Yet the clock in the hall chimed again, and two ringing strokes resounded through the

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silent house before we gained admittance to the room.

Raffle's next care was to muffle the bell on the shuttered window (with a silk handkerchief from the hat-stand) and to prepare an emergency exit by opening first the shutters and then the window itself. Luckily it was a still night, and very little wind came in to embarrass us. He then began operations on the safe, revealed by me behind its folding screen of books, while I stood sentry on the threshold. I may have stood there for a dozen minutes, listening to the loud hall clock and to the gentle dentistry of Raffles in the mouth of the safe behind me, when a third sound thrilled my every nerve. It was the equally cautious opening of a door in the gallery overhead.

I moistened my lips to whisper a word of warning to Raffles. But his ears had been as quick as mine, and something longer. His lantern darkened as I turned my head; next moment I felt his breath upon the back of my neck. It was now too late even for a whisper, and quite out of the question to close the mutilated door. There we could only stand, I on the threshold, Raffles at my elbow, while one carrying a candle crept down the stairs.

The study-door was at right angles to the lowest flight, and just to the right of one alighting in the

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hall. It was thus impossible for us to see who it was until the person was close abreast of us; but by the rustle of the gown we knew that it was one of the ladies, and dressed just as she had come from theatre or ball. Insensibly I drew back as the candle swam into our field of vision: it had not traversed many inches when a hand was clapped firmly but silently across my mouth.

I could forgive Raffles for that, at any rate! In another breath I should have cried aloud: for the girl with the candle, the girl in her ball-dress, at dead of night, the girl with the letter for the post, was the last girl on God's wide earth whom I should have chosen thus to encounter—a midnight intruder in the very house where I had been reluctantly received on her account!

I forgot Raffles. I forgot the new and unforgivable grudge I had against him now. I forgot his very hand across my mouth, even before he paid me the compliment of removing it. There was the only girl in all the world: I had eyes and brains for no one and for nothing else. She had neither seen nor heard us, had looked neither to the right hand nor the left. But a small oak table stood on the opposite side of the hall; it was to this table that she went. On it was one of those boxes in which one puts one's letters for

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the post; and she stooped to read by her candle the times at which this box was cleared.

The loud clock ticked and ticked. She was standing at her full height now, her candle on the table, her letter in both hands, and in her down-cast face a sweet and pitiful perplexity that drew the tears to my eyes. Through a film I saw her open the envelope so lately sealed and read her letter once more, as though she would have altered it a little at the last. It was too late for that; but of a sudden she plucked a rose from her bosom, and was pressing it in with her letter when I groaned aloud.

How could I help it? The letter was for me: of that I was as sure as though I had been looking over her shoulder. She was as true as tempered steel; there were not two of us to whom she wrote and sent roses at dead of night. It was her one chance of writing to me. None would know that she had written. And she cared enough to soften the reproaches I had richly earned, with a red rose warm from her own warm heart. And there, and there was I, a common thief who had broken in to steal! Yet I was unaware that I had uttered a sound until she looked up, startled, and the hands behind me pinned me where I stood.

I think she must have seen us, even in the dim

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light of the solitary candle. Yet not a sound escaped her as she peered courageously in our direction; neither did one of us move; but the hall clock went on and on, every tick like the beat of a drum to bring the house about our ears, until a minute must have passed as in some breathless dream. And then came the awakening—with such a kocking and a ringing at the front door as brought all three of us to our senses on the spot.

"The son of the house!" whispered Raffles in my ear, as he dragged me back to the window he had left open for our escape. But as he leaped out first a sharp cry stopped me at the sill. "Get back! Get back! We're trapped!" he cried; and in the single second that I stood there, I saw him fell one officer to the ground, and dart across the lawn with another at his heels. A third came running up to the window. What could I do but double back into the house? And there in the hall I met my lost love face to face.

Till that moment she had not recognized me. I ran to catch her as she all but fell. And my touch repelled her into life, so that she shook me off, and stood gasping: "You, of all men! You, of all men!" until I could bear it no more, but broke again for the study-window. "Not that

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way—not that way!" she cried in an agony at that. Her hands were upon me now. "In there, in there," she whispered, pointing and pulling me to a mere cupboard under the stairs, where hats and coats were hung; and it was she who shut the door on me with a sob.

Doors were already opening overhead, voices calling, voices answering, the alarm running like wildfire from room to room. Soft feet pattered in the gallery and down the stairs about my very ears. I do not know what made me put on my own shoes as I heard them, but I think that I was ready and even longing to walk out and give myself up. I need not say what and who it was that alone restrained me. I heard her name. I heard them crying to her as though she had fainted. I recognized the detested voice of my *bête noir*, Alick Carruthers, thick as might be expected of the dissipated dog, yet daring to stutter out her name. And then I heard, without catching, her low reply; it was in answer to the somewhat stern questioning of quite another voice; and from what followed I knew that she had never fainted at all.

"Upstairs, miss, did he? Are you sure?"

I did not hear her answer. I conceive her as simply pointing up the stairs. In any case, about

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my very ears once more, there now followed such a patter and tramp of bare and booted feet as renewed in me a base fear for my own skin. But voices and feet passed over my head, went up and up, higher and higher; and I was wondering whether or not to make a dash for it, when one light pair came running down again, and in very despair I marched out to meet my preserver, looking as little as I could like the abject thing I felt.

"Be quick!" she cried in a harsh whisper, and pointed peremptorily to the porch.

But I stood stubbornly before her, my heart hardened by her hardness, and perversely indifferent to all else. And as I stood I saw the letter she had written, in the hand with which she pointed, crushed into a ball.

"Quickly!" She stamped her foot. "Quickly —*if you ever cared!*"

This in a whisper, without bitterness, without contempt, but with a sudden wild entreaty that breathed upon the dying embers of my poor manhood. I drew myself together for the last time in her sight. I turned, and left her as she wished —for her sake, not for mine. And as I went I heard her tearing her letter into little pieces, and the little pieces falling on the floor.

Then I remembered Raffles, and could have

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killed him for what he had done. Doubtless by this time he was safe and snug in the Albany: what did my fate matter to him? Never mind; this should be the end between him and me as well; it was the end of everything, this dark night's work! I would go and tell him so. I would jump into a cab and drive there and then to his accursed rooms. But first I must escape from the trap in which he had been so ready to leave me. And on the very steps I drew back in despair. They were searching the shrubberies between the drive and the road; a policeman's lantern kept flashing in and out among the laurels, while a young man in evening-clothes directed him from the gravel sweep. It was this young man whom I must dodge, but at my first step in the gravel he wheeled round, and it was Raffles himself.

"Hulloa!" he cried. "So you've come up to join the dance as well! Had a look inside, have you? You'll be better employed in helping to draw the cover in front here. It's all right, officer —only another gentleman from the Empress Rooms."

And we made a brave show of assisting in the futile search, until the arrival of more police, and a broad hint from an irritable sergeant, gave us an excellent excuse for going off arm-in-arm. But

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it was Raffles who had thrust his arm through mine. I shook him off as we left the scene of shame behind.

"My dear Bunny!" he exclaimed. "Do you know what brought me back?"

I answered savagely that I neither knew nor cared.

"I had the very devil of a squeak for it," he went on. "I did the hurdles over two or three garden-walls, but so did the flyer who was on my tracks, and he drove me back into the straight and down to High Street like any lamplighter. If he had only had the breath to sing out it would have been all up with me then; as it was I pulled off my coat the moment I was round the corner, and took a ticket for it at the Empress Rooms."

"I suppose you had one for the dance that was going on," I growled. Nor would it have been a coincidence for Raffles to have had a ticket for that or any other entertainment of the London season.

"I never asked what the dance was," he returned. "I merely took the opportunity of revising my toilet, and getting rid of that rather distinctive overcoat, which I shall call for now. They're not too particular at such stages of such proceedings, but I've no doubt I should have seen

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someone I knew if I had gone right in. I might even have had a turn, if only I had been less uneasy about you, Bunny."

"It was like you to come back to help me out," said I. "But to lie to me, and to inveigle me with your lies into that house of all houses—that was not like you, Raffles—and I never shall forgive it or you!"

Raffles took my arm again. We were near the High Street gates of Palace Gardens, and I was too miserable to resist an advance which I meant never to give him an opportunity to repeat.

"Come, come, Bunny, there wasn't much inveigling about it," said he. "I did my level best to leave you behind, but you wouldn't listen to me."

"If you had told me the truth I should have listened fast enough," I retorted. "But what's the use of talking? You can boast of your own adventures after you bolted. You don't care what happened to me."

"I cared so much that I came back to see."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble! The wrong had been done. Raffles—Raffles—don't you know who she was?"

It was my hand that gripped his arm once more.

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"I guessed," he answered, gravely enough even for me.

"It was she who saved me, not you," I said. "And that is the bitterest part of all!"

Yet I told him that part with a strange sad pride in her whom I had lost—through him—forever. As I ended we turned into High Street; in the prevailing stillness, the faint strains of the band reached us from the Empress Rooms; and I hailed a crawling hansom as Raffles turned that way.

"Bunny," said he, "it's no use saying I'm sorry. Sorrow adds insult in a case like this—if ever there was or will be such another! Only believe me, Bunny, when I swear to you that I had not the smallest shadow of a suspicion that *she* was in the house."

And in my heart of hearts I did believe him; but I could not bring myself to say the words.

"You told me yourself that you had written to her in the country," he pursued.

"And that letter!" I rejoined, in a fresh wave of bitterness: "that letter she had written at dead of night, and stolen down to post, it was the one I have been waiting for all these days! I should have got it to-morrow. Now I shall never get it, never hear from her again, nor have another

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chance in this world or in the next. I don't say it was all your fault. You no more knew that she was there than I did. But you told me a deliberate lie about her people, and that I never shall forgive."

I spoke as vehemently as I could under my breath. The hansom was waiting at the curb.

"I can say no more than I have said," returned Raffles with a shrug. "Lie or no lie, I didn't tell it to bring you with me, but to get you to give me certain information without feeling a beast about it. But, as a matter of fact, it was no lie about old Hector Carruthers and Lord Lochmaben, and anybody but you would have guessed the truth."

"What is the truth?"

"I as good as told you, Bunny, again and again."

"Then tell me now."

"If you read your paper there would be no need; but if you want to know, old Carruthers headed the list of the Birthday Honors, and Lord Lochmaben is the title of his choice."

And this miserable quibble was not a lie! My lip curled, I turned my back without a word, and drove home to my Mount Street flat in a new fury of savage scorn. Not a lie, indeed! It was the one that is half a truth, the meanest lie of all,

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and the very last to which I could have dreamt that Raffles would stoop. So far there had been a degree of honor between us, if only of the kind understood to obtain between thief and thief. Now all that was at an end. Raffles had cheated me. Raffles had completed the ruin of my life. I was done with Raffles, as she who shall not be named was done with me.

And yet, even while I blamed him most bitterly, and utterly abominated his deceitful deed, I could not but admit in my heart that the result was out of all proportion to the intent: he had never dreamt of doing me this injury, or indeed any injury at all. Intrinsically the deceit had been quite venial, the reason for it obviously the reason that Raffles had given me. It was quite true that he had spoken of this Lochmaben peerage as a new creation, and of the heir to it in a fashion only applicable to Alick Carruthers. He had given me hints, which I had been too dense to take, and he had certainly made more than one attempt to deter me from accompanying him on this fatal emprise; had he been more explicit, I might have made it my business to deter him. I could not say in my heart that Raffles had failed to satisfy such honor as I might reasonably expect to subsist between us. Yet it seems to me to require a superhuman sanity always and unerringly to sepa-

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rate cause from effect, achievement from intent. And I, for one, was never quite able to do so in this case.

I could not be accused of neglecting my newspaper during the next few wretched days. I read every word that I could find about the attempted jewel-robbery in Palace Gardens, and the reports afforded me my sole comfort. In the first place, it was only an attempted robbery; nothing had been taken, after all. And then—and then—the one member of the household who had come nearest to a personal encounter with either of us was unable to furnish any description of the man—had even expressed a doubt as to the likelihood of identification in the event of an arrest!

I will not say with what mingled feelings I read and dwelt on that announcement. It kept a certain faint glow alive within me until the morning brought me back the only presents I had ever made her. They were books; jewellery had been tabooed by the authorities. And the books came back without a word, though the parcel was directed in her hand.

I had made up my mind not to go near Raffles again, but in my heart I already regretted my resolve. I had forfeited love, I had sacrificed honor, and now I must deliberately alienate myself from the one being whose society might yet be

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some recompense for all that I had lost. The situation was aggravated by the state of my exchequer. I expected an ultimatum from my banker by every post. Yet this influence was nothing to the other. It was Raffles I loved. It was not the dark life we led together, still less its base rewards; it was the man himself, his gayety, his humor, his dazzling audacity, his incomparable courage and resource. And a very horror of turning to him again in mere need of greed set the seal on my first angry resolution. But the anger was soon gone out of me, and when at length Raffles bridged the gap by coming to me, I rose to greet him almost with a shout.

He came as though nothing had happened; and, indeed, not very many days had passed, though they might have been months to me. Yet I fancied the gaze that watched me through our smoke a trifle less sunny than it had been before. And it was a relief to me when he came with few preliminaries to the inevitable point.

"Did you ever hear from her, Bunny?" he asked.

"In a way," I answered. "We won't talk about it, if you don't mind, Raffles."

"That sort of way!" he exclaimed. He seemed both surprised and disappointed.

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"Yes," I said, "that sort of way. It's finished. What did you expect?"

"I don't know," said Raffles. "I only thought that the girl who went so far to get a fellow out of a tight place might go a little farther to keep him from getting into another."

"I don't see why she should," said I, honestly enough, yet with the irritation of a less just feeling deep down in my inmost consciousness.

"Yet you did hear from her?" he persisted.

"She sent me back my poor presents, without a word," I said, "if you call that hearing."

I could not bring myself to own to Raffles that I had given her only books. He asked if I was sure that she had sent them back herself; and that was his last question. My answer was enough for him. And to this day I cannot say whether it was more in relief than in regret that he laid a hand upon my shoulder.

"So you are out of Paradise after all!" said Raffles. "I was not sure, or I should have come round before. Well, Bunny, if they don't want you there, there's a little Inferno in the Albany where you will be as welcome as ever!"

And still, with all the magic mischief of his smile, there was that touch of sadness which I was yet to read aright.

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The Chest of Silver

LIKE all the tribe of which I held him head, Raffles professed the liveliest disdain for unwieldy plunder of any description; it might be old Sheffield, or it might be solid silver or gold, but if the thing was not to be concealed about the person, he would none whatever of it. Unlike the rest of us, however, in this as in all else, Raffles would not infrequently allow the acquisitive spirit of the mere collector to silence the dictates of professional prudence. The old oak chests, and even the mahogany wine-cooler, for which he had doubtless paid like an honest citizen, were thus immovable with pieces of crested plate, which he had neither the temerity to use nor the hardihood to melt or sell. He could but gloat over them behind locked doors, as I used to tell him, and at last one afternoon I caught him at it. It was in the year after that of my novitiate, a halcyon period at the Albany, when Raffles left no crib uncracked, and I played second-murderer every time. I had called in response to a telegram in which he stated that he was going out of town,

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and must say good-by to me before he went. And I could only think that he was inspired by the same impulse toward the bronzed salvers and the tarnished teapots with which I found him surrounded, until my eyes lit upon the enormous silver-chest into which he was fitting them one by one.

"Allow me, Bunny! I shall take the liberty of locking both doors behind you and putting the key in my pocket," said Raffles, when he had let me in. "Not that I mean to take you prisoner, my dear fellow; but there are those of us who can turn keys from the outside, though it was never an accomplishment of mine."

"Not Crawshay again?" I cried, standing still in my hat.

Raffles regarded me with that tantalizing smile of his which might mean nothing, yet which often meant so much; and in a flash I was convinced that our most jealous enemy and dangerous rival, the doyen of an older school, had paid him yet another visit.

"That remains to be seen," was the measured reply; "and I for one have not set naked eye on the fellow since I saw him off through that window and left myself for dead on this very spot. In fact, I imagined him comfortably back in jail."

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"Not old Crawshay!" said I. "He's far too good a man to be taken twice. I should call him the very prince of professional cracksmen."

"Should you?" said Raffles coldly, with as cold an eye looking into mine. "Then you had better prepare to repel princes when I'm gone."

"But gone where?" I asked, finding a corner for my hat and coat, and helping myself to the comforts of the venerable dresser which was one of our friend's greatest treasures. "Where is it you are off to, and why are you taking this herd of white elephants with you?"

Raffles bestowed the cachet of his smile on my description of his motley plate. He joined me in one of his favorite cigarettes, only shaking a superior head at his own decanter.

"One question at a time, Bunny," said he. "In the first place, I am going to have these rooms freshened up with a potful of paint, the electric light, and the telephone you've been at me about so long."

"Good!" I cried. "Then we shall be able to talk to each other day and night!"

"And get overheard and run in for our pains? I shall wait till you *are* run in, I think," said Raffles cruelly. "But the rest's a necessity: not that I love new paint or am pining for electric light, but

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for reasons which I will just breathe in your private ear, Bunny. You must not try to take them too seriously; but the fact is, there is just the least bit of a twitter against me in this rookery of an Albany. It must have been started by that tame old bird, Policeman Mackenzie; it isn't very bad as yet, but it needn't be that to reach my ears. Well, it was open to me either to clear out altogether, and so confirm whatever happened to be in the air, or to go off for a time, under some arrangement which would give the authorities ample excuse for overhauling every inch of my rooms. Which would you have done, Bunny?"

"Cleared out, while I could!" said I devoutly.

"So I should have thought," rejoined Raffles. "Yet you see the merit of my plan. I shall leave every mortal thing unlocked."

"Except that," said I, kicking the huge oak case with the iron bands and clamps, and the baize lining fast disappearing under heavy packages bearing the shapes of urns and candelabra.

"That," replied Raffles, "is neither to go with me nor to remain here."

"Then what do you propose to do with it?"

"You have your banking account, and your banker," he went on. This was perfectly true, though it was Raffles alone who had kept the one

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open, and enabled me to propitiate the other in moments of emergency.

"Well?"

"Well, pay in this bundle of notes this afternoon, and say you have had a great week at Liverpool and Lincoln; then ask them if they can do with your silver while you run over to Paris for a merry Easter. I should tell them it's rather heavy —a lot of old family stuff that you've a good mind to leave with them till you marry and settle down."

I winced at this, but consented to the rest after a moment's consideration. After all, and for more reasons that I need enumerate, it was a plausible tale enough. And Raffles had no banker; it was quite impossible for him to explain, across any single counter, the large sums of hard cash which did sometimes fall into his hands; and it might well be that he had nursed my small account in view of the very quandary which had now arisen. On all grounds, it was impossible for me to refuse him, and I am still glad to remember that my assent was given, on the whole, ungrudgingly.

"But when will the chest be ready for me?" I merely asked, as I stuffed the notes into my cigarette case. "And how are we to get it out of this, in banking hours, without attracting any amount of attention at this end?"

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Raffles gave me an approving nod.

"I'm glad to see you spot the crux so quickly, Bunny. I have thought of your taking it round to your place first, under cloud of night; but we are bound to be seen even so, and on the whole it would look far less suspicious in broad daylight. It will take you some twelve or fifteen minutes to drive to your bank in a growler, so if you are here with one at a quarter to ten to-morrow morning, that will exactly meet the case. But you must have a hansom this minute if you mean to prepare the way with those notes this afternoon!"

It was only too like the Raffles of those days to dismiss a subject and myself in the same breath, with a sudden nod, and a brief grasp of the hand he was already holding out for mine. I had a great mind to take another of his cigarettes instead, for there were one or two points on which he had carefully omitted to enlighten me. Thus, I had still to learn the bare direction of his journey; and it was all that I could do to drag it from him as I stood buttoning my coat and gloves.

"Scotland," he vouchsafed at last.

"At Easter," I remarked.

"To learn the language," he explained. "I have no tongue but my own, you see, but I try to make up for it by cultivating every shade of that.

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Some of them have come in useful even to your knowledge, Bunny: what price my Cockney that night in St. John's Wood? I can keep up my end in stage Irish, real Devonshire, very fair Norfolk, and three distinct Yorkshire dialects. But my good Galloway Scots might be better, and I mean to make it so."

"You still haven't told me where to write to you."

"I'll write to you first, Bunny."

"At least let me see you off," I urged at the door. "I promise not to look at your ticket if you tell me the train!"

"The eleven-fifty from Euston."

"Then I'll be with you by quarter to ten."

And I left him without further parley, reading his impatience in his face. Everything, to be sure, seemed clear enough without that fuller discussion which I loved and Raffles hated. Yet I thought we might at least have dined together, and in my heart I felt just the least bit hurt, until it occurred to me as I drove to count the notes in my cigarette case. Resentment was impossible after that. The sum ran well into three figures, and it was plain that Raffles meant me to have a good time in his absence. So I told his lie with unction at my bank, and made due arrangements for the reception of

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his chest next morning. Then I repaired to our club, hoping he would drop in, and that we might dine together after all. In that I was disappointed. It was nothing, however, to the disappointment awaiting me at the Albany, when I arrived in my four-wheeler at the appointed hour next morning.

"Mr. Raffles 'as gawn, sir," said the porter, with a note of reproach in his confidential undertone. The man was a favorite with Raffles, who used him and tipped him with consummate tact, and he knew me only less well.

"Gone!" I echoed aghast. "Where on earth to?"

"Scotland, sir."

"Already?"

"By the eleven-fifty lawst night."

"Last night! I thought he meant eleven-fifty this morning!"

"He knew you did, sir, when you never came, and he told me to tell you there was no such train."

I could have rent my garments in mortification and annoyance with myself and Raffles. It was as much his fault as mine. But for his indecent haste in getting rid of me, his characteristic abruptness at the end, there would have been no misunderstanding or mistake.

"Any other message?" I inquired morosely.

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"Only about the box, sir. Mr. Raffles said as you was goin' to take chawge of it time he's away, and I've a friend ready to lend a 'and in getting it on the cab. It's a rare 'eavy 'un, but Mr. Raffles an' me could lift it all right between us, so I dessay me an' my friend can."

For my own part, I must confess that its weight concerned me less than the vast size of that infernal chest, as I drove with it past club and park at ten o'clock in the morning. Sit as far back as I might in the four-wheeler, I could conceal neither myself nor my connection with the huge iron-clamped case upon the roof: in my heated imagination its wood was glass through which all the world could see the guilty contents. Once an officious constable held up the traffic at our approach, and for a moment I put a blood-curdling construction upon the simple ceremony. Low boys shouted after us —or if it was not after us, I thought it was—and that their cry was "Stop thief!" Enough said of one of the most unpleasant cab-drives I ever had in my life. *Horresco referens.*

At the bank, however, thanks to the foresight and liberality of Raffles, all was smooth water. I paid my cabman handsomely, gave a florin to the stout fellow in livery whom he helped with the chest, and could have pressed gold upon the

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genial clerk who laughed like a gentleman at my jokes about the Liverpool winners and the latest betting on the Family Plate. I was only disconcerted when he informed me that the bank gave no receipts for deposits of this nature. I am now aware that few London banks do. But it is pleasing to believe that at the time I looked—what I felt—as though all I valued upon earth were in jeopardy.

I should have got through the rest of that day happily enough, such was the load off my mind and hands, but for an extraordinary and most disconcerting note received late at night from Raffles himself. He was a man who telegraphed freely, but seldom wrote a letter. Sometimes, however, he sent a scribbled line by special messenger; and overnight, evidently in the train, he had scribbled this one to post in the small hours at Crewe:

"'Ware Prince of Professors! *He was in the offing when I left.* If slightest cause for uneasiness about bank, withdraw at once and keep in own rooms like good chap.

"A. J. R.

"*P. S.*—Other reasons, as you shall hear."

There was a nice nightcap for a puzzled head! I had made rather an evening of it, what with increase of funds and decrease of anxiety, but this

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cryptic admonition spoiled the remainder of my night. It had arrived by a late post, and I only wished that I had left it all night in my letter-box.

What exactly did it mean? And what exactly must I do? These were questions that confronted me with fresh force in the morning.

The news of Crawshay did not surprise me. I was quite sure that Raffles had been given good reason to bear him in mind before his journey, even if he had not again beheld the ruffian in the flesh. That ruffian and that journey might be more intimately connected than I had yet supposed. Raffles never told me all. Yet the solid fact held good—held better than ever—that I had seen his plunder safely planted in my bank. Crawshay himself could not follow it *there*. I was certain he had not followed my cab: in the acute self-consciousness induced by that abominable drive, I should have known it in my bones if he had. I thought of the porter's friend who had helped me with the chest. No, I remember him as well as I remembered Crawshay; they were quite different types.

To remove that vile box from the bank, on top of another cab, with no stronger pretext and no further instructions, was not to be thought of for a moment. Yet I did think of it, for hours. I

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was always anxious to do my part by Raffles; he had done more than his by me, not once or twice, to-day or yesterday, but again and again from the very first. I need not state the obvious reasons I had for fighting shy of the personal custody of his accursed chest. Yet he had run worse risks for me, and I wanted him to learn that he, too, could depend on a devotion not unworthy of his own.

In my dilemma I did what I have often done when at a loss for light and leading. I took hardly any lunch, but went to Northumberland Avenue and had a Turkish bath instead. I know nothing so cleansing to mind as well as body, nothing better calculated to put the finest possible edge on such judgment as one may happen to possess. Even Raffles, without an ounce to lose or a nerve to soothe, used to own a sensuous appreciation of the peace of mind and person to be gained in this fashion when all others failed. For me, the fun began before the boots were off one's feet; the muffled footfalls, the thin sound of the fountain, even the spent swathed forms upon the couches, and the whole clean, warm, idle atmosphere, were so much unction to my simpler soul. The half-hour in the hot-rooms I used to count but a strenuous step to a divine lassitude of limb and accom-

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panying exaltation of intellect. And yet—and yet—it was in the hottest room of all, in a temperature of 270° Fahrenheit, that the bolt fell from the *Pall Mall Gazette* which I had bought outside the bath.

I was turning over the hot, crisp pages, and positively revelling in my fiery furnace, when the following headlines and leaded paragraphs leapt to my eye with the force of a veritable blow:

BANK ROBBERS IN THE WEST END—
DARING AND MYSTERIOUS CRIME

An audacious burglary and dastardly assault have been committed on the premises of the City and Suburban Bank in Sloane Street, W. From the details so far to hand, the robbery appears to have been deliberately planned and adroitly executed in the early hours of this morning.

A night watchman named Fawcett states that between one and two o'clock he heard a slight noise in the neighborhood of the lower strong-room, used as a repository for the plate and other possessions of various customers of the bank. Going down to investigate, he was instantly attacked by a powerful ruffian, who succeeded in felling him to the ground before an alarm could be raised.

Fawcett is unable to furnish any description of his assailant or assailants, but is of opinion that more than one were engaged in the commission of the crime. When the unfortunate man recovered consciousness, no trace of the thieves remained, with the exception of a single candle

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which had been left burning on the flags of the corridor. The strong-room, however, had been opened, and it is feared the raid on the chests of plate and other valuables may prove to have been only too successful, in view of the Easter exodus, which the thieves had evidently taken into account. The ordinary banking chambers were not even visited; entry and exit are believed to have been effected through the coal cellar, which is also situated in the basement. Up to the present the police have effected no arrest.

I sat practically paralyzed by this appalling news; and I swear that, even in that incredible temperature, it was a cold perspiration in which I sweltered from head to heel. Crawshay, of course! Crawshay once more upon the track of Raffles and his ill-gotten gains! And once more I blamed Raffles himself: his warning had come too late: he should have wired to me at once not to take the box to the bank at all. He was a madman ever to have invested in so obvious and obtrusive a receptacle for treasure. It would serve Raffles right if that and no other was the box which had been broken into by the thieves.

Yet, when I considered the character of his treasure, I fairly shuddered in my sweat. It was a hoard of criminal relics. Suppose his chest had indeed been rifled, and emptied of every silver thing but one; that one remaining piece of silver,

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seen of men, was quite enough to cast Raffles into the outer darkness of penal servitude! And Crawshay was capable of it—of perceiving the insidious revenge—of taking it without compunction or remorse.

There was only one course for me. I must follow my instructions to the letter and recover the chest at all hazards, or be taken myself in the attempt. If only Raffles had left me some address, to which I could have wired some word of warning! But it was no use thinking of that; for the rest there was time enough up to four o'clock, and as yet it was not three. I determined to go through with my bath and make the most of it. Might it not be my last for years?

But I was past enjoying even a Turkish bath. I had not the patience for a proper shampoo, or sufficient spirit for the plunge. I weighed myself automatically, for that was a matter near my heart; but I forgot to give my man his sixpence until the reproachful intonation of his adieu recalled me to myself. And my couch in the cooling gallery—my favorite couch, in my favorite corner, which I had secured with gusto on coming in—it was a bed of thorns, with hideous visions of a plank-bed to follow!

I ought to be able to add that I heard the burg-

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lary discussed on adjacent couches before I left. I certainly listened for it, and was rather disappointed more than once when I had held my breath in vain. But this is the unvarnished record of an odious hour, and it passed without further aggravation from without; only, as I drove to Sloane Street, the news was on all the posters, and on one I read of "a clew" which spelt for me a doom I was grimly resolved to share.

Already there was something in the nature of a "run" upon the Sloane Street branch of the City and Suburban. A cab drove away with a chest of reasonable dimensions as mine drove up, while in the bank itself a lady was making a painful scene. As for the genial clerk who had roared at my jokes the day before, he was mercifully in no mood for any more, but, on the contrary, quite rude to me at sight.

"I've been expecting you all the afternoon," said he. "You needn't look so pale."

"Is it safe?"

"That Noah's Ark of yours? Yes, so I hear; they'd just got to it when they were interrupted, and they never went back again."

"Then it wasn't even opened?"

"Only just begun on, I believe."

"Thank God!"

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"You may; we don't," growled the clerk. "The manager says he believes your chest was at the bottom of it all."

"How could it be?" I asked uneasily.

"By being seen on the cab a mile off, and followed," said the clerk.

"Does the manager want to see *me?*" I asked boldly.

"Not unless you want to see him," was the blunt reply. "He's been at it with others all the afternoon, and they haven't all got off as cheap as you."

"Then my silver shall not embarrass you any longer," said I grandly. "I meant to leave it if it was all right, but after all you have said I certainly shall not. Let your man or men bring up the chest at once. I dare say they also have been 'at it with others all the afternoon,' but I shall make this worth their while."

I did not mind driving through the streets with the thing this time. My present relief was too overwhelming as yet to admit of pangs and fears for the immediate future. No summer sun had ever shone more brightly than that rather watery one of early April. There was a green-and-gold dust of buds and shoots on the trees as we passed the park. I felt greater things sprouting in my heart. Hansoms passed with schoolboys just home

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for the Easter holidays, four-wheelers outward bound, with bicycles and perambulators atop; none that rode in them were half so happy as I, with the great load on my cab, but the greater one off my heart.

At Mount Street it just went into the lift; that was a stroke of luck; and the lift-man and I between us carried it into my flat. It seemed a featherweight to me now. I felt a Samson in the exaltation of that hour. And I will not say what my first act was when I found myself alone with my white elephant in the middle of the room; enough that the siphon was still doing its work when the glass slipped through my fingers to the floor.

"Bunny!"

It was Raffles. Yet for a moment I looked about me quite in vain. He was not at the window; he was not at the open door. And yet Raffles it had been, or at all events his voice, and that bubbling over with fun and satisfaction, be his body where it might. In the end I dropped my eyes, and there was his living face in the middle of the lid of the chest, like that of the saint upon its charger.

But Raffles was alive, Raffles was laughing as though his vocal cords would snap—there was

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neither tragedy nor illusion in the apparition of Raffles. A life-size Jack-in-the-box, he had thrust his head through a lid within the lid, cut by himself between the two iron bands that ran round the chest like the straps of a portmanteau. He must have been busy at it when I found him pretending to pack, if not far into that night, for it was a very perfect piece of work; and even as I stared without a word, and he crouched laughing in my face, an arm came squeezing out, keys in hand; one was turned in either of the two great padlocks, the whole lid lifted, and out stepped Raffles like the conjurer he was.

"So you were the burglar!" I exclaimed at last.

"Well, I am just as glad I didn't know."

He had wrung my hand already, but at this he fairly mangled it in his.

"You dear little brick," he cried, "that's the one thing of all things I longed to hear you say! How could you have behaved as you've done if you had known? How could any living man? How could you have acted, as the polar star of all the stages could not have acted in your place? Remember that I have heard a lot, and as good as seen as much as I've heard. Bunny, I don't know where you were greatest: at the Albany, here, or at your bank!"

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