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# I HAVE KILLED A MAN!

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*By the Same Author:*

**THE MURDER ON THE BUS**

**THE THREE DAGGERS**

**THE BODY IN THE SAFE**

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# I HAVE KILLED A MAN!

*By*

CECIL FREEMAN GREGG

LINCOLN MAC VEAGH
THE DIAL PRESS
NEW YORK · MCMXXXI
LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO., TORONTO

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TO

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# PART ONE

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# CHAPTER I

## IN WHICH MR. SCOTT LAYS BARE HIS SOUL

I HAVE killed a man!

There you are, dear reader; you cannot say that I haven't warned you! And by the expression "dear reader" I include not only those who have paid seven shillings and sixpence, or two dollars as the case may be, for their copy, but also those who have borrowed this book from a library. For, in either case, it means a few extra pence in my pocket, or a small addition to my estate should I have passed away. Naturally I don't expect to die for many years to come, and when this sad event occurs, I state here and now that it won't be at the hands of the public executioner. There's going to be no toeing of the chalk line waiting for the trapdoor to open for this child! No passive submission to being strapped into a chair in preparation of ten thousand (or more) volts! Oh dear me, no! I'm far too clever.

But let me revert to my original sentence. I have killed a man.

You can't conceive the enormous pleasure it gives me to write that sentence. Let's do it again. I HAVE KILLED A MAN! In *caps* this time, for all the world to see.

Of course, I shall never be caught. That goes without saying.

And let me assure you that I'm not writing this confession behind closed doors. No hole-in-the-corner business for me. If the entire Metropolitan Police Force and all the private detectives in the world were standing behind me at this very moment, it would not cause me the least concern. In fact, I should welcome their presence.



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And why?

Well, that's because I'm who I am. I'm an author. I write detective stories for a living. So you see my position. I'm engaged in writing a thriller. This confession is merely the MS. of my latest novel. It's too easy. No one will believe it's the truth. Unless it's published before-hand, when I'm dead and gone this story will be found among my effects and hailed as a masterpiece of fiction. My very profession protects me!

The names, too, are real—that's the scream of it! Of course, I shall protect myself by denying it on the flyleaf. You know the thing:

"The author wishes it clearly to be understood that the characters in this story are entirely fictitious, and that no reference is made, or intended to be made, to any living person."

Just turn back a page or two and have a look. There you are, you see! I told you so!

I've also headed this story, as you can see:

I Have Killed a Man!
by
? ? ?

Ah! By whom? Shall I use my real name, my *nom de plume*, or a pseudonym? I must think this over. After all, I may be a criminal, but that does not necessarily mean I'm to be criminally foolish. Supposing that Inspector Higgins (a fictional Detective-Inspector Higgins, of course—not the one at Scotland Yard) were to read this, it might make things awkward. Not, of course, that he could get anything on me, but I do hate to have a man trailing my footsteps: it's most inconvenient, for one thing—and one has to be so circumspect.

For a moment, therefore, I think I'll omit my name. Sorry, and all that, but . . .

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I have killed a man! Sorry to repeat myself like this, but I get paid, on occasion, so much per line, and repetition naturally helps.

At one time there were three of us in our little gang, and now there are only two. How very sad! Like the ten little nigger boys. Soon, perhaps there'll be only one. I must think this over. Our thirty-three-and-a-third per cent. division has recently increased to fifty per cent. And one hundred per cent. is exactly twice as much. Yes. It really is worth my consideration.

Yet Jimmy Pearson is useful, very useful. But, then, so was Bobby Baynes, and Bobby, alas, is no more. However, I cannot abide treachery. For one thing, the consequences are apt to be serious. I flatter myself that my prompt action stopped Bobby Baynes squeaking. I must take the matter up with Jimmy Pearson. I'm entitled to some material recompense for protecting him in the matter, for he would have been in the soup as well as I had I not acted with such alacrity.

I have looked up the word "alacrity" and find that it means "cheerful promptitude to do some act." And I must say that my removal of Bobby Baynes was cheerfully accomplished. In fact, if I only get half of his share in our swag I shall have been amply rewarded. Yet why should Jimmy Pearson get the other half when he had nothing to do with it? Surely I'm entitled to all of Bobby Baynes' share? I'll have this out with Pearson. Not only should I get Baynes' share, but I think that in all fairness Pearson should give me some of his. I acted for both of us. I'll put the matter to him. He's bound to agree. Of course, if he doesn't, well . . . I must take steps to insure that I get the lot, that's all!

In any case, dear reader, I fear that I am digressing. The matter is one for mutual adjustment between Pearson and myself, and, with all due respect, is no concern of yours. Purely personal to me. No offence, I trust.

However, to resume my—er—tragic history. . . .

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In my early days as an author I went to great lengths to acquire what is termed local colour. Periodically I inflicted my presence on sundry officers of Scotland Yard in order to ascertain, where possible, the inside workings of the more famous cases. I should like to state here and now that they always treated me with the utmost courtesy. They "suffered me gladly."

It is some years ago now since I first obtained from a friend—my local M.P. as a matter of fact—an introduction to Inspector Higgins of Scotland Yard. I did not know what my friend had said in his letter of introduction—nowadays of course I should have steamed it open before delivering it in person—but Higgins, having read the letter, looked up at me with a quizzical smile.

"So, Mr. Scott"—it's not my name really, but it will suffice—"so, Mr. Scott, you're an author. Well, well, well!"

I'm afraid I blushed. I was younger then.

"Hardly that, sir. You see . . ." Frankly, I stammered.

"That's all right, Mr. Scott, we've all got to start at something or other, and, presumably, there must be worse jobs." He sounded doubtful, but I let it pass. "I'm afraid that our work at the Yard here is much more prosaic than some of the more imaginative writers of thrillers would have us believe. Still, if you're keen you can come along with me to Pearson's flat, where I'm about to institute a search for hidden swag. Sounds romantic, but logically his flat is the only place where Pearson could possibly have hidden the stuff he lifted from the Columnar Hotel."

"Oh! *That* Pearson!" I was somewhat awed, for the papers had recently been full of the burglary at this famous hotel, for only the previous day the thief, Pearson, had been arrested. I had imagined that his haul had been recovered when the arrest was made, but apparently I was wrong.

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"Yes. *That* Pearson"—grimly from the inspector. "He'll get seven years if he gets a day."

We set off together, and I had a job to keep up with the long-legged detective. Here's a good place to describe him.

Tall, broad-shouldered, and athletic-looking. Immaculately dressed, his clothes seemingly a part of his personality. An exceptionally fine figure of a man in the late thirties. Humorously twinkling eyes. It was patently obvious that he was well able to take care of himself under any circumstances. Well liked by his superiors and his subordinates at Scotland Yard, as was evidenced by the smile as well as the salute he received from the uniformed constable on duty at the gates, and the cheery nod he received from Chief-Inspector Dryan whom we met in the corridor. I was mighty proud to be seen in his company. I piously trust I shall always be so!

I ambled along by his side, for he is a much taller man than I, but in about two minutes I was completely out of breath. He stopped, smiled at me, then hailed a taxi. I subsided thankfully on the well-worn cushions.

Shortly afterwards the taxi drew up at the kerb, and we alighted. In a somewhat embarrassed manner I fumbled for change, but Inspector Higgins waved me aside and paid the fare. Then he turned and surveyed the block of flats before which the taxi had stopped. The block seemingly contained about a dozen flats, each self-contained and with a common entrance. Higgins ran up the steps leading to this entrance in pairs, and I trotted meekly behind. Eventually he stopped at a door numbered Thirteen, and rapped smartly with his knuckles. The door was immediately opened by a uniformed constable, who saluted smartly.

"All ready, Jones?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Cut out the naval patter, sonny. You're in the police force now."

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The man coloured resentfully, but his resentment faded into a wan smile when Inspector Higgins grinned broadly at him and laid a kindly hand upon his shoulder.

I was not so quick mounting the stairs as the inspector, and, although I was in time to hear the remarks which passed, I found my passage barred by the constable. Higgins, however, called from an adjacent room:

"O.K., Jones. Let him in."

I entered and made my way to the room from which the voice had proceeded.

Inspector Higgins was standing in the middle of the room, his hands in his trousers pockets and his hat thrust back. The room itself was in a state of the utmost confusion: chairs were lying upon the floor; one window was cracked; a telephone instrument had been completely wrenched from the wall and still had about two feet of flex attached, the broken wires of which shone brightly in the light from the window; a metal waste-paper basket had been completely buckled; the protective plate glass on top of a flat desk was chipped at one corner; whilst lying in the middle of the room at the inspector's feet was a typewriter, completely smashed.

"Some scrap," muttered Higgins reminiscently. Taking his hands from his pockets his started a search in his jacket and eventually removed therefrom a pipe, pouch, and an automatic lighter. Slowly he filled his pipe, placed the stem in his mouth and clamped it therein with his strong white teeth, then speculatively rubbed the flint of his lighter. He was instantly rewarded with a small flame, and he turned to me with a beaming face.

"Lit first time, laddie."

Soon he had the pipe drawing to his entire satisfaction, and he emitted a cloud of pungent smoke.

Mechanically I began to set the place in order, and as a preliminary seized hold of a fallen chair.

"Drop it!" A yell from the inspector so startled me that I carried out his order involuntarily, and literally.

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"My dear chap, the very first thing you've got to learn in this business is never to touch a thing until you're satisfied that you won't want to know at some future date its original position."

"Sorry, sir . . ."

"That's all right. Now let me see. . . ."

"Evidence of a struggle, sir," I ventured tentatively.

"Struggle?" Inspector Higgins sniggered. "My dear chap, this is where we arrested our friend Pearson. He—er—resisted somewhat. Gosh, it was a glorious mix-up!"

"Good Lord! How many were there of you?"

"Only me"—modestly.

"Only you?" I shouted unbelievingly. "But Pearson is a mighty big chap to take on alone."

"Well, so am I." He grinned, and sucked meditatively at his pipe. "Now, let's think. Pearson was standing there"—pointing nebulously with his finger, his eyes upon the floor—"and I'd got about as far as here." Another casual direction. "H'm. H'm." He raised his eyes to the roof, as if for inspiration. Then he nodded, as if confirming his recollection. "H'm." A pause. "Then the fracas started." A subdued chuckle.

"What exactly are you looking for, Inspector?" I broke in upon his ruminations.

"A diamond necklace. That's all. Worth about eighty thousand dollars, according to its owner, who was staying at the Columnar when Pearson paid his little visit. Huge value—little bulk. You could almost get it in a matchbox—figuratively speaking of course. It wasn't on him when we searched him, so it must be here somewhere. We found most of the other stuff here, you see." In such spasmodic sentences he told me of the arrest of Pearson and the search for his haul.

Then a silence, whilst, with furrowed brow, Inspector Higgins concentrated upon the problem of the missing necklace. At long last:

"Look here, Scott. Let's reconstruct this business—it'll

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help me to recollect. You be our friend Pearson—go and stand behind that desk. I entered the door here, and he immediately jumped up from his chair, which fell backwards and still remains on the floor." I walked behind the desk and stood waiting for further instructions. It reminded me of a few years before when I had been a leading light in our local Amateur Dramatic Society. I was to play a part. But without any make-up. Pity! I was good at this sort of thing!

Higgins stood in the centre of the room and whistled tunelessly.

"As soon as I entered the room Pearson grabbed the telephone instrument, wrenched it from the wall—pretty useful effort, that!"—in parenthesis—"and went for me." A pause. "The point is—why?"

"I don't know," I answered; but he ignored this pitiful contribution to the discussion, and said sharply:

"Grab hold of that instrument, and hold it aloft ready to charge!" He smiled.

I picked up the telephone instrument with the attached flex and held it up. Immediately, within the instrument, there was a faint rattle.

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# CHAPTER II

## IN WHICH MR. SCOTT FALLS BY THE WAYSIDE

ON looking back I realise that the interruption which immediately followed was the turning point in my life.

There was a sound of running footsteps up the stone steps from the common entrance to the flats, which stopped outside the front door. Inspector Higgins walked to the door of the room, opened it and peered out.

"What is it, Jones?"

"Messenger for you, sir."

"All right. Show him in."

A man entered breathlessly. The raised eyebrows of the inspector were a silent invitation to the man to say his piece.

"Pearson, sir."

"Well?"

"Escaped, sir."

"How?"

"He was being taken to court by taxi, sir. A collision was his opportunity."

"I see." Higgins nodded dismissal to the man, and turned to me. "Sorry, Mr. Scott. We must go."

Three minutes later I was standing on the kerb outside the block of flats, whilst the inspector's taxi was receding in the distance.

I returned home to consider my position. I had not the slightest doubt in my mind but that the diamond necklace was hidden within the telephone instrument. I was also sure that, but for the providential interruption, Inspector



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Higgins would have arrived at the same conclusion. Just consider the position: A man has made a spectacular raid on the Columnar Hotel and got away with an exceedingly valuable lot of jewellery. He is surprised by a visit from a detective. Obviously, not a social call! Instead of grabbing his revolver (the papers that morning had been full of the account of his arrest—in which his revolver figured largely) he wrenches the telephone instrument from the wall. Why? Surely not for use as a weapon?

Thus my reasoning. Now for my conclusions.

I had here a story for which the newspapers would pay handsomely—say one hundred pounds—perhaps two. And the necklace was worth eighty thousand dollars—roughly sixteen thousand pounds. A difference of about fifteen thousand nine hundred pounds. Rather a big difference between honesty and—well—opportunity.

And again: Supposing I returned to that block of flats, succeeded in getting past the ex-sailor guard and carried off the instrument in triumph, no one would dream that I had got the necklace. It sounded, bar the getting into the flat, almost too easy.

Then a further thought assailed me: Pearson had escaped. The first thing he would do would be to return to the flat and recover his loot. And, furthermore, I could bet my bottom dollar that Inspector Higgins had already made the same inference, and had somebody at the flat to welcome Pearson's return. In which case it might pay me to take what I could get for my story and try to forget the monetary value of the jewels. Unless, of course, a substantial reward had been offered by their wealthy owner. I went out and bought an *Evening Standard*.

Pearson's spectacular escape was recorded in the Stop Press. There was no mention of a reward. Good enough. If the American owner was as mean as all that, she must take the consequences.

I would annex that necklace for my own personal use.

My decision made, I concentrated on my plan of cam-

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paign. To be exact—on two plans of campaign. I would state here that I attribute my subsequent successes to the fact that I always had two strings to my bow: I was always prepared with an alternative should my original scheme gang agley.

In this case my original plan was simplicity itself. I would present myself once more at the flat, and, should the same constable still be on duty, inform him that I had been sent by my friend, Inspector Higgins, to recover a hypothetical pair of gloves, walking stick or so forth. You see the idea? Bluff—pure and simple. Remembering the man's "Ay, ay, sir!" and the inspector's remark that he was not in the Navy *now,* I think I was justified in assuming that the man was a newcomer to the Force. Already I was using my wits! At least, I kidded myself so at the time. Looking back, I can see the snags, for if the man was not so green as he looked and refused to let me in, he would doubtless justify his action to the inspector the next time he saw him, and Higgins would wonder what on earth my game had been in trying to bluff an entrance. There were other pitfalls, but, fortunately, it was my second plan which I had to put into operation.

When I arrived at the flat, about five o'clock that evening, there was no guard in evidence, so I rang the bell and waited in some trepidation for the door to be opened. I had a small black leather bag in my hand, and my cap was pulled well over my face. It was not strictly a disguise, being the merest suggestion of an occupation. I waited for three minutes, then rang again. This time there was a sound of movement within the flat, and the door was cautiously opened. A helmetted head was thrust through the aperture and a curt voice inquired my business.

"Telephone Service," I replied, pushing at the door.

"You'll have to leave it. This flat is in the hands of the police, and——"

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"It's all right. We know that. I have permission——"

"Oh! Come in then"—ungraciously and unwillingly.

I entered. . . . A huge fist caught me on the point of the chin.

Thus my introduction to a man who, in after years, was my most trusted—I mean trustful—lieutenant. I'm prepared to admit that, at the time, I cut a most ignoble figure, but believe me, I made up for the indignity later. Oh, yes! I received full compensation for that blow on the jaw.

I suppose that I was knocked out for but a few seconds, possibly for just about the Marquis of Queensberry's minimum, for I felt myself being dragged along the floor, and realised that, subconsciously, I was still gripping the handle of my black bag. I was flung without ceremony into a corner, and was surprised to find that I wasn't the only occupant, for there, securely bound and gagged, was my old friend, the ex-naval constable. His eyes were closed, and I wondered, without compassion, whether he were dead or merely unconscious. Strangely enough, I felt no fear for myself, for, the muzziness clearing from my head, I began to take stock of my position. And it was much better than I anticipated, for my assailant had his back turned towards me and was frantically stuffing the broken telephone instrument into a brown paper carrier. Quietly I stood to my feet, and taking from my bag an old revolver—which, had I but dared to fire would probably have burst—said, in a voice cold and menacing, "Stick 'em up."

The effect was electrical. The man crouched with his back towards me, his shoulders hunched and with a ridiculously small police helmet perched on his head. He dropped the paper carrier and the telephone instrument and spread the fingers of his hands like the talons of some predatory bird. Slowly his fingers clenched and he turned

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with a snarl. The fact that I did not move a muscle save to point the muzzle of my revolver straight at his head seemed to bid him pause.

As a matter of fact, I was somewhat startled, although I must admit that now I would find the phenomenon perfectly natural. The man with the ill-fitting helmet was not a constable with an eye to the main chance, but was none other than the recently-escaped Pearson. I decided to be blasé.

"Good evening, Mr. Pearson. This is indeed a pleasure."

He growled. I learned afterwards that he took me to be a detective or similar myrmidon of the law.

"Oo're you?"

"Never mind that. I'm after the Columnar necklace. Freely I admit it. You may lower your hands, but any funny business . . ." I waggled my obsolete revolver suggestively. I discovered then that Mr. Pearson, to put it coarsely, had no guts, for he wilted, muttered faintly something about it being "a fair cop," and seemed at the point of tears. "You can go and see if the course is clear, and you can bolt if you like"—he glared at me, apparently surprised at my generosity—"or you can see the matter out with me."

He did not stop to consider my proposal, but nodded his head quickly and decisively.

"I'll take a chance wiv you, guv'ner."

"Right. Take a peek out of the door, and let me know whether it is safe to bolt."

Without further ado he hurried to carry out my instructions. It may be thought that I took a big chance, presuming Pearson to be armed, but I reasoned thusly: the man had but recently escaped from his guard, and it is to be presumed that—big fools as the police may be—at least they would have made certain that he was unarmed before starting their abortive attempt to gaol him; and further, any firearms found on the premises of this flat would have been confiscated as additional evidence

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of the ferocity of the man Pearson. As I have stated—Pearson rushed to do my bidding.

As soon as he had left the room I acted. Seizing my black bag I dragged therefrom a telephone instrument—filched from an empty flat next to my own—and promptly exchanged it for the one already packed in Pearson's paper carrier. This was the second plan—already referred to, or at least, part of it. For I had intended to exchange the instruments if I had been allowed into the flat by the police, and walk away ostensibly to find some forgotten tool!

"All clear, mate." Pearson returned, and looked to me for instructions.

"Good!" I peered at the man through lowered eyelids, as if coming to a decision. "I'm going to trust you, Pearson. You can take your swag and bolt. But you've got to divvy up with me afterwards. I want fifty per cent. of the proceeds, see?"

"Sorry, sir, but there's anover bloke in wiv me. You can avver third."

"Good enough! Where can I find you?"

He gave me an address without hesitation, which I did not trouble to note.

"Thanks. You push off now. I'll follow in a minute or two."

"Thank *you*, sir. You're a torf."

I nodded adieu, and looked out of the window. Coming up the steps of the main entrance to this block of flats was a man whom, even in the failing light, I had no difficulty in recognising as Inspector Higgins. My first impulse was to warn the unsuspecting Pearson, but, fortunately, wiser counsels prevailed.

I had to act quickly. I ran through the flat to the rear rooms and discovered that there was a goods service lift on the outside wall, communicating with the kitchen. My black bag was quickly recovered, and, with but a back-

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ward glance to the still unconscious policeman, I closed and locked the kitchen door.

The lift, unfortunately, was manipulated solely by hand, and, as a test of sheer strength, I suggest to any interested party the following: Just try to lower yourself in one of these lifts! First of all there is the question of balance; then that awkward decision which has to be made as to whether one will stay with the box-lift or with the rope—each of which pull against the other. Couple this to the fact that I was at least forty feet in the air, and the wonder is I did not turn grey. I placed my black bag on the floor of the lift, then I seized the rope and hung on to it like grim death before trusting my body to the lift. Then a most agonising moment during which my arms seemed to be almost pulled out of their sockets. Then hand over hand, with infinite care, I lowered myself in the lift.

I was but half-way down when there was a shout from above, and an inkwell came hurtling in my direction. How futile!

I let go of the rope and crashed to the ground. A minute later I was walking briskly towards Maida Vale tube station.

It was when I was stopped by a policeman outside the station, that I gave Inspector Higgins full marks for throwing that inkwell; for the constable pointed out, in a very friendly manner, that I had spilled some ink on my shirt front. Had he but known how near we both were to death at that moment—for I had almost decided to fire my ancient revolver—I think he would have kept his well-intentioned remarks to himself.

"Th-that's all r-right, c-c-constable," I remarked with a deliberate stutter, and ran down the steps.

As a matter of fact, all ended happily as far as I was concerned. Pearson, as foreshadowed by Inspector Hig-

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gins, got seven years, with six strokes of the "cat" for violence to the ex-naval constable; Inspector Higgins received official congratulations for his part in the recapture of Pearson; a carefully worded notice appeared asking for information *re* an inkstained suspect who stuttered; and I got the Columnar diamond necklace!

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# CHAPTER III

## IN WHICH BOBBY BAYNES INTRODUCES HIMSELF

THE last paragraph of the preceding chapter succinctly describes the happenings of the subsequent three months. Pearson's trial—and his fruitless appeal—lasted two months, and throughout the proceedings he reiterated his ignorance of my identity and of the whereabouts of the Columnar necklace—and was politely disbelieved. I, too, was far from inactive. In the first place I took my inkstained suit and, having removed therefrom all tell-tale tailor's tabs and similar marks, deposited it at the left-luggage office at Baker Street Station, giving the name of the only acquaintance of mine possessed of a congenital stutter. A bit crude perhaps, but he had a devil of a time convincing the police of the authenticity of his alibi. Fortunately for him it was cast-iron.

Then again, immediately after my escape from the flat, I rang up Scotland Yard and asked whether Inspector Higgins could give me an appointment without delay—at once, if possible.

I was courteously informed that the inspector was otherwise engaged and fixed an appointment for the following morning. He eventually gave me an interview, somewhat ungraciously, and with my tongue in my cheek I told him how sorry I was that he had been unable to see me the previous evening when I had telephoned. Dear me! If only he had!

I thanked him warmly for his kindness in allowing me to accompany him to Pearson's flat the previous day, and obtained from him an invitation to come to him at any



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time, when, provided he was not as busy as he was at present, he would always be glad to see me! I took the hint, and went.

It is one thing to have in one's possession a diamond necklace worth eighty thousand dollars, but an entirely different horse to realise anything of its value. One has to be so circumspect. I found the thing as I had anticipated, inside the telephone instrument, the bottom of which I had to unscrew before the necklace was revealed. I had wondered at the outset why friend Pearson had been trying to bolt with the entire instrument instead of the necklace only, as one would have thought. This unscrewing business explained his ostensible foolishness—for, seemingly, he had no time to retrieve the jewels from their peculiar hiding place and had, perforce, to take the hiding place with him. He must have had a bit of a shock when he realised that he had bolted with the wrong telephone instrument! It amuses me even now when I think of it.

The necklace was superb. Had it not been for my pecuniary liabilities at that time, I do not doubt but that I should have been tempted to keep it merely from pride in its possession. Still—needs must *et cetera, et cetera.*

It was a definite handicap knowing no "fence," as the purchasers of stolen goods, *vide* the yellow Press, are called. Here I had a fortune in my hands and no means of realising it!

I spent many a happy hour at the Old Bailey listening to Pearson's trial, being careful to sit at the back of the court in case the prisoner should recognise me. Not that I imagine that, from our very short acquaintance, he could possibly do so, but—careful is my middle name. In fact I became adept in calculating the capacity of the court, and would often wait until the queue was a certain length before I would take my position therein—thus ensuring

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that I would be in the back row. On one occasion I overdid it, and had to stand. It was most annoying!

Coming out of the court on the third day of the trial I ran into Inspector Higgins.

"Hallo, Mr. Scott. Gathering local colour?"

"Yes, Inspector. That, and the fact that I feel a sort of proprietory interest in the case. Having been over the scene of the slaughter," I added hastily.

"Oh, I see!"—casually, yet thoughtfully. Then and there I decided that never again would I endeavour to be clever and to play upon words merely for my own amusement whilst in the inspector's company. He was apt to jump to a right conclusion too quickly for my liking.

I invited him to lunch, and basked in a lot of reflected glory when he was discreetly pointed out by some of the other customers.

Three weeks after the conviction of Pearson, and with the matter of the disposal of the necklace still undecided, I returned to my rooms, whereupon my landlady informed me that a gentleman had called to see me. This, of itself, was somewhat unsettling, for, though I do not boast a conscience—let alone a guilty one—nevertheless, the matter caused me some concern. You see I had no friends. True, my original introduction to Inspector Higgins had been obtained from my local M.P., and I see, on looking back, that I referred to him as a friend, yet I must confess I had never met him, and that, without a doubt, he gave me the intro. more with an eye to a future election than from any of the courtesies of friendship. I had no friends, yet a "gentleman" had called to see me.

I quote the word advisedly, for, to my landlady, there are three distinct types of human beings which she classifies according to their outward appearances. (*a*) Persons: said with a thinly-veiled deprecation and typifying someone very low in her social scale. (*b*) Men and women: the

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intermediates who were not exactly "Persons" and certainly not, in her opinion (*c*) Ladies and gentlemen. This class consisted merely of well-dressed or apparently affluent citizens. I believe that at that time I was hovering between (*b*) and (*c*) in my landlady's estimation.

"Gentleman!" Did Inspector Higgins come within this category? And why, at this juncture, think of Inspector Higgins? I must pull myself together. Definitely, I decided that he did, and for a moment felt like a cornered rat (I don't like the simile, but I cannot think of a more appropriate expression).

"He's gone now, sir. But I let him go to your room as he wished to write a note." My expression must have changed, for she added quickly: "I hope that was all right, sir?" Apprehensively I nodded affirmatively, afraid to trust my voice, and nervously mounted the stairs to my room. I pushed open my door and peered into the room, afraid at what I might see.

Nothing! Literally nothing! Not even the note which this mysterious gentleman wished to write. Very, very suspicous. And it wasn't Scotland Yard, for I was convinced that a pretty thorough search had been made, and the Yard, I believe, is very meticulous with regard to search warrants. Not that there was any real evidence of a search, mind you—but nevertheless, I was convinced that one had been made. For instance, my pyjamas had been folded—carelessly it is true—yet that is a thing I rarely do; and my landlady, on principle, refuses to rectify my omissions. I slept ill that night.

The following week was a nightmare. I was jostled in the street; nearly run over by a taxi; became an unwilling combatant in a street-corner fight; and was offered innumerable drinks by innocent-looking strangers; and generally would have gone to the police forthwith for protection, but for—the Columnar necklace.

Yes. That was it. The diamonds. Yet how had I given myself away? Not a soul could possibly know that they

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were in my possession, save Pearson, and he was due for seven of the best. A mystery. I decided to stay at home until the trouble had blown over.

I woke in the middle of the night with a vague feeling of unrest. At first I attributed it to the natural reaction to the excitement of the previous week, then—dimly outlined at the foot of my bed I perceived a still form. Cautiously I groped beneath my pillow until my fingers closed upon the butt of my ancient revolver, and my courage returned with a rush. I felt for the electric light switch near the head of the bed and deflected it, using, at the same time, the identical formula which had proved so effective in dealing with Pearson: "Stick 'em up!"

Seated at the foot of the bed was a man of under thirty years of age. His trilby hat, pushed back from his head, revealed brown curly hair. His right foot swung idly at the side of the bed, whilst his left leg was drawn up until his chin, square and strong, rested upon the knee. His hands clasped his left ankle and helped to hide the wonderful hue of his sock. I envied him his clothes. An unlit cigarette was stuck jauntily in the corner of his mouth.

"Stick 'em up!" It was humiliating to have to repeat the order.

He surveyed me quizzically for a moment, then:

"You know you ought to be in the pictures, sonny!"

"Stick 'em up, blast you!"

"Naughty! Naughty!" A twinkling smile revealed white strong-looking teeth. Laughingly he felt for his matches, lit the cigarette, then rested his head on the bedrail and blew a ring of smoke to the ceiling—a picture of indolent ease.

There was a tense silence—at least, tense on my part, for already I could not cope with the situation. Then, slowly my anger was mastering me, and I feared the consequences to both of us should I pull the trigger. The

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immediate consequences I mean, not the shadow of the gallows. The stranger looked at me.

"Supposing you discard the—er—museum piece"—with an airy wave of his hand at my revolver—"and we'll talk business."

"And what business can I talk with you?" Rapidly I was regaining my composure. "Who are you, anyway? A detective?"

He smiled delightedly, and instinctively I knew that I had said the wrong thing.

"Detective, eh? Now I wonder why our melodramatic friend should think of detectives, when an—er—honest man would be thinking rather of burglars or similar midnight marauders?" he inquired of the world at large, much to my discomfiture. "As to my name. A rose, *et cetera*. Still. How about Robert Baynes? Bobby for short and in the interests of alliteration."

"Well, Bobby Baynes. And what can I do for you?"

"That's more like it." Baynes stood up from the foot of the bed, walked to the firegrate, threw his cigarette into the dead ashes, and turned to me, his face keen and businesslike.

"As a preliminary, suppose you hand over the Columnar necklace."

"And suppose I don't!"—belligerently. A statement, not a question.

He looked at me through narrowed eyelids. "We won't suppose anything so foolish, although I'm thankful for your tacit admission that you've got it. Come along, Scott. Hand it over."

"It's likely, isn't it?"

"It's more than likely—it's a certainty."

"Look here, Baynes. I'm armed, and——"

"You're not. So you can cut that out!" He interrupted in so certain a tone of voice that without more ado I broke the breech of my revolver, and gave a start as I realised that it was not loaded.

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"I—er—take all necessary precautions, Scott"—smilingly. "So—er—what about it?"

For the space of a few seconds there was a complete silence, whilst mentally I reviewed the position. I was left holding the baby, and it might be worth my while to dicker, particularly bearing in mind the fact that I alone knew the whereabouts of the Columnar necklace.

"Well? What d'you suggest?"

"You hand over the necklace, and I'll give you one hundred pounds for your trouble. *And* say no more about it."

One hundred pounds. The hypothetical newspaper fee for my story! I laughed shortly.

"Try again!"

He looked at me—somehow his expression chilled. "Considering the dirty trick you played on my friend Pearson, the offer is exactly one hundred pounds too much. In spite of popular opinion to the contrary, there is a certain honour—elementary I grant you!—amongst—er—thieves."

"Pearson offered me a third," I stated, stung to a reply.

"Ah! That was very generous of him. And you decided to take the lot!"

"It wasn't his, anyway."

Baynes burst into a chuckle of complete merriment. "Mr. Scott, your casuistry amuses me. I have neither time nor the inclination to argue with you. As Pearson offered you a third, his offer will stand. And now *I'll* offer you some advice, free, gratis and for nothing: Hand over the necklace without more ado, and thus make sure of your third. To you it's a white elephant. You can't realise on it, and you haven't a dog's chance of selling it to that wealthy American with money but no conscience, so convenient in books. To me—although I cannot get more than one-third of its value—the selling of the necklace is mere child's play."

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Still I hesitated. One-third of one-third made my proportion something short of two thousand pounds. And I'd reckoned on . . .

"Come on. Make your mind up!" Baynes glared at me ferociously.

"All right!" Throwing aside the bedclothes, I groped for my slippers; then I walked to the door, upon which was hanging the disreputable cap which I had worn in my guise as a telephone mechanic. I tore open the lining.

Then I gave a gasp.

The necklace had gone!

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# CHAPTER IV

## IN WHICH BOBBY BAYNES TAKES MATTERS IN HAND

"HAVE you ever been on the stage, Mr. Scott?" The ridiculous question, coming as it did so quickly upon my consternation at discovering the loss of the Columnar necklace, roused my ire.

"What on earth are you driving at?"

"But have you?" he persisted quietly.

"In a small way. Why?" Thus modestly did I inform him of my many successes as a leading light in our local Amateur Dramatic Society.

"I knew it." It pleased me to think that he had heard of me.

"Yes. I used to be pretty good."

"And still are. Suppose you have another look,"—smilingly.

The implication was so patent that for a moment it completely took my breath away. I turned, glared balefully at Baynes and strode forcefully in his direction, with the mental determination of knocking his block off. Indolently he rose to meet my onslaught, and the fact that he was at least a head taller than me, bid me pause.

"Blast you. D'y' think I'm play-acting?"

"If you are, you've missed your vocation." Gone was his indolence. Bobby Baynes became a man of action.

"There this morning?"

"Yes."

"You didn't leave the house to-day!" A statement.

"I did. For half an hour, to get a drink."

"H'm. Must have missed you"—thoughtfully to himself.



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"I'm getting careless in my old age." Then: "You haven't left the house for a week."

"You seem to know a lot about me."

"Naturally. It's my business to do so. And whilst I was watching you, someone was watching me. Slick Sims? I don't think so—he kills his own meat. Got it! It was Beefy Bull." He stopped his ruminations and turned to me.

"Scott! I know where our necklace is."

"Good! Let's go and get it."

He smiled. "Obviously you don't know Beefy Bull. He's one of those scabs who wait until an enterprising colleague has—er—pulled off a successful deal, and then lifts the swag from its new owner, from whom, obviously, there is no kick coming. Sort o' trick you played on Pearson"—in parenthesis and with a sniff of disgust. "Still, you know no better, whereas Bull . . . H'm. We must attend to Master Bull. Get dressed!"

Not being used to it I resented the tone of his order, but if I ever hoped to see any part of my two thousand pounds it was obvious that I must hook up with Baynes. I dressed.

Whilst doing so I settled a point which had been at the back of my mind since first becoming aware of Baynes' identity.

"How did you get on to me, Baynes?"

"Simps! When a man of a similar build to one described by both Pearson and Inspector Higgins as having lifted the Columnar necklace takes such an interest in the trial of Pearson, but always sits at the back of the court even though there are seats to spare at the front, then that man seemingly knows something. When coupled with this, the same man has a hectic week of jostling and so forth *without* applying for police protection, then that man has something to hide. You see, I spent a few hours in court myself."

A sudden fear assailed me.

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"But if it is so obvious to you—what about the police?"

Baynes shrugged his shoulders. "Friend of Higgins, aren't you?"

"Not exactly, but . . ."

"He's vouched for you, I'll bet."

I breathed a sigh of relief as the explanation dawned upon me. "Of course. I'm assimilating local colour. Higgins was showing me over the flat when he received news of Pearson's original escape."

"Yes. That was a bit of hard luck. I engineered the taxi accident. Lot of expense and no result. But let me warn you, young man"—he wagged an expressive forefinger in my direction—"don't take Higgins too cheaply. He can see as far through a brick wall as most."

I laughed. He turned sharply towards me, and said impressively:

"You seem to have embarked upon a—er—career of crime. One day you will feel a tap on the shoulder. It'll be Inspector Higgins offering to accompany you on a little walk."

"Speak for yourself."

"Oh! Higgins'll get me before he's finished"—carelessly.

I dismissed the matter with a shrug. Then:

"And how did this—er—Beefy Bull person get on to me?"

"He didn't. Bull got on to *me*. He knew I was Pearson's sidekick, and from his process of reasoning, deduced that I had the Columnar necklace, vainly imagining Pearson's yarn of your intervention being all my eye—until he discovered that I was after you. Then he—er—stepped in."

I finished lacing my boots.

"Ready?"

"O.K."

There was a knock at the door.

Baynes glanced at me. Not apprehensively, but rather

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quizzically. For the moment I was flustered, then, with my forefinger to my lips enjoining silence, I tiptoed to the window. We climbed out on to the roof of the garage beneath, and two minutes later were hurrying away from my house in the protective shadow of a high wall.

"I got in that way," remarked Baynes, nodding his head in the direction of the house.

"And that's how I got out to get my drink."

"Ah! That's how I missed you—and how Bull got in. He didn't waste much time."

The "Pink Mouse" at three o'clock in the morning was a rum-looking place. We had to walk the entire distance from my house, and by the time we arrived there I was feeling pretty weary. Most of the journey was covered in silence. For my part I was somewhat apprehensive as to the identity of the person who had knocked at my door at 2 a.m., whilst Baynes seemed to be cogitating on his coming interview with Beefy Bull. I imagine he was merely planning his campaign, for he did not seem at all frightened by the prospect, and kept up a particularly irritating whistle during the major part of our journey—not penetrating, but merely tuneless. At last:

"Ah! Here we are!"

We had, but a few seconds previously, turned down an alley-way, a cul-de-sac, and facing us at the end of the alley was a wooden door with an iron grille. Baynes stepped to the door and rapped smartly thereon with his knuckles. It was a distinctive rap—long, two shorts and a long—like a Morse X. A silence before I became aware of a pair of eyes peering from behind the grille. It was eerie at that time of night. Soundlessly the door opened.

"Come in, Bobby. Wot abaht 'im?" with a jerk of his head in my direction.

"He's with me for to-night."

We entered the place, and the door closed silently behind us. We were in an ill-lit passage showing every sign

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of decay, whilst the porter-fellow carried a dilapidated, evil-smelling lantern.

"Quiet-like 'ere to-night, Bobby."

"The Bull about?"

"Ain't seen 'im fer a week or more. Can't've bin pinched or we'd've 'eard the 'oller from 'ere."

"Ma Boggs available?"

"Wot d'y'want wiv 'er, Bobby?" suspiciously.

"Ah! Then she *is* in. I'll see her."

"Lumme, Bobby! Giv' us a chanst. I——"

"Lead on, MacDuff."

"That ain't me nime, and yer know it."

Baynes waited no longer but pushed by the porter, and together we descended a flight of stone steps. At the bottom hung a heavy curtain from beyond which came the tinkling strains of a tinny piano. I would have marched boldly in but for Bobby's restraining arm.

"Better let me go first, unless you want a bullet through the stomach."

I shuddered, not so much at the thought of the bullet, as from the casual way he said it. He crept to the curtain, gently pulled it away from the wall, then, with one eye, viewed the company behind it. After a close scrutiny:

"All clear, Scott. Follow me."

He strode into the room, entirely oblivious of the glances flung in his direction, whilst I followed sheepishly behind.

It was a cell-like place, about forty feet square, with a door curtained off, exactly opposite the one by which we had entered. Round, marble-topped tables were scattered round the room, at which sat ill-assorted couples, garishly dressed, with some in a state, seemingly, of undress. The air was heavy with smoke for which there was, apparently, no outlet save the curtained doors. Half a dozen evil-looking men were playing cards in the corner on our extreme left, and they did not deign to look up when we entered. For the rest, after a first glance at

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which Bobby was recognised, and a suspicious snapping of the eyes at me, they resumed their varied occupations.

Bobby walked straight across the room to the curtains opposite. We had almost reached the curtains when our way was barred by a huge negro. He appeared, apparently from nowhere, his huge bulk obscuring half the curtain. A white muffler round his neck served but to accentuate the colour of his skin, whilst the clay pipe clenched in his sparkling teeth added to the incongruity of his appearance. Never before, and certainly not since, have I seen a negro with a pipe. A negress—yes—but a negro . . . !

"Wot you want, suh?"

"Ma Boggs, Sambo."

"Ma name ain't Sambo, an' you knows it. Ma Boggs is engaged. She tol' me so."

"That's all right, Sambo. She's expecting us."

"She ain't."

"Now look here, Lincoln. Ma Boggs is with the Bull, and is just waiting for us to come along. I expect she forgot to tell you. You can ask her if you like—but you know what Ma Boggs is. Don't blame me if she bites your ears off."

The negro was obviously in a quandary. His fear of the quaintly-named Ma Boggs was very real, in spite of his enormous size, and the seemingly straightforward suggestion that he ask the lady whether she wished to see Baynes did not aid him in his decision. As a general rule a negro has a one-track mind, and I realised then something which I confirmed later, that as a convincing bluffer Bobby Baynes had no peer. He could make a gold brick syndicate appear a gilt-edged investment. Whilst the negro was making up his mind Baynes acted.

"Don't you worry, Sambo. I'll explain to Ma Boggs."

Unceremoniously he pushed the man aside, and as I followed, the negro was still muttering something about his name being Lincoln. Thus we jumped our second fence.

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Baynes pulled the curtain aside to reveal a heavily-built wooden door behind it. He grasped the handle and slowly turned it. Then he pushed the door open and stepped through the aperture. I followed and shut the door behind me. For a moment I was blinded by the light from an electric globe. I shielded my eyes. Seated at a table was the most repulsive woman I had ever seen; large and shapeless, with ill-kempt hair and swarthy skin. She was chewing the end of a lighted cigarette with her yellow teeth. Also seated at the table was a man—huge, big-chested and of immense muscular development. A bowler hat, thrust well back from his forehead revealed no hair; he had no eyebrows, and his cheeks were as smooth as a child's. He blinked rapidly in our direction and I realised, with a shudder, that he had no eyelashes. A mighty hairless creature of most repellent mien. His very appearance made me feel sick. If this were the man who had the Columnar diamonds, he could keep them for all the trouble I should take to recover them. An aura of evil hovered over him.

I fingered my lower lip in undisguised apprehension. Gosh! I'd give anything merely to get away from his fearsome presence.

And then he spoke.

"Well?"

A high-pitched, squeaky whisper—if I can so describe it. The merest suggestion of sound, which set my teeth on edge. I realised the truth of Baynes' statement that when this man stole from a thief, there would be no kick coming. Not from me, anyhow! Bobby Baynes straightened his tie, and gazed impudently at the pair seated at the table.

"Well." He smacked his lips appreciatively. "Here we are again!"

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# CHAPTER V

## IN WHICH BOBBY BAYNES STANDS UP FOR HIS RIGHTS

SLOWLY and ponderously the man rose from his seat, easing his huge bulk from beneath the table and sliding back his chair with one foot. To add to his unwholesome aspect he had a cast in one eye, whilst the other winked malevolently at Baynes.

Had I been alone I should have bolted. As it was, I was fascinated, petrified to the spot by an overwhelming curiosity: I could conveniently drag in here the outworn simile of the snake and the rabbit. Relentlessly, with shuffling steps, the man advanced towards us. I retreated at the same pace.

Bobby Baynes, however, stood his ground. Then, without looking round:

"Scott. There's a door behind you—lock it!"

The mesmeric tension was broken, I swung on my heel, stepped to the door and turned the key. When I looked round again but a yard separated the pair. The Bull was still advancing, but barely an inch at a time. I could see that his jaws were working as though chewing some imaginary gum. He thrust his head forward and hunched his shoulders—even thus crouched he looked taller than Bobby. His feet stopped their shuffling, his fingers hooked like claws; his jaw was out-thrust and his knees bent like a beast about to spring.

Smack!

The next moment he was lying on his back, a look of the most ludicrous surprise on his face, his good eye blinking rapidly in Bobby's direction.



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"You waited too long, Bull. Besides I don't bluff worth a cent."

A silence, whilst the Bull, his eye still on Baynes, slowly rose to his feet.

"Get up and eat him, you big stiff." A shrill voice broke the sound of his laboured breathing—Ma Boggs had found her voice at last. I looked at her, a veritable virago, her eyes glaring malevolently at the pair of us, and the thought crossed my mind that, for the moment, she looked even more aggressive than the mighty Bull. She threw her cigarette to the floor and ground it beneath her heel, then, arms akimbo, she stood and waited.

The Bull backed slowly to the wall, and, without taking his eye off Baynes, groped with one hand in the corner of the room. Then:

"Ah! Now, Mr. Robert Baynes," he squeaked. "Now we'll see who's who!" Rapidly he advanced, flourishing a heavy club. Still Bobby did not move.

"I—er—shouldn't do that, Beefy." Conversationally, with no hidden menace, yet the brute paused, disconcerted, dimly wondering what hidden ace Bobby could have up his sleeve. Then Bobby acted. With a cat-like spring he jumped at the Bull and seized his wrist. Whether or not Baynes had a knowledge of jiu-jitsu I did not know, but a second later the club dropped to the floor and, as regards weapons, the pair were on equal terms.

Ma Boggs screamed. Immediately there was a pommelling upon the locked door, and the negro's voice could be heard above the din, clamouring for a hatchet to smash the panelling.

Baynes and the Bull were locked in each other's arms swaying round the confined space, whilst Ma Boggs, still screaming at the top of her voice, dodged from side to side, and I stood irresolute with my back to the door.

With a herculean effort Bobby freed himself from the Bull's embrace, and staggered back a couple of feet, gulping huge breaths of the fœtid atmosphere into his tortured

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lungs. The Bull himself was in but slightly better fettle. He pulled himself together with a visible effort, and flung himself once more at Bobby.

Baynes avoided the clumsy rush by a delicate side-step and, as the Bull clattered past, landed a punch which would have knocked most men into the middle of next week. Seemingly its only effect on the Bull was to make him lose his balance, but before he could recover Bobby had landed another Dorbury, which made them both wince. Baynes frowningly rubbed his wrist.

Once more the two men sparred for an opening, and, before I knew what was happening, the Bull had landed a terrible punch which Baynes only half parried. I began to look about me for a means of escape, for if Baynes were going to be pulverised, things would be pretty unhealthy for me afterwards. I make no excuse: Safety First is a fairly good motto, being but the modern equivalent of the discretion-valour theory. Exactly opposite the door through which we had entered the room was a fireplace, with the dead ashes of a long-forgotten fire still reposing behind the rusty bars. There was no window: the spider's-parlour aspect of the place appalled me: Baynes had led us both into a trap by his cocksure methods. The only grain of comfort was the fact that, up to now, Baynes had almost held his own.

Baynes shook his head in a pitiful effort to clear his brain from the effects of that powerful blow. With a bellow, well in keeping with his name, the Bull advanced, victoriously, to finish his opponent. He made the mistake which many a better fighter than he had made before him: he underestimated the recuperative powers of his adversary. Bobby Baynes was not yet finished.

I have on occasion paid my ten dollars in New York to see a couple of reputed fighters tap at each other with padded gloves, whilst a crowd of frenzied spectators yelled both encouragement and abuse, and have more than once left the arena with the firm conviction that

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I have seen almost fifty cents' worth of excitement. This was different. I had a front seat for nothing. There were no rounds, no rules, and no ring. Neither were there gloves. Furthermore, the outcome would probably decide whether I were to spend the next few months in hospital myself.

"Kill him, Bull. Kill him!"

Beefy Bull turned and grinned at Ma Boggs as an expression of thanks for her timely encouragement: a mistake no experienced fighter would make. Baynes seized the opportunity. He hurled himself at the Bull, and launched a smashing blow straight from the shoulder with all his fourteen stone of meat and muscle behind it. The Bull took it on the point of the jaw.

It seemed, literally, to lift the man off his feet, and I had the barest fraction of a second to dodge aside as Beefy Bull crashed to the door. For an infinitesimal moment he stood upright with his back to the door, his arms outspread, then his knees crumpled beneath him and he collapsed to the floor.

For the second time since he had entered that room Bobby Baynes straightened his tie. Then he carefully brushed back his curly hair, and picked up his hat. He walked to the recumbent Bull and turned him over with the toe of his boot.

"You've had that coming to you for a long time," he apostrophised the unconscious figure. "And now you've got it."

A slight sound of movement behind me made me turn. I let out a yell.

"Look out, Bobby!"

Baynes ducked. Something whistled through the air and struck the door with a "spat," and there, quivering malevolently in the light from the electric globe, was a dagger. Bobby straightened himself and stared fascinatedly at the weapon until the vibrations had subsided. A crash on the other side of the door set it trembling

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again, as the impatient negro added his quota to the reigning pandemonium.

Bobby seized the dagger by the hilt, but it required all his great strength before he had released it from the woodwork. He turned. It was a long time before I forgot the expression on his face.

Ma Boggs' scream was the quintessence of fear, as Bobby Baynes advanced towards her.

"Madam, you have signed your own death-warrant."

"Help! Help!" An ear-piercing shriek.

Entirely unperturbed Baynes strode towards the nerve-shattered woman.

"There is one thing which can save you, Ma Boggs."

A pause. The hag was too frightened even to speak, merely nodding her head eagerly and thankfully.

Bobby Baynes held out his hand.

"The Columnar necklace, if you please."

She fumbled beneath her voluminous dress and handed over a glistening object without a word, furtively licking her slavering lips. Bobby's eyes never left the woman's face: he took the diamonds with his free hand and thrust them without a glance into his jacket pocket. The woman's eyes strayed to the door, and then lit up with an unholy light. Quickly Bobby turned. A glance was sufficient. Beneath the concentrated weight of the negro and his other friends outside the door, it was slowly giving way.

Bobby turned a complete circle as he hastily scanned the room, until his gaze rested upon an electric switch on the wall.

"The lights, Scott."

I ran to the switch, but stopped as the head of an axe crashed through the door with a teeth-edging, splintering screech.

"Are you paralysed or petrified? The lights, man, the lights."

The remainder of his vituperation was cut short by another crash with the axe. The door swayed on its hinges,

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and it was only the bulk of the inert Bull which prevented the door from opening and the angry crowd outside from pouring into the room.

Before I could move, Bobby Baynes stepped quickly to the switch and deflected it, ignoring Ma Boggs' agonised cry to let it alone.

Instead of an all-enveloping darkness, the solitary electric globe still functioned. The switch had failed. Bobby gazed at the light in dismay, and turned the switch back again. Above the din at the door there was a sound behind us. Instinctively we turned, and were just in time to see the entire fireplace slip back into its original position.

Bobby Baynes smiled in pure enjoyment, stretched out his hand in elaborate gesture, then, with a preliminary flourish extended his forefinger, and once more deflected the switch.

Slowly the fireplace swung open, revealing a dark aperture behind.

*"Voilà!"*

I smiled, partly at his antics, but mainly from relief. Still Bobby did not hurry. He stood beneath the electric globe and gazed at it speculatively, then at the dagger in his hand.

He smiled, and nodded his head, as though mentally confirming a decision. Then he hurled the dagger at the globe. There was a faint explosion, and simultaneously utter darkness. Immediately, through the cracks in the door, the eager crowd outside became visible. We crunched through the broken glass, then, hand in hand, crept beneath the open fireplace into the welcome blackness beyond.

We regained the street at the head of the alley-way, and, glancing down as we hurried past, we saw a pair of uniformed constables staring speculatively at the wooden door with the iron grille, from behind which excited, yet muffled, shouts were issuing.

Baynes grunted. "That'll give Ma Boggs and her satel-

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lites something to think about—they don't want the police nosing in there. I'd like to stay to see the outcome, but—come along!"

"Where?"

"My place. Can't very well go to yours until we've found out who was knocking on your door."

As he spoke we passed beneath a lighted lamp, and I caught a glimpse of his face.

"Gosh, Baynes. Your eye!"

"Yellowish-purple?"

"More or less. I thought the Bull had put paid to your account when he landed that lot."

"So did I. It was my own fault, too. That's the worst of battling with a swivel-eyed opponent. When I was initiated into the noble art of self-defence, my instructor told me always to watch the other fellow's eyes—the—er—windows of the soul—thus one can learn the other man's intentions almost before he knows them himself. In this case I watched the wrong eye. I doubt whether friend Bull has a soul, but I'm certain of this—he's only got one sound window thereto."

We walked along in silence, whilst I marvelled at what manner of man this Bobby Baynes was. He could see humour where none could be thought to exist; the recent battle was proof of his immense vitality and strength; his speech, the very intonation of his voice, suggested at least a public school education; yet against this must be set his open acknowledgment of his association with Pearson the convict, and the fact that the doorkeeper of the "Pink Mouse" addressed him by his first name: well known if not an habitué of a thieves' kitchen.

We marched on in silence, until it became irksome.

"Funny name—Pink Mouse," I ventured.

"Yes"—absently. "It becomes more obvious after you've sampled their liquor."

I gave it up, and relapsed once more into silence. An hour's walk, until the nature of the houses had changed

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and we were in an obvious suburban district. Then Baynes halted, laying his hand on my arm:

"A little circumspection is—er—indicated. Inspector Higgins suffers from inspiration, and occasionally—er ——" With infinite care he peered round a corner, and remained, without movement, for perhaps thirty seconds, then:

"All clear, Scott. Higgins is off duty."

Hurriedly we turned the corner, then Baynes marched boldly up to a house of three stories, semi-detached with garage. I followed.

Opening the front door with a tiny key he bade me enter.

"Welcome to my mansion, Scott," he said. "There are three flats here. All mine!"

I entered, and Baynes shut the door soundlessly, as though afraid to disturb his neighbours.

"To the victor—the spoils," he remarked, placing his hand in his jacket pocket, whilst he switched on the electric light with the other. A moment later the wonderful Columnar necklace nestled glistening in his hand.

He gave a gasp, then looked at me.

"I'm sorry, Scott, but the entertainment this evening has been of no avail."

"Why? What'd'you mean? Aren't they genuine?"

"Quite genuine"—quietly. "In fact so genuine that they must be returned."

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# CHAPTER VI

## IN WHICH MR. SCOTT CONTINUES HIS CONFESSION—

FOR the space of a few seconds I failed utterly to grasp his meaning. It seemed incongruous to me that a man should fight as he had done, if not exactly for his own, at least for something to which he considered he had a right, and then calmly suggest he did not want it. Then the possible explanation struck me and I smiled cynically:

"I see. The—er—Machiavellian Mr. Baynes will attend to the—er—return of the necklace, whilst the simple-minded Mr. Scott proceeds promptly to forget all about it, and the unlucky Mr. Pearson languishes in gaol. Oh, yes! I don't think!"

"Pearson? Yes. I was forgetting him."

"Still, he at least is conveniently out of the way," I suggested, with a sneer, somewhat overawed at my own temerity.

Without a word Baynes entered a room to the right of the hall, and beckoned me to follow. He pulled the curtains before turning on the electric light, then, with a wave of his hand, he indicated the sideboard, where a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda-water stood upon a tray.

"Glasses in cupboard. Help yourself."

Baynes walked to a beautifully upholstered settee, and slowly seated himself. With his left hand he groped at a smoker's companion, found cigarette and matches, then lit his cigarette, whilst his eyes stared thoughtfully at his feet. He looked up.

"I'm sorry, Scott, but as I said, this necklace must be returned. I cannot explain why—but there it is. I don't



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mind the least how it's done—you can do it yourself if you like, but it's got to be done. I must make it up to Pearson, but, candidly, I don't like making it up to you. In fact I don't intend doing so. You came into this by a mean trick, and by similar means bluffed Pearson for a third of the proceeds. Without me we should never have recovered the necklace——"

"And never have lost it," I reminded him, thinking of the way the Bull had got on to his track.

"True. Well, I'll make you an offer. As a general rule I'm a lone hand—this business with Pearson was rather an exception—but I'm willing to take you in with me on a fifty-fifty basis. Generous terms if you did but know it. And when Pearson comes out we will split three ways."

I considered this for a moment, then:

"Good enough."

He nodded. Thus casually began our association.

I stayed with Baynes for the remaining hour or so before daylight, and he convinced me of the advisability of returning to my digs.

"Flight, my lad, is a tacit admission of wrongdoing. Whoever knocked at your door during the night could have known nothing of the Columnar diamonds. Million to one against, anyhow. Go back and put up a bluff."

Easy enough for him, perhaps——

On my way home I purchased a pair of revolvers in a case and some ammunition. If I were to be a bandit I would be a pukka one. Besides, I had read somewhere that "Colonel Colt" made all men equal, and, as I was to share equally with Baynes, I needed some mechanical assistance to protect my share. You see I was still thinking of that fight with the Bull.

The landlady was responsible for my scare the previous night, for she thought she had heard voices! My explanation that I talked in my sleep was not well received, and

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from the naughty look she gave me, I am sure she considers me a bit of a *roué*. Let her!

A week later a reward of two thousand pounds was offered for the return of the necklace, "no questions asked." I telephoned to Baynes and suggested that this might pay Pearson's rake-off.

"Good suggestion, Scott, if only such an offer were legal. I somehow smell a rat."

Nevertheless, that very day, Bobby Baynes went to Scotland Yard. He told me about it afterwards in his quaintly humorous phraseology. Apparently he was fairly well known at the Yard, and he assured me that the constable at the gate fell down in a fit when he asked him whether he could see Inspector Higgins. The inspector himself had cheerily asked Baynes whether he had come to give himself up. Seemingly the police knew all about Bobby, but somehow lacked sufficient proof to lead to a conviction for any of his alleged misdeeds—and of this Bobby was well aware.

Baynes, without any beating about the bush, asked Higgins whether the advertisement were a trap.

"Not a trap, Bobby, but a mistake by a misguided woman with more money than brains. I told her that myself. She didn't thank me for the information; neither did she like the phrase 'compounding a felony.' I understand that the reward still stands, but the 'no questions asked' business has been dropped. So, if you know anything about it, Bobby, take my tip and forget it."

Higgins, however, agreed that Pearson stuck to his story about someone stealing it from him, but admitted it might be merely a figment of his very fertile imagination. He also agreed that Pearson might tell Baynes where he had hidden the necklace.

"But don't imagine, Bobby, that I'll be such a fool as to let him tell you where he's hidden it. I don't want to lose my last chance of recovering it."

"Thanks for the compliment. Supposing I give you my

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word of honour that, if Pearson reveals its whereabouts, I will return it to its rightful owner—what then?"

"Word of honour?" (I understand that Inspector Higgins did not laugh at this as I most certainly should have done.) "H'm!"

"I always keep it." (I can well imagine the dignity which Baynes would impart to such a statement.)

"Frankly, Bobby, I would trust you were it not outside your usual sphere. Generally speaking, you pull your own chestnuts out of the fire: it's not like you to claim a reward of someone else's labour."

"The reward to go to Pearson himself."

"H'm! That's different. I cannot condone the ethics, but let it pass. We cannot choose our own weapons, and I must admit that I'd very much like to get that necklace back."

The pantomime was faithfully followed. Baynes, under police escort, visited Pearson in prison, and they were left alone for exactly two minutes. What he said I do not know, but I imagine that Pearson must have been greatly mystified by the visit from Bobby. The escort duly returned to Scotland Yard, and Baynes asked for forty-eight hours free from police surveillance. I don't know the inspector's mental processes, but I imagine he decided to take a chance. I asked Bobby whether he thought he would be shadowed.

"No. Higgins, like myself, is a man of honour."

My titter changed to a cough.

Three days later the necklace was returned by registered post—anonymously—and a sum of two thousand pounds was invested in Five per cent. War Stock, in the name of James Pearson, the dividends to be utilised in the purchase of additional stock until further notice.

Shortly afterwards Baynes and I started a legitimate business as a cover for our more—er—unorthodox activi-

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ties. We set up as private inquiry agents, in the hope, as Baynes expressed it, of obtaining inside information likely to be of use in our real line of work. We tried to think of a name, and, in a weak moment, I suggested "Brains, Limited." He agreed that the description was more than apt, and that, although the difficulty might be overcome by using the abbreviated forms of the last word, somehow he was not in favour. He suggested (which suggestion was adopted) "Scott and Company."

I had a visit from Inspector Higgins within a month of our opening shop. He warned me against Bobby in a very friendly way, and hoped we were not setting up in opposition to the police, for, if so, we were likely to get ourselves into trouble for obstructing the police in the course of their duties.

"What most novelists, and ninety per cent. of the public, overlook, Mr. Scott, is that the—er—amateur detective doesn't stand a dog's chance against the regular force, and were he to interfere in any case upon which the official police were already engaged, he'd find himself promptly arrested, and would be hauled in front of the magistrates the following morning for obstruction."

I thanked him, both for his warning and for his kindly advice, but told him that Bobby Baynes had turned over a new leaf.

"That would be the best news I've heard for years, Mr. Scott, if only I could believe it. Good morning!"

During the next five years the syndicate made about twenty thousand pounds, and would have made considerably more had not Baynes objected to—well, to state it bluntly—blackmail.

"We're all liable at some time or another to make fools of ourselves, and that is no reason in itself why we should pay someone else to cover such foolishness."

Very nice and all that, but . . .

"No, Scott. We must keep our little business—er—

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clean. You're building up quite a rep. as a free-lance journalist, and I have seen you billed as 'our crime expert' on more than one occasion. Blackmail leads to complications. Once let the—er—victim appeal to the police, and—phut!—exit Messrs. Scott and Baynes."

We had occasional brushes with the Bull and his satellites. Beefy had never forgiven Bobby for the tremendous hiding he had once received, and if ever he could do us a bad turn he wouldn't think twice.

"Why don't you kill the swine and done with it?" I queried, after a very flagrant effort on the Bull's part.

"Not my line."

"Afraid?"

There was a silence whilst Baynes looked steadily in my direction.

"Of the consequences?" I amended, somewhat hastily.

"H'm!"

"I seem to remember on one memorable occasion that you threatened a certain lady with sudden death," I ventured.

He laughed. "Ma Boggs? I should have had a job. The blade of the dagger broke off as I was wrenching it from the door. I thought you noticed it."

Then Pearson was released from prison and joined us. We were a pretty competent team. In my character of a reporter I used to call upon all visitors of any means arriving from abroad. They paid me handsomely for the "write-up"; the papers paid me—not so handsomely—for the news par.; whilst my impressions were invaluable to Bobby when he came along to sell his pup. One visitor was on the look out for a mining proposition. Bobby sold him one! Another was buying pictures. Bobby found a convenient "family heirloom."

Then for some unaccountable reason Baynes fell in love. At least, not exactly unaccountable, for the lady in

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question was certainly a humdinger. I saw them together, dining at the Palatial. Sort of girl I should like for a wife. Of medium height, lissom, svelte, and—proud. Afterwards I asked Baynes for an introduction. I didn't get it, and didn't like the manner of his refusal. I made inquiries and found she was the Lady Muriel Beaumeere. Bobby was flying high!

Late one afternoon, calling at Baynes' flat, I found him ensconced with Inspector Higgins. Treachery! I waited, and when Baynes left the flat, leaving Higgins in possession, I was sure. I crept to the door and locked the inspector in the room. Then I went in search of Baynes, returning to the office on the off-chance of finding him, He greeted me coldly, and advised me to bolt.

"Why?"

"Inspector Higgins is after us, that's why."

"Higgins, eh? I'll chance it."

"Please yourself—I'm hooking it."

"Afraid?"

"Yes."

I did not see him again for about a month. It was Armistice Night, and a commemorative ball was in progress at the Palatial. I was there in a professional capacity, both as a reporter and as a—crook. And again he was with Inspector Higgins.

Time for me to act! I hurried home for my revolvers. There they were, in the case, as unused as the day I bought them, whilst still under the spell of Baynes' fury. I loaded them both, then placed one under a pillow to deaden the sound—and pulled the trigger. Having thus made preparation I rushed back to the Palatial. I almost collided with the inspector just outside the bar. It was unfortunate, but in my character of a reporter I whispered in his ear:

"Anything doing?"

Impatiently he shook me off, and I hurried upstairs to

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the large hall. Yes. There was Baynes, and talking to the Lady Muriel Beaumeere as though he hadn't a care in the world. I'd show him! I waited till the girl had gone, then I sidled up to him.

"Baynes," I whispered. "Catch hold of this. I believe H. is after you." I handed him the revolver from which one cartridge had been fired. He took the weapon wonderingly, although I almost had to force it upon him. I slid away. Then I waited. It was essential to the success of my plan that I catch him alone.

Inspector Higgins eventually returned to the table, and I decided to go to Bobby's flat, there to await his eventual return. I might utilise the time I had to wait in picking up any unconsidered trifles. Baynes would have no use for them after to-night!

I entered his flat with a key I had had made some months before, from a wax impression of Baynes' own key. I thought at the time it would come in useful if I waited long enough, and this occasion proved my foresight. I had scarcely begun my search when I heard a car draw up to the kerb outside the flat. I peered through the blinds. It was Baynes' car, and whilst I looked Higgins himself stepped out. Thank goodness for the street lamp so conveniently near! I was trapped. I hid behind a curtain. Higgins let himself into the flat—presumably with Baynes' key, and walked straight to the telephone. He asked for a Mayfair number, and then for Lady Muriel Beaumeere. And Baynes was alone—at last! The chance for which I had been waiting had come. With infinite care I slipped out of the flat. The inspector was too intent on the telephone to have noticed me had I walked out boldly!

Baynes was still waiting patiently at the wheel of his car. Proof enough that he was in no trouble as far as the police were concerned. I walked up to him. He saw me almost at once.

"Hallo, Scott. Better clear off—Higgins is inside."

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"What about you? I gave you a gun in case of an accident such as this."

"I know. And you'd better take it back. I'm through. Giving myself up, so to speak. I'm withdrawing from our partnership, too." Then, whimsically: "I told you Higgins would get me one day. And if I'm found with this on me, they'll add at least three years to my sentence."

He laughed, and pulled from his pocket the revolver which I had given him. As he did so, I shot him through the head.

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# CHAPTER VII

## —AND CONCLUDES IT

AND that, dear reader, was the end of Mr. Robert Baynes. He knew who'd got him, and I'm glad he knew. He flung up an arm in a futile effort to ward off my bullet, and I laughed in his face. So perish all traitors.

And Pearson and I are left to carry on, although I haven't seen *him* for over a week, and the police want him for something or other. I'll state here and now that I never did like Bobby Baynes. For a crook he put on too many airs. Lady Muriel Beaumeere indeed! That's like his gall. She'll have to look elsewhere for a husband now, and might do worse than look in my direction. What'll she think when she reads in the morning's papers that her lover has—committed suicide. There's no question of murder, you understand. Suicide. They used to bury 'em at the crossroads with a spit driven through their hearts, or something of the sort. It'd serve Baynes right if they treated him the same.

Since I got home to-night I've been busy writing this confession. But it's been a longer job than I anticipated, and I'm getting weary. And I'm sure to have a heavy day to-morrow writing up the suicide of that underworld character, "Bobby Baynes." I am, as a matter of fact, expecting every moment a telephone call from the *World*, informing me of the suicide and giving me the commission. If I weren't so tired I'd start now and save a little time. . . .

I feel muzzy. I keep thinking, for some unknown reason, of the Bull. If he starts his little gallops there will be no



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Baynes to act as buffer. Pity I threw the other revolver away. Thought it better in my hurried departure from Baynes' flat. Chucked it in the Regent's Canal.

And the Bull is an ugly customer; and Ma Boggs may still be alive: and Lincoln, the negro doorkeeper of the "Pink Mouse."

Bah! What if they are? I'm Scott. Afraid of nobody. Baynes was the king-pin till he met his equal, and more than equal, for I killed him.

I'll finish as I started.

I have killed a man!

It only remains for me to sign my name along the dotted line.

This is the dotted line.....

END OF PART ONE

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# PART TWO

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# CHAPTER I

## IN WHICH BOBBY BAYNES RETURNS TO THE HOME OF HIS FATHERS

ON the thirty-first day of January, in the year of Our Lord one thousand nine hundred and nineteen, half a dozen ratings from a destroyer lying up Sheerness creek were demobilised. Since the destroyer had left the Fourth Flotilla, after a somewhat hectic time on convoy work at Plymouth, it had been engaged for a month in masterly inactivity up Sheerness creek, until the ratings (other than active-service wallahs) had one and all applied to the skipper to accelerate their dismissal from the ship.

He, poor chap, could do nothing. Yet at last came the thirty-first day of January, and a happy band left the destroyer, which had been their only home for years—for ever.

The parting tears were non-existent. The aforementioned active-service men, having signed on for twelve years, viewed the departure with envious eyes, painfully conscious of the years still to run, and entirely oblivious of the fact that they, at least, had a home and a secure profession, whilst these others—at best merely amateurs, were returning to a world which had forgotten them, and, having managed without them for so long, did not want them.

The six, having received their pay and been passed fit by the ship's surgeon, boarded the trot-boat with all their belongings stuffed into their respective kitbags, and were duly landed at Chatham: unwanted—and damned glad of it!



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A drink was indicated. In fact six drinks were indicated. One complete round!

Ten o'clock and six happy ex-servicemen were incontinently slung out of the "Boar's Head."

Should o-old er-quaintance be fergot an'

Bobby Baynes watched, with twinkling eyes, the other five, rolling, with the exaggerated gait affected by amateur sailors, somewhat accentuated by their recent libations, down the street towards the station. He smiled.

"And that, seemingly, is that."

" 'Ullo, mate. Demobbed?"

"Yes."

"And now returnin' to the ancestral 'ome, what?"

"You've said it."

Bobby waited until his new-found acquaintance had gone, then he strolled to the station in the wake of the other five.

Half an hour later a huge Rolls drew up to the station gates, and a chauffeuse alighted. Bobby walked to the car and pitched his kitbag into the luggage carrier.

"Master Robert?" the girl queried.

Bobby nodded. "Home, Jamesina."

It was midnight when the car eventually drew to a halt. In spite of the lateness of the hour, the last few minutes of the drive had been in the nature of a triumph, for the entire village appeared to have turned out to welcome Bobby's return. He little thought when he had telephoned for the car that the news would have travelled so quickly. They cheered him through the lodge gates, and the sudden cessation of sound as he had passed through gave him a few moments respite during the drive up the gravelled path.

The huge Elizabethan mansion, which was his home, was lit up in every window and made an imposing sight which gladdened his heart. As the car drew to a halt, a

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slight, girlish figure ran from the heavy oaken doorway.

"Bobby!"

"Hallo, kid. You've growed."

A portly figure then emerged from the doorway, its gleaming shirtfront a spot of light in the darkness around. With dignified mien it began its descent of the front-door steps, then the pace was slightly accelerated, until, with a quaint waddle, the figure ran to the car and dragged therefrom Bobby's kitbag.

Bobby extended the glad hand, which the other seized.

"M-master Robert, sir—er—Master Robert, sir." The man broke off; then, with a rush: "B-Bobby lad, b-but I'm damned glad to see you again—er—sir. Er—begging your pardon, sir."

Bobby laughed. "You're a good scout, Thomson. And I'm—er—damned glad to see you, too."

"Now then, sir. No swearing. You know I'd never allow that!"

Bustling to hide his emotion, the white-haired old butler, rarely to be met outside the covers of a novel, struggled to lift the kitbag to his shoulder. With one hand Bobby Baynes lifted it to his back, and with the other resting affectionately upon the girl's arm, he strode to the house.

As he crossed the threshold he dropped the mantle of Bobby Baynes and became the Honourable Robert Beaumeere.

"His Lordship has retired, sir, but will see you in the morning."

"Thank you."

"Well, Robert. So you're back—safe and sound?"

The question was purely rhetorical, yet Bobby meekly answered it.

"Yes, sir."

"H'm! And now you are back, what do you propose to do?"

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