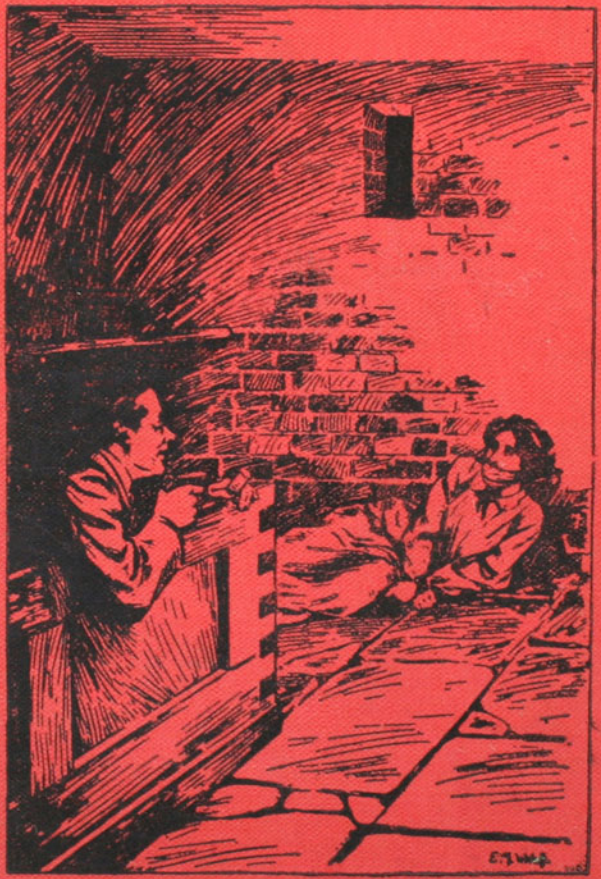
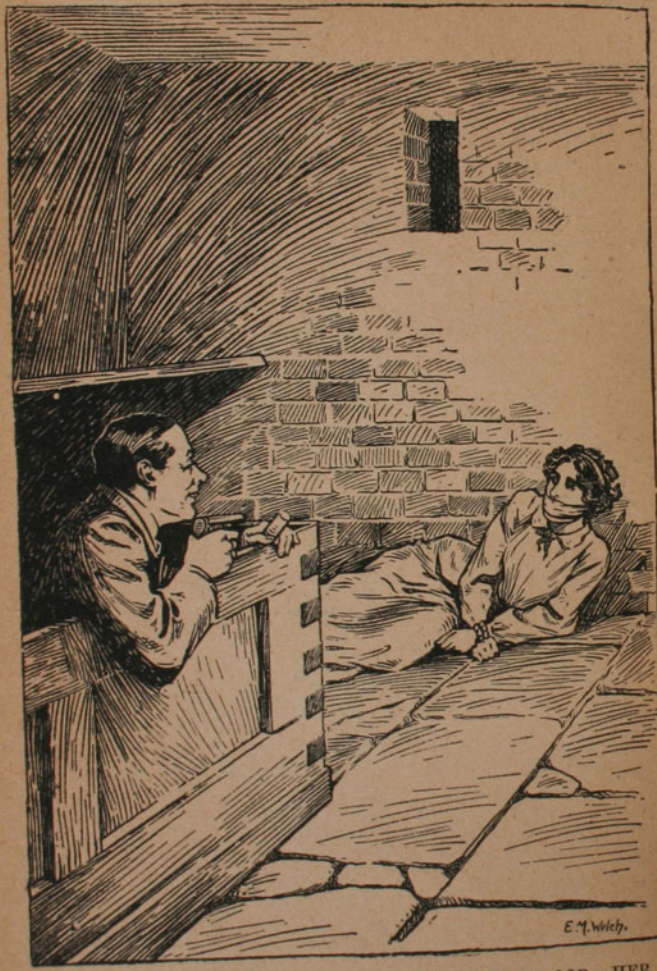
THE AMAZING MR. BUNN





A WOMAN, GAGGED AND BOUND, LAY ON THE FLOOR. HER EYES APPEALED TO HIM OVER THE GAG.

(p. 248.)

Frontispiece.

THE AMAZING MR. BUNN

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"FOLK OF THE WILD," "EASY MONEY," ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

THE ADVENTURE OF "THE BRAIN."

"I SHALL now proceed to give my celebrated imitation of a gentleman pinching a blood-orange," mused Mr. "Smiler" Bunn, the gifted pickpocket of Garraty Street, King's Cross, to himself, as he stood thoughtfully before a fruiterer's shop in a small street off Oxford Street. "A real gent hooking of the biggest blood-orange in the bunch!"

With this laudable intention he turned his gaze upon a fine pineapple that reposed aristocratically upon pink paper behind the plate-glass window, as the shopman came out and stood for a moment near the door, leaning against

the shop-front extension, which was piled with fruit—chiefly oranges, "blood" and otherwise. This part of the shop was in front of the window, and was unprotected save by the watchful care of the shopman.

"Nice little pineapple, that," said Mr. Bunn, casually.

"Pretty fair for the time of year," replied the shopman. "Will you take it?"

"Well, 'ow much is it?"

"Half a guinea," said the shopman.

Mr. Bunn shook his head. His resources at the moment totalled sevenpence only.

"Too dear," he decided, both hands plunged deep into his coat-pockets. "What's that little black-looking thing that keeps on running round the pineapple? Not a mouse, is it?"

The shopman plunged inside suddenly, with a frightful threat against all mice, and—Mr. Bunn's right hand flickered. Only flickered. Few people watching him would have cared to wager that his hand had left his pocket at all. Then he moved tranquilly away, and the biggest

blood-orange on the shop-front went with him. The celebrated imitation was over, and the performer had strolled calmly round an adjacent corner before the shopman had given up his search for the mouse.

"Very well done, old man," muttered Mr. Bunn. "I ain't sure but what you ain't improving. Your 'and has not lost its cunning, nor your heye its quickness."

He turned into Oxford Street, feeling distinctly encouraged by this small success, and mingled unobtrusively with the crowd of women who were looking at the shop windows and wondering why their husbands did not earn as much as other women's husbands.

Mr. Bunn had skilfully worked his way through the thickest of the crowd for over a hundred yards before he marked a lady who seemed sufficiently careless in the handling of her bag to call for his closer attention. He moved quickly to her. She was a handsome woman of middle age, with a determined face, and rather too strong a chin. She was exceedingly

well-dressed, and carried her bag in the bend of two fingers. At first she did not appear to be interested in the shops, but a hat dashingly displayed in a corner window suddenly caught her attention, and she stopped to look at it. Mr. Bunn paused for the fraction of a second immediately behind her. Then he went quietly on—round the corner (corners were a speciality of Smiler Bunn's). He did not look behind—he knew better. He simply lounged very slowly on, hoping the bag did not make too pronounced a bulge in his pocket. He looked quite the most unconcerned man in London, until he heard a sudden rustle of skirts behind him and felt a quick, firm grip on his arm.

"You are very unintelligent," said a sharp voice, and he turned to see the well-dressed woman who had been carrying her bag carelessly.

"Give me what you have in your right-hand coat-pocket at once," she requested him coldly.

"I dunno what you mean. I don't know *you*. What d'you mean?" asked Smiler, rather nervously.

"Do not let us have any nonsense, please," was her chilly comment. "Give it me at once."

Smiler put his hand in his pocket with desperate calmness and drew out—a remarkably fine blood-orange.

"It's the only one I got, but you can have it——" he began; but she interrupted.

"Do you want me to call the police?" she said. "Give me the bag instantly."

Smiler gave a sickly smile, put his hand into the other pocket, and, with a badly-feigned start of surprise, produced the bag.

"Why, what's this? However did this get there? This ain't mine—it don't belong to me!" he began, making the poor best of a very bad job.

But she cut him short. She took the bag, her quick grey eyes playing over him in a singularly comprehensive glance. She saw a clean-shaven, rather stout, butlerish-looking man of about thirty-eight, with a good-humoured mouth and a solid chin. He was extremely shabby, but neat, and obviously was in a state of considerable

embarrassment. She was about to speak, when Mr. Bunn pushed back his hat and passed his hand across his brow—a gesture evidently unconscious, and born of the mental stress of the moment. But her eyes brightened suddenly as they lighted upon his forehead, and her lips relaxed a little. For it was unquestionably a fine frontal development—a Brow among Brows. Assisted somewhat by a slight premature baldness, the forehead of Mr. Bunn was a feature of which its owner was acutely conscious. There was too much of it, in his opinion. It had never been of much use to him, and he was in the habit of considering its vast expanse a deformity rather than a sign of intellect. He was quite aware that it saved his features from being commonplace—he fancied it made them ridiculous instead. But evidently the lady of the bag did not think so. She was actually smiling to him.

"I should like to ask you a few questions," she said, "if you have no objection."

Mr. Bunn did not answer.

"*Have* you any objection?" she inquired sweetly, glancing across the road, where a dozen policemen were solemnly walking in Indian file towards their beats. Smiler regarded them for a moment—a most unpleasant sight, he considered.

Then, "No, no objection—not at all—not by no means," he said.

"Be good enough to accompany me, then," continued the woman, in a singularly business-like way. She moved slowly on, and Mr. Bunn walked by her side.

"Why are you a pickpocket?" she said curtly.

Mr. Bunn muttered something to the effect that he was not—strike him lucky if he was. But the woman ignored his denial.

"It is so foolish," she said. "So obviously unsuitable a profession for a man with your intellect. Why, with your forehead you should be carving out a great future, a career, a reputation."

Smiler stared suspiciously at her.

"You leave my forrid alone," he requested her. "I can't help having a thing more like a balloon than a 'eadpiece on my shoulders, can I?"

"But, my good person, don't you see what a great thing it is to have such a brain, and what a terrible thing it is for such an intellect to lie dormant? If all men had such intellect as your forehead tells me plainly you possess, you do not think we women would ever have asked for votes? Certainly not. It is because not one man in a hundred thousand possesses such a brain as yours that we have decided to fight for our rights. And when I think of the possibilities of yours, when I think of the latent power in your glorious head, that only needs training and shaping to the Idea. When I think, Here I have in its practically fallow state a Brain of Brains which belongs to me, and is my own to mould as I like—unless its owner wishes to be sent to prison for six months in the third division with hard labour — can you wonder that my whole spirit takes fire,

and I cry aloud, yet again — 'VOTES FOR WOMEN!'"

It was a truly lusty yell, and it gave Mr. Bunn an unpleasant shock. Every one within hearing turned to stare at the woman, but she seemed blandly unconscious of their scrutiny. She gripped the unnerved Smiler's arm and became business-like again.

"Understand me," she said. "I consider you a Find, and I propose to keep you—unless, of course, you prefer to be handed over to the police. I can see that you are a man with immense possibilities, and those possibilities I intend to develop with the ultimate aim of devoting them to the Cause. Do you understand me? I propose to educate you. You shall become a lecturer, a champion of women's rights, a pursuer of the Vote. You shall be paid while you are being taught — and paid well — and when, in the course of time, I have stirred that great Brain out of its present inaction, it shall be devoted to our service and rewarded in proportion. No —

not a word. Come with me. I am Lilian Carroway."

Mr. Bunn felt dazed. Lilian Carroway! He knew now with whom he had to deal. The Suffragette who knew more about jiu-jitsu than any European and most Japanese. The woman who a few months previously had wrestled her way into the House of Commons over the bodies of many half-stunned and wholly astonished policemen, and had threatened to put a strangulation lock on the Prime Minister himself if he did not promise to answer a plain question. Taken by surprise, he had promised, and Lilian, rather flurried, had put the following question to him:

"VOTES FOR WOMEN?"

"I must have notice of that question," had been the suave, non-committal reply of the Prime Minister, and before the Suffragette had quite thought it out, the police had taken her by storm and removed her.

Smiler Bunn remembered the incident well

and congratulated himself on not having annoyed her.

She called a taxi-cab, and commanded him to get in. She gave the driver the address of the headquarters of the particular branch of the movement to which she belonged, and sat down beside the dazed pickpocket.

"Your fortune is made," she said briefly.

Mr. Bunn muttered "Certainly," in a very uncertain voice, and relapsed into a gloomy silence.

"I have no doubt that you consider yourself to be in a singularly unfortunate position, Mr.—er—what is your name?"

"Connaught," said Smiler, absently reading the first name he saw over a shop window. "Louisy Connaught."

"Louise Connaught! What an extraordinary name! How do you spell it? Louise is a woman's name."

"Well, some spell it one way and some another. I don't mind much."

"But it is a woman's name."

"Well, I was one of a twin," lied Mr. Bunn, uncomfortably, wishing he had taken a name from some other shop window. "We was mixed a little at the christenin', and me sister's name is Thomas."

"I see. How unfortunate!" said the Suffragette. Then she spoke the name over to herself several times: "Louise Connaught—*Louis* Connaught. Why, it's a splendid name—Louis Connaught. It has a royal sort of ring. Mr. Louis Connaught, I really congratulate you upon your name."

"Louis" smiled uneasily and avoided meeting her eye.

Then the "taxi" turned suddenly into a courtyard at the side of a big block of flats near Whitehall, and pulled up.

"Here we are, Mr. Connaught," said the Suffragette, and paying the driver she gently impelled her captive into the building. He was not quite so anxious to bolt as he had been. That mention of payment had interested him, and, in any case, there seemed to be an

uncomfortably large number of police in the neighbourhood. Mr. Bunn had recognised two plainclothes men at the entrance to the side court.

He passively followed Mrs. Carroway into the lift, and from the lift into a large room on the second floor. This apartment was furnished like the board-room of a big company, but its business appearance was made slightly less severe by one or two little feminine touches here and there—a few flowers, a mirror or so, and some rather tasteful pictures. There were a dozen women of different ages scattered about the room.

Mrs. Carroway greeted them impulsively.

"My dears, I have discovered a Brain!" she cried.

The Brain blushed as he removed his hat, for he knew what was coming.

"Look at his forehead," said the enthusiastic Lilian. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Wall, it's all right as regards quantity—there's a good square foot of it—if the quality is there," answered a rather obvious spinster of

uncertain age, with a Scotch face and a New England accent. "What's the Brain's name?"

"Louis Connaught," announced Mrs. Carroway, importantly, and several of the younger and less angular of the Suffragettes looked interested. It was certainly a high-sounding name.

"Wall, Louis, I'm glad you're here," said the American lady, "and the vurry fact of your being here shows that there's *something* behind that frontal freeboard of yours. Most men avoid this place as though it was a place of worship. You mustn't mind my candour; this strenuous pursuit of the Vote makes a girl candid."

The Brain bowed awkwardly. It was one of his few assets that he was not afraid of women. He was not even nervous with them, except when they were in a position, and looked likely, to hand him over to the police. Some instinct deeply buried behind what the "girl" was pleased to term his "frontal freeboard" told him that Mrs. Carroway would not explain to the others the circumstances in which she had made his unwilling acquaintance.

A young and pretty girl came forward, smiling, offering her hand. It was hard to believe that such a lovely slip of feminine daintiness had done, to use the popular expression, "her two months in the second division" with the best of them. She was Lady Mary de Vott.

"We are very glad to have you fighting in our Cause, Mr. Connaught," she said, charmingly.

Smiler shook hands as though he meant never to leave off.

"Glad—proud!" he said heavily. "Glad to oblige. Any little thing like that — any time."

Mrs. Carroway broke in.

"There is rather a curious little story to tell about Mr. Connaught," she said, "and, in case any one should notice and misconstrue any little mannerisms he may possess, I should like to tell his story, which explains them. Mr. Connaught probably will prefer not to be present. If so"—she turned to Smiler—"will you go to the waiting-room?"

She touched a bell, and a trim typist appeared.

"Show this gentleman into the waiting-room," ordered Lilian, and Smiler went out, feeling that, on the whole, he was travelling in the direction of a rich streak of luck. He dropped into a big, luxurious lounge, and gracefully lying at full length, proceeded, with many sounds of enjoyment, to utterly demolish the blood-orange he had so deftly acquired an hour before. He then took a little nap, and woke, thoroughly refreshed, to find Mrs. Carroway by the side of the lounge, staring with a rapt and wondering expression at his towering forehead.

"Ah, this is splendid!" she said. "I see that in common with many other great brains you have the knack of snatching an hour's rest at odd moments. Napoleon possessed it also, I believe."

"Napoleon who?" inquired Mr. Bunn, who could have beaten any brain in the world at the gentle art of resting.

"Bonaparte, my dear man!" said Mrs.

Carroway, good-humouredly. "Haven't you ever heard of Napoleon Bonaparte?"

Mr. Bunn thought.

"Heard the name somewhere or other. Hasn't he got a shop down by the Holborn end of Shaftesbury Avenue—fried fish and chips? Little dark man?"

Mrs. Carroway stared.

"I do not think so," she answered.

"Ah, some relation of his, I expect!" said Smiler, airily, and dismissed the matter. He stood up. After his reception in the big committee-room he had lost much of his trepidation as to the result of his unfortunate little *contretemps* with the Suffragette leader's hand-bag.

"Well, how about this little lot?" He tapped his forehead significantly. "Was any offer made?"

"Ah, that is quite settled. We have agreed unanimously that—after a cursory examination by a skilled phrenologist—you shall be entered at once as a Special Organiser. Why, are you disappointed, Mr. Connaught?"

She had noticed his face fall.

"No; only I don't know a note of music. I can't tell one tune from another. I admit it don't want much thinking about, just turning a handle; but even a organ-grinder——"

Mrs. Carroway laughed.

"Oh, I see!" she smiled. "I said 'Organiser.'"

"Oh!" said Smiler, with an air of intense relief, wondering what an organiser was.

"Of course," the suffragette continued, "I shall not expect big things from you at first. I think you had better begin by reading up the question of Women's Suffrage. Every morning you shall report to me at, say, ten, and we will talk over the chapters you have read. You will be able to tell me what conclusions you have come to, and what opinions you have formed on the subject, and I shall be able to correct any false impressions made upon you, and, no doubt, your intellect, as it becomes familiar with the question, will soon be discovering new and valuable interpretations of the old ideas, and giving new ideas and plans for the advancement

of the Cause. After a few weeks of careful reading you will have to begin practising public speaking, and we all expect that by that time your own great natural gifts will assert themselves, and from being a—novice, let us say—you will become a leader both in thought and in action. During the first few weeks your remuneration will be three pounds a week—the League has funds in plenty—if that is agreeable to you."

She seemed to expect an answer, and Smiler managed to get his breath back in time to say that he thought three pounds a week would do "for a start."

"Well, that being settled, let us go into the committee-room. We've sent for a phrenologist, and he is waiting there for you; and, by the way, I've explained to our comrades that I was introduced to you by an old friend, who told me that you were of almost noble birth, but, owing to a series of misfortunes, your education—both socially and—er—scholastically, has been slightly neglected. And now, Mr. Connaught,

before we join the others, let me say that I believe in you, and I think you will prove a tremendous acquisition to the Cause. I do not see how one with so noble a forehead as yours can prove otherwise."

Mr. Bunn was almost touched.

"Lady," he said, with a singular emphasis, "you do me proud, strike me pink all over, if you don't. You're a *lady*, that's what you are, and I know when I'm dealing with a lady and I treat her *as* a lady. You'll see. Don't you worry about me. I shall be all right, once I get started. When I'm just joggin' along in my own quiet way, kids can play with me; but once I get started, I'm a rum 'un, and don't you forget it, lady. I only want to get started." He extended his hand. "Put it *there*, Mrs. Carroway!"

The Suffragette leader put her hand in his, and they shook in silence.

There were about thirty Suffragettes in the committee-room when the two re-entered, and a lean man in a worn frock-coat and a flannel shirt, who was delivering a sort of lecture on

phrenology. Smiler, with the instinct of one "crook" for another, glanced at his sharp, famished eyes and summed him up instantly as a charlatan—only "charlatan" was not the exact word which occurred to the new Organiser.

Mrs. Carroway introduced the two men, and the phrenologist indicated a chair, which Smiler took. In five minutes' talk with the ladies the phrenologist had gleaned precisely what they wanted for their money, and he proceeded to give it to them unstintingly.

He took Smiler's head in his hungry-looking hands and pressed it. He said—

"This is indeed a brain—a most unusual, indeed, an amazing brain. I have not often 'andled a brain of this description. This head which I hold in my 'and is an astonishing head!" He slid a clammy palm across the gratified Mr. Bunn's forehead. "I should term this head a phenomenal head. It is perplexing—it is what we call an Unexpected Head. It has every indication of being wholly undeveloped, while its natural force is stupendous. I consider it

puzzling; it is a very difficult cranium!" He frowned, looked thoughtful, and finally dropped his hands suddenly. "Ladies," he said glibly, "I really couldn't afford to read this head for a guinea. This is as good a three-guinea head as ever I see under my 'and. This head should be charted properly; usually I charge a guinea extra for a No. 1 chart, but if you'll take a three-guinea readin' of this head, I'll throw in the chart, marked out in two colours, and framed in black oak, with pale green mount, with signed certificate and seal at the back, complete, with half-hour's verbal readin', any questions answered, for three pounds ten, cash, usual charge five guineas. Crowned heads twenty guineas and expenses. And that's a bargain."

Naturally, it being a bargain, every lady in the room agreed on the "three-pounds-ten readin'," and considered it cheap.

And then, to his intense astonishment and profound gratification, Mr. Bunn learnt among other things that he would, with a little practice, develop into an orator of a brilliance surpassing

that of the late Mr. W. E. Gladstone, and rivalling that of Mark Antony, a statesman whose statecraft would be as iron-handed as that of Bismarck, as subtle as that of Abdul the Damned, as fearless as that of Nero, and as dazzling as that of the German Emperor; a lawgiver as unbiassed and careful as Moses, a diplomat as finished as Talleyrand, a thinker as profound as Isaac Walton (the phrenologist probably meant Isaac Newton), a champion of rights as persuasive as Oliver Cromwell, and, finally, a politician as honest as"—here the phrenologist faltered for a moment—"as honest a politician as—as—the best of them." A great deal of useful and equally valuable information having been imparted, the phrenologist announced that the sitting was at an end, drew his cheque, promised to send on the chart and certificate, volunteered to read the palms of any ladies present for five shillings per palm, offered to throw himself into a trance and communicate with the spirit of any dead relative of any one present for two guineas per spirit, deal round a pack of

his business cards with the air of a pretty good poker-player, and finally took his departure.

The curious thing was that every woman—and there were many intelligent women there—seemed to believe in this shabby, flannel-shirted liar, and to respect him. Their congratulations as they surrounded the Brain were unmistakably genuine. Then, suddenly, the telephone-bell rang shrilly, and a message was received to the effect that the Prime Minister had been seen motoring in the direction of Walton Heath with a bag of golf clubs in the car. Mrs. Carroway gave a few swift instructions, and the room emptied like magic. In ten minutes Mr. Bunn was alone again with the Suffragette leader. Smiler was a little dazed.

"Where've they all gone?" he asked.

"To Walton Heath, in taxi-cabs."

"Why?"

"To ask the Prime Minister when he's going to give Votes for Women, of course."

"Well, but that American woman took a darn

great axe," said Smiler. "Surely she ain't going to ask with that!"

"One never knows," replied Mrs. Carroway, darkly.

Mr. Bunn looked grieved.

"Pore bloke," he said, with extraordinary earnestness. "Pore, *pore* bloke. It ain't all beer and skittles being Prime Minister, is it?"

"We do our best to see that it isn't!" said Mrs. Carroway, modestly. "And now about our books. I've looked out a few to begin with. Here they are."

She indicated a pile of massive volumes on the floor at the foot of a big bookcase. Smiler's jaw fell.

"Well," he said, without enthusiasm, "brain or no brain, that little lot'll give me a thundering headache before I'm through 'em. They'd better be sent by Carter Paterson or Pickford, hadn't they?"

Mrs. Carroway thought a cab would be better, and sent for one. Then she produced her purse, and Smiler became more interested.

"You must not mind my mentioning it, Mr. Connaught, but it has just occurred to me that possibly you may be short of ready money. Are you?"

"Yes," replied Smiler, with manly simplicity. "I am, somethink astonishin'."

"In that case, then"—Mrs. Carroway opened the purse—"you may like to take two pounds of your first week's salary in advance. Would you?"

"I would," answered Smiler, straightforwardly, and without false pride.

"Very well, then"—she handed him two sovereigns. "Will you write your address on this envelope, and I will enter your name in the book of the League?"

Smiler did so.

"Garraty Street. What a quaint old name!" commented the lady as she read the address.

"Yes, ain't it?" said Smiler. "And it's a quaint, old-fashioned sort of street, too," he went on, "where everybody lives on fried fish, and the landlord got to chain down the window

sills to stop 'em from using 'em for firewood. I shall be leaving there pretty soon, directly I've developed me brain a little bit. And now I'll sling me hook. What time will you be expecting me to-morrow?"

"I think at two o'clock. You had better begin on this book. She handed him a somewhat massive volume, entitled, "The Vote: What it Means and Why We Want It," by Lilian Carroway. "You must make notes as you read, and we can discuss your notes to-morrow."

Smiler took the book and weighed it in his hand.

"Ye—es," he said, rather feebly, and turned to help the cabman carry the remaining books to the cab.

So Mr. Smiler Bunn, *alias* Louis Connaught, *alias* The Brain, became a Suffragette, and only the phrenologist seemed to know that he could never be more than a suffrajest at most.

He shook hands with Mrs. Carroway and went down to the cab. Waiting on the kerb near the entrance to the mansion was a man whose

appearance seemed familiar to Mr. Bunn. This man stepped forward as Smiler entered the cab. It was the phrenologist.

"Excuse me, Brain," he said jauntily. "I'll give you a lift," and followed Smiler into the cab, closing the door behind him.

Smiler stared, then recollected the illuminated address the man had given him half an hour before, and grinned.

"All right," he said.

The phrenologist surveyed him with alert, black eyes that played over him like search-lights. He was a young man, painfully thin, hawk-nosed, and his movements were curiously deft and swift. He drew two long, thin, black, leathery-looking cigars from his breast-pocket, and handed one to Mr. Bunn.

"Hide behind that," he said, "if you like flavour and bite to a cigar."

Smiler did so, and waited for his companion to speak. The phrenologist lost no time.

"This has got to be worked properly, Mr. Connaught," he said. "There's lots of lovely

money back there,"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, indicating the Suffragettes' headquarters—"and you and me's got to magnetise it before any of the other grafters in this town gets on to it. Now, I'm going to play fair with you, Mr. Connaught. You got a pull with that bunch somehow; thanks to me, they reckon you'll be able to put King Solomon and all his wisdom in your ticket pocket after a week or two's study. On account of the shape of your head, I make it. Well, you and me's men of the world, and we can be frank where others fall out, and as a man of the world, I can tell you right away, Mr. Connaught, that the Brain idea is a dream. Why, say, the minute I feels your head under my 'and I found myself saying, 'Well, this is a High Brow all right, but it's hollow behind. There's nothin' to it—nix—vacant.' I mean nothing special. Of course, there's brain there—about the average. Very near up to the average, say. But you ain't no Homer, any more than me or them daffy-down-dillies back to the mansions. The old girl seems to fancy herself

at physiognomy, but she's trod on a banana-skin all right if she's risking real money on your dial. Well, now, I want to be friendly with you, Mr. Connaught. This town owes us both a living, and the only rule in the game is that we got to collect it. Well, now, let's put our cards on the table. I'm a palm-reader and phrenologist just now, but I'm going solid for bigger business bimeby. Now, what's your lay?"

"Well, the old girl *thought* I been picking her pocket," said Smiler, grinning, and the other scoundrel's eyes glittered with satisfaction.

"Why, that's great! Oh, you're a sure enough gun; you got a gun's hand, all right. Say, shake. I knew you was a crook first glimp, and when I see your hands I wondered whether it was forgin' or picking pockets. Well now, that's settled. Now, I got a little place just off the Strand, here. You send this cab on with your books, and come to this office of mine, and we'll have a talk."

Smiler was willing; he was fascinated with his new acquaintance, and within five minutes the

pair were closeted in the phrenologist's den in a back street off the Strand.

It took the "palm-reader" precisely ten minutes to outline the idea of a *coup* which he and Smiler could work together as partners.

"Now, brother," he began, "what you got to understand is that you ain't going to last with that bunch of vote-sharps longer than about a fortnight—if that. They got a lot of brains among 'em, and the old girl, she's got the brightest. But she's just happened to get hung up on your forrid, and her own idea of her physiognomy skill. But by the time you've read one or two of them books she'll have lost her interest. You'll give yourself away, sure, and then it'll be the street for yours, and the salary'll fold its tent and silently steal away—see? You see that, don't you?"

Smiler nodded. He had known that all along.

"Well, so what you get, you got to get quick. And now, listen to me——"

The palm-reader's voice dropped to a dry and rapid whisper.

"Now, my name's Mesmer La Touche, and my title's Perfessor, and I'm a man you can trust," he began, and straightway unfolded his scheme.

* * * * * *

Precisely a week later the Suffragette cohort, under command of Mrs. Carroway, gave a greatly-boomed demonstration at King James's Hall. This demonstration had been enormously advertised. Entrance was free to all people of reasonably respectable appearance, and promised to be successful, if only because of the fact that the proceedings were not to consist of speeches but chiefly of a series of limelight illuminated tableaux. The idea of the tableaux was to re-enact on the platform various scenes which had marked the progress of the Women's Suffrage Movement, and with which scenes the Suffragettes were associated in the mind's eyes of the public.

For instance, Tableau No. 1 on the programme was to consist of about thirty Suffragettes clothed in prison raiment with feeding-bottles being held to their mouths by savage-looking men, their

arms being held by brutal wardresses. The curtain would go up, revealing the "atrocity" in full swing against a back curtain painted to resemble masonry and prison bars. Tableau No. 2 again depicted the devoted thirty, chained and padlocked to a row of iron railings, staring defiantly at a back curtain painted like a Cabinet Minister's house, while, rapidly approaching, the heavy sound of the feet of a large body of reckless police could be heard—thanks to the energy of a shirt-sleeved scene-shifter in the wings, who was to manipulate various wood and drum contrivances built for the purpose of imitating the march of many men. And so on, through a series of about twenty similar tableaux. The first item on the programme was to be the singing of the famous Suffragette song—

> Women of England, arise in your might,
> For the tyrant has nigh burnt his boats;
> Man has done wrong too long, let him now do aright
> And give women votes.

by the thirty Suffragettes, who would, in this scene, wear their choicest evening toilettes and

all their jewels, in order to let the public see that, despite their desperate deeds, they were women of consequence, wealth and position.

It was a well-conceived plan of entertainment, and advertisement, and the deadheads of London —and London is practically populated by deadheads—flocked to this free evening with a unanimity beyond either praise or blame. The doors opened at seven o'clock, and at 7.15 there was not even standing-room left. The curtain was due to go up at 7.30.

Behind the scenes there was a rushing sound of many silk skirts, wafts of expensive perfumes, the odour of flowers, excited whisperings of feminine tongues, the flash and flicker of diamonds, giggles and squirks and bubblings of mirth. The place was alive with women. Here and there a scene-shifter slouched in and out of dark angles and nooks, concerned with ropes and canvas frames. In a big dressing-room at the back was an uncomfortable-looking man in evening dress—Mr. Smiler Bunn. He seemed to be the only man in the place.

It may be explained that The Brain had not been fruitful of results during the previous week of study, and the development of his intellect appeared to be less than the improvement in his manners and speech. His ideas about Women's Suffrage were about where they were before he became The Brain; if anything, they were rather more confused on the subject than otherwise. He had disappointed Mrs. Carroway a little, but, thanks to a few points praising her book, which had been taught him by the phrenologist, she continued to expect big things from him.

But Smiler knew perfectly well that it was only a question of a week or two before his association with the Suffragettes would cease. He was a good pickpocket, but he was no political organiser, and he knew it. "Professor" La Touche had explained that to him too frequently for him to forget it. But Smiler did not care; he and the phrenologist had made their arrangements, and long before the tableaux were ended that night they would be carried out.

Mr. Bunn's duty that evening was to act as a sort of stage attendant to the thirty Suffragettes. He was to chain them to the railings, for instance, to help arrange the prison feeding scene, and so on. Mrs. Carroway had drilled him well, and she had no doubt he would do the thing thoroughly.

Now, there are about four back entrances to King James's Hall, three of which are in different streets, and as half-past seven drew near there rolled unobtrusively up to one of these entrances a neat one-horse brougham. Nobody got out of the brougham, nor did the coachman descend. He just pulled up and waited. A policeman strolled up and remarked that it was a " perishin' cold night." The coachman, in a voice curiously resembling that of Mesmer La Touche, palm reader and phrenologist, agreed with him, and volunteered the information that presently he had to take away a big dress-basket of costumes belonging to a titled Suffragette who was inside the hall. The intelligent constable gathered that if anybody happened to be about to lend a hand when the basket came down there would probably

be a "dollar" floating about (Mesmer believed in boldness). The policeman decided to remain and lend a hand. This was one of the reasons why neither that efficient officer nor Mesmer La Touche saw a laundry-van—driven by a small and curiously unimportant-looking man pull up at one of the back entrances further round the building, and wait there in very much the same way as the brougham was waiting.

Inside the hall the opening song had been sung, and the Suffragettes were now posing in the prison scene, much to the appreciation of a sympathetic audience. Smiler Bunn, with an armful of short chains, was waiting in the wings with a group of scene-shifters bearing sections of strong iron railings. The curtain went down on the first tableau, and the women came pouring off the stage, hurrying to their dressing-rooms to change for the great "Chains" scene. In three minutes the railings were fixed, and Smiler Bunn was chaining the Suffragettes to the bars. And it was noticeable that while all the evening he had been wearing a distinctly worried look,

now, as one by one the padlocks clicked, that worried look was replaced by a gradually widening smile. Mrs. Carroway noticed it, and wondered why The Brain was smiling.

The last Suffragette chained up, Mr. Bunn made a bolt for the back. He had about three minutes to work in, and a lot to do in that three minutes. He ran in and out of the dressing-rooms, exactly like a weasel working a rabbit warren. Each time he came out of a room he brought an armful of furs. In a minute and a half he had run through all the dressing-rooms, and was literally staggering under his bundle of furs. He dropped them all into a big dress-basket at the end of the corridor, jammed down the lid, and whistled softly. Instantly a man—the driver of the laundry-van—appeared, running silently to him, took one end of the basket, and Smiler taking the other end, the pair of them vanished. In twenty seconds the basket was in the laundry-van.

"Hurry up, for pity's sake!" sobbed Mr. Bunn, as he scrambled up beside his confederate.

"Nearly half of 'em had left their diamonds on their dressing-tables"—his voice cracked with excitement — "and *by Gawd! I've got 'em all!*"

The van rolled down the back street and round a corner—corners, it has been explained, were a speciality of Mr. Smiler Bunn. He peered back as the van swung round, and caught a fleeting glimpse of a one-horse brougham waiting patiently outside another back door. And he grinned.

"Poor old Mesmer!" he chuckled. "He's a clever man, is Mesmer, but if he don't get off out of it, 'im and his brougham, he'll stand a darn good chance of getting copped. He's a good man at ideas, Mesmer is, but he's no good at carryin' of 'em out. Ah, well—round the corner, mate. The sooner we get this lot to Israelstein's the better I shall be pleased. I wonder what Lilian will say? It'll take 'em a good twenty minutes to file them chains!"

There was a sudden sound of galloping hoofs. Smiler turned, looking back just in time to see the brougham tear down the street they had just

left, and a few yards behind it half a dozen policemen running like hares.

"There goes Mesmer—poor chap! The town certainly owes him a living, same as he said, but I don't reckon he'll be collecting any of it to-night—*not* to-night, I don't reckon," muttered The Brain.

And the laundry-van rumbled comfortably on towards the business-place of that genial receiver of stolen goods, Mr. Israelstein.

CHAPTER II.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE TURNCOATS.

Mr. Bunn was ever a man who was particular about his meals. Some weeks after his adventure with the Suffragettes, he decided to give himself a really good lunch. Entering a restaurant and seating himself, he took the menu in his hand and subjected it to so profound and lengthy a study that the waiter's off-hand manner put on, as it were, a heavy overcoat of respect. Evidently he was about to serve an epicure.

At last Smiler looked up.

"I'll 'ave," he said, "a bit of the pullet of a turkey."

"Pardon, sir?" queried the waiter, politely.

"A double portion of the pullet of a turkey," said Mr. Bunn, irritably.

The waiter looked perplexed.

"Some of this here!"

Mr. Bunn pointed to the menu, and the perplexity vanished from the face of the waiter, together with his air of respect.

"*Poulet a la Turque*—yes, sir."

"Wait a minute," said Smiler. "I don't like the sound of it. You don't say it the same way as I do, and it don't sound very savoury the way you say it. I want something with some stuffin' in it."

"Stuffin', sir?" repeated the waiter.

"That's it, stuffin'—sage and onion——" Mr. Bunn began to lose patience. "Look here," he went on, "'ave you got any duck on?"

"Wild duck, sir? Yes. *Only* wild duck to-day, sir. Or some snipe. We have got some nice snipe, sir."

"Ah, well; let's have one or two—see? And some mashed potatoes and some turnip-tops and a few parsnips. And some beer—and don't forget the vinegar."

The waiter looked a little dazed, and hurried off, muttering something unlovely about the English. He was French himself.

Mr. Bunn had never tasted snipe, and he sat back, looking forward to a very pleasant lunch.

During the previous three months, business had been exceedingly brisk with him; he had moved into new apartments in Cherry Blossom Street, Tottenham Court Road, and he was hoping henceforward to live on a slightly more elaborate scale than hitherto he had been able to afford.

His sale of the Suffragettes' jewellery and furs for some three hundred pounds to Lazarus Israelstein, the receiver, seemed to have ushered in a series of much smaller but equally successful little *coups*. It is true that had the venerable Israelstein paid him only a fifth of the value of the goods he could have retired from the pocket-picking profession without fear regarding his financial future, but his acquaintance with diamonds and furs had been previously so limited that he was quite content with his price.

He sat thinking as he awaited his snipe.

"Yes," he said presently. "I'll do it. I'll have a fur coat this winter. It's warm and classy. And a bit of class about his clothes does no man

no 'arm. I can see as a man's got to be in the swell mob to make big money, and so I'll be one of 'em. I can always pawn a fur coat, anyhow, if I don't fancy it."

His soliloquy was interrupted by the waiter, who placed two snipe and their formidable convoy of vegetables before him, and departed to fetch the beer. Smiler's eyes glistened a little and his lips twitched as he surveyed the repast that was spread for him. He sniffed—and his nostrils twitched and his eyes ceased to glisten.

"Gameyish—very," he said doubtfully, assisting himself liberally to vegetables. "Still, it's a great luxury, I've always heard—snipe is."

He took one on to his plate, cut it in two, hesitated as the piquant odour of the bird assailed him, then placed it in his mouth and bit on it. For the fraction of a second it was difficult to distinguish whether he had broken a tooth or had been suddenly paralysed. He stood up hastily, looking round for the waiter. That unfortunate individual was approaching quickly with the beer. But he put the brake

on when he observed the expression on his patron's face, slowed more and more, and finally halted.

Smiler deliberately took a snipe in each hand, "hefting" them for a comfortable grip, as a man about to throw a brick does, and then, even as the waiter turned to run, he threw them in rapid succession at the man.

"These snipes is rotten!" yelled Mr. Bunn, furiously, as he threw them. "They've been bad for months!"

One took the waiter on the ear, and the other closed the right eye of the restaurant manager for three clear days. And by the time the confusion had abated, Mr. Bunn was gone, swearing never again to enter any restaurant which sold anything more *recherché* than a cut off the joint. He went into a bar close by and took three peppermints one after the other to get the taste of the snipe out of his mouth, and then proceeded to the nearest Lockhart's to get a really eatable lunch. But, nevertheless, it was in a very bad temper that, half an hour later, he entered the

establishment of one Lewis Hyams, secondhand-clothes dealer, of Dutch Street, Paddington.

"I want a fur-lined coat—a good 'un!" demanded Smiler of the black-bearded individual with the dull green and old gold complexion and heavy flexible nose, who stood behind the counter cleaning an old pair of trousers with benzine.

The dealer ran his eye over Smiler and gave an excellent imitation of a congratulatory smile.

"Vell, you've come to the right shop. Ve ave 'em all qualities except dem cheap vons vit de moths in dem," he informed the prospective customer, smiling like a famished vulture. "Vhat vhas your price?"

"Let's have a look at the coat first," parried Smiler, who had bought a suit from Hyams before.

The dealer crossed the shop to a dim corner, and presently came back with a big overcoat—lined with fur. Rat fur, it looked like.

"Dere's a peautiful ghoat—try it on, mister. It's put aside for a Court gentleman, but he ain't very well—see? You've got it a beautiful

figure, mister—try de ghoat on. Give it a chance, mister—'ere, I'll help yer off."

Smiler felt the fur, and a pinch of it came away between his finger and thumb, leaving a bald spot. Hyams angrily snatched the coat away.

"What you doin' it?" he said sourly. "Ain't you know no better for to 'andle a fur ghoat like dat? Talk about de moths. Vhat sort of ghoat yer want, say it?" he said feverishly.

"Well, I don't want no coat in a moultin' condition," replied Mr. Bunn, with ponderous humour. "You put your dogskin away and let me see a *coat*. Somethink about five pounds or more."

The dealer raised his hands.

"Vell, vhy didn't yer *say* it? Dis ghoat's goin' for twenty-five bob! It'll 'ave to be a k'vid now you've spoiled it," he added sadly.

He hung up the "spoiled" coat and looked round the shop doubtfully. There is not much business done in fur coats in Dutch Street, Paddington. Corduroy is too popular there.

There was a momentary pause. Then Mr. Hyams suddenly brightened up.

"Vhait a mo'—vhait 'alf a mo'." He clutched Smiler's arm anxiously. "Yer von't go, mister. You'll be it a gentleman, mister, for 'alf a mo'. I've got the very thing."

He darted into a room at the back of the shop, and almost instantly reappeared with a better-looking overcoat, the fur of which was a really excellent imitation of kangaroo, which it is said can sometimes be made into a sort of imitation of inferior sable.

"Real sable, mister," he said reverently. He put his hand to his mouth and whispered, "Brought to dis country by poachers vhat get it from de Czar's own private preserviss at Siberia."

"That's better!" said Smiler. "Let's put it on."

He slipped his arms into it and buttoned it.

"Mister, that's nobby! S'velp me, dat ghoat vhas made for you." He stood back, admiring

the really quite reasonable fit of the garment. Then he suddenly raised his voice.

"Izzy!" he cried, and a sleek young vulture of about twenty years came into the shop.

"Look at yer pore grandvater's fur ghoat on de gentleman, Izzy, my poy. Why, it fits him better as it fitted de old man, ain't it—no!"

The younger man walked completely round Smiler and agreed.

"My vord, it's vorth a k'vid more to dis gentleman dan anybody else, ain't it?" he said, and having thrown out his valuable suggestion, thrust out his hands, palms upwards, to indicate overwhelming admiration, and went and stood in the doorway, quite artlessly blocking the only exit. Evidently he mistrusted the customer.

Smiler regarded himself in a glass which Hyams produced, approved of the fit, and carefully removed the coat, much to the disappointment of a typical British working-man who had just come in.

"Don't like it," said Smiler. "How much is it?"

"Fifteen pound?" said the dealer, in a questioning tone.

"Give you two pound ten," said Smiler. "Take it or leave it."

Hyams' eyes glistened, and he braced up like a war-horse sniffing the fray from afar off. Here was a foeman worthy of him.

"God of Israel!" he said piously, and shook his clenched fists in the air, looking up at the ceiling with fevered eyes. "Vhat ruin!"

He gasped for breath a moment, and, having slightly recovered, quoted fourteen pounds.

Smiler offered two pounds twelve shillings and sixpence, and Mr. Hyams unbottoned his collar and asked his son to stand aside from the doorway in order to admit more air.

The working-man, whose time did not appear valuable, swore admiringly under his breath as Mr. Hyams metaphorically spat on his hands and fell to work. It was a grim struggle. Smiler advanced his bid by half-crowns, and Hyams reduced his price by crowns. Throughout twenty long minutes the dealer wailed and

moaned and urged and wept and implored; and Smiler stood starkly still, determined and implacable as the Day of Judgment; and Izzy, the youth, wrung his hair and his hands for pride at his father's business talents; and the working-man rocked to and fro, swearing softly with emotion. Then suddenly a girl appeared at the door behind the counter, presumably attracted by the noise of the conflict. She stood on the threshold looking into the shop, and Smiler's quick eye — a successful pickpocket requires an eye like a condor—instantly took in her remarkable beauty.

It was the face of a beautiful Jewess whose family might have lived three generations in America, and there is no more beautiful type of face in all the world. Serious, mysterious, alluring, of the East. Dark, with no more than the remotest hint of the Christian girl's pink, perfectly-shaped, with fine teeth and superb eyes. There was a suspicion of hardness on the face—but that may have been the shadow.

Smiler drew his breath in suddenly and paused.

Then the girl was gone. But she had completely "jacked up" Smiler's side of the bargain, as he expressed it later. He did not want such a girl to hear him haggling in half-crowns for a fur coat.

"Look here, mister," he said with an unmistakable air of finality. "I'll give six quid for the coat, take it or blooming-well leave it."

This was a jump of seventeen and sixpence. Hyams was smitten dumb for a second. Then recognising that Mr. Smiler had said the last word, he swiftly agreed.

"And I'll take a receipt for it, too," said Mr. Bunn, rather sourly. "It'll be useful, perhaps, when I want to pawn the coat."

"Vill you promise to pawn it 'ere vhen you pawn it?" demanded Hyams, always ready to do business.

"I will—'urry up!" said Smiler easily, and began counting out the money.

Mr. Hyams wrote the receipt, took the six pounds, at Smiler's request gave the coat a brush, and handed it over the counter.

Then an astonishing thing befell. It was now quite silent in the shop, and as Smiler seized the coat just below the collar all present heard the crisp and almost unmistakable crackle of bank-notes seemingly right under Smiler's hand.

Hyams grabbed for the coat like lightning, but in a fraction of time Smiler had it rolled up under his arm and in a grip like the grip of the law. Hyam's face had turned a delicate green.

"Ah! Vhat ruin!" he groaned.

Smiler took a step towards the door. But Hyams put out his hands desperately.

"I ain't vhant to sell it de coat, mister. For God's sake don't go avay!" he cried.

"Oh, rats to that!" replied Mr. Bunn politely. "It's mine—linin' and all," he continued meaningly. "Ain't it mine, sport? Ain't I paid for it, and got a receipt for it?"

He applied to the working-man, who spoke like a true Briton.

"'Course it's yours, mate," he said warmly. "I never 'eard of such a thing. Whoddyer

mean?" he continued in a tone of ferocity to Hyams. "Whoddyer tryin' on? Tryin' to get my mate's coat away from 'im? You let 'im alone—see—or I'll put it acrost you. You can't sell a thing and then take it back. It's agin the lor. You'll get into trouble, you will. That's what you'll get into." He turned to Mr. Bunn. "Come on mate," he said. "We'll get off out of it. This place ain't any too honest."

Hyams leaned across the counter, trembling.

"I'll give fifty k'vid down for de ghoat, mister," he said.

"Not for *this* coat," replied Smiler, and turned to the shop-door.

If it was worth fifty pounds to Hyams it was worth it to him.

"If dere's money in de lining of de ghoat it's mine!" said Hyams. "Izzy, go and fetch it a policeman."

"That's it, Izzy, fetch two—fetch a sergeant while you're at it," said Smiler facetiously, "and he'll tell you that what a man buys and

pays for and gets a receipt for in the presence of a witness, belongs to the man. 'Ere, out of the way!"

He strode suddenly to the door and into the street, and Hyams followed him, muttering a few words to Izzy as he went.

It was now about three o'clock. They fell into line, Smiler walking first with the coat under his arm, the workman slightly behind Mr. Bunn, and Mr. Hyams about a yard behind the workman, his eyes fastened on the coat in a keen and hungry stare. It was perfectly plain to Smiler that Hyams did not intend to let the coat or its new owner out of his sight until he was convinced that it contained nothing more precious than its fur lining. He just dogged the trail of the pickpocket like an elderly and extremely hungry wolf.

Half-way down the street they passed an antique furniture shop, at the door of which was standing the proprietor—a gentleman named Abraham Cohenstein. He was polishing a gimlet (of a size suitable for making worm-holes), but

at sight of Hyams he paused a second to regard the little procession.

Without taking his eyes off Smiler Bunn, Mr. Hyams said a few rapid words in Yiddish, and, shouting to some one at the back of the shop, Mr. Cohenstein tripped forth and joined Hyams on his money trail. Cohenstein's air was that of a fasting hyæna. He and Hyams muttered swiftly together as they followed in the steps of Smiler Bunn.

At the end of the street the blood-hounds were reinforced by another—one Moses Morris—who at a few words from Hyams cheerfully left a small jewellery establishment in charge of a boy, and took up the trail, with something in his appearance reminiscent of a starving raven attracted by a dead sheep.

Something peculiar about the three Jews seemed to strike another of the race who was looking into a shop-window round the corner, and he came running across the street and joined them.

At this point Smiler turned to the working-man.

"You keep with me, mate, and it'll be worth a five quid to you when I've shook 'em off. They'll be accusing me of stealing the coat if I don't keep a witness, and in case we get parted, give us your name and address."

"Me name's Bill Welch, and I lives in Paradise Court, Bishop's Mews, Paddington," said the man; "and I'll stick to you as long as you've got the price of a pint."

"That's the talk!" said Smiler, and they ambled steadily on—and the bloodhounds ambled steadily after them.

* * * * *

It is necessary to explain here that the coat which Smiler Bunn had just purchased from the amiable Hyams had originally belonged to Hyams' father, a patriarchal old Israelite, who was reputed to be wealthy. Some three months before he had died, and to the extreme grief of his son, he had left nothing behind him worth inheriting but the secondhand-clothing establishment. Hyams the younger had searched everywhere and inquired everywhere, but he

had not been able to find that the old man had left anything at all resembling real money behind him. But he could not have taken it with him. And Hyams knew that he had possessed at least eight hundred pounds. But he had not been able to find more than the few pounds which had been in his father's pocket at the time of his decease, and he had almost resigned himself to go through life with a broken heart, when he had heard, too late, that musical crackle of bank-notes in the fur coat which had belonged to his father. And then, with stunning force, it had occurred to him that the only thing he had not searched was the fur coat. It was then that he lost his head and grabbed for the coat, and, worse than that, had offered fifty pounds for it.

He could have wept with rage as he followed Mr. Bunn—indeed, he wanted to, but dared not get his eyes blurred. Smiler might dodge them at any moment. Mr. Hyams had good eyesight, and just then he was requiring all of it.

He was afraid to call the police, for he was not

quite clear as to the law dealing with money found in fur coats. Did it belong to the vendor, the purchaser, or was it appropriated by the Government? He did not know—nor did his friends. And he was proposing to take no risks beyond offering to pay a small percentage on the profits of the expedition. But all his friends had known of the money which Hyams the elder had been said to possess, and they were only too glad to participate—at a percentage.

Curiously enough, Smiler Bunn was refraining from calling the police in to protect him and his property for precisely the same reason as Hyams. Smiler wanted what he termed "the lot," and he was taking what, in his opinion, were the necessary steps to obtain it. As for Bill Welch, he wanted anything he could get—and was, he flattered himself, on the way to getting it.

* * * * *

The chase began at about three o'clock. After about twenty minutes' quick walking Smiler Bunn began to weary, and hailed a hansom. Bill

Welch, who climbed in after him, announced that the blood-hounds had hailed a taxi-cab. Smiler peered through the little window at the back of the hansom and saw for himself that a taxi was following the cab so closely that the bonnet of the motor almost touched the back of the cabman's seat. Eight hungry eyes were staring at him from the taxi.

"Why don't you rip the darn coat open here?" said the well-intentioned William. But Smiler shook his head.

"No fear," he replied. "As long as the notes are in the coat they're mine, and I've got a receipt for them. Once they're out of the coat I've got to account for where and how I got 'em if them Yiddisher gents call in the police. And I ain't popular with the police. No police would believe I found 'em in a fur coat if them Yids said I pinched 'em out of their pockets. And if they knew who I was, no police would accept any explanation of mine anyhow. I don't mean to say I ain't honest—I'm as straight as a gun-barrel—but what I mean is, it ain't

convenient for me to go about offering explanations for being in possession of a lot of bank-notes just now. See?" (Smiler was thinking of the proceeds of several little hauls he had made recently, for which he was still "wanted.")

"What we got to do," continued Smiler, "is to make a good get-away with the coat and open her up nice and quiet when we're alone in my room."

He looked out of the window again.

"It ain't no good tryin' to get away from a taxi-cab in this hansom. Let's go and have a drink and a snack of something." He lifted the little trap-door in the roof. "Pull up at the first eatin' house," he instructed the cabman.

They were in Oxford Street, and a few doors further on the cab stopped at a small Italian restaurant. Smiler paid the cabman, and they went inside, Hyams and Co. not three yards behind them.

Smiler stood in the middle of the hot, stuffy restaurant and deliberately put on the fur coat,

turned up the collar, carefully put the flaps down over the pockets, and buttoned himself up.

"Now they'll only get rags off me if they get anything at all," he announced, and ordered some chops.

The Jews held a whispered conference, at the end of which Hyams got up and approached the couple with the chops.

"If you lay as much as a finger on me or my coat, Hyams," said Smiler swiftly, "I'll punch your face round under your left earhole, and Bill Welch here'll punch it on round down the back of your neck, so as your collar-band'll choke you."

But the dealer only gave a ghastly smile.

"Vill you do business?" he said. "What you want cash down for de ghoat?"

"What'll you give?"

"Seventy k'vid."

Smiler grinned and shook his head. Hyams, who knew that Smiler could not have any idea as to why the coat was likely to contain anything

approaching that sum, groaned and spread out his hands in a kind of despair.

"Vell, eighty k'vid—and two per cent. of what I find it in de linin'."

"Oh, cheese it!" said Mr. Bunn vulgarly, and Hyams sat down. There was another excited conference, which ended in Hyams getting up and leaving the restaurant.

"'Ullo!" said Bill Welch. "Gone for the police."

"Don't you believe it," remarked Smiler cheerfully. "Gone to fetch a few more of the tribe more likely."

But, as a matter of fact, Hyams had gone to the nearest telephone to call up reinforcements of a kind which would appeal to Mr. Bunn more than all the Jews in London ranged in battle-array.

Smiler decided to counter the move.

He called the manager of the restaurant and the three waiters.

"Gents all," he said loudly. "I 'ave reason to believe I'm being followed by a gang of sharps.

I don't know for certain, but I have me suspicions. Now I want you gents to understand that when you're dealing with me you're dealing with a gent, and if I should be set upon in your cafy I consider it to be your duty to protect your customers."

He put on the table three half-sovereigns and a sovereign, and the waiters pouched the smaller coins with an expertness which was only equalled by that of the manager as he pouched the sovereign. Then, obviously restraining with difficulty from cheering Mr. Bunn, they retreated to their various positions to scowl at the occupants of the other table.

The manager himself attended to the requirements of Smiler and his friend, gritting his teeth at the Jews, who had ordered coffee only.

In about ten minutes Hyams returned—alone, but with a slightly more animated expression. He rejoined his companions, and they all sat on silently, patiently, at the table next to Smiler's—exactly like four birds of prey sitting by a dying koodoo on an African plain.

Smiler and Bill Welch were just lighting two pallid cigars which the manager had recommended, when the door of the restaurant swung open and a woman came in.

She was well, but rather flashily, dressed, and was unusually good-looking in a dark, brilliant, Eastern fashion. Her age might have been about thirty. She was rouged considerably, and the pencil had obviously assisted Nature in the regions of her eyebrows and lashes. She had fine eyes, very bright.

"Bit Jewish, I reckon," muttered Smiler to himself as she swept past, apparently without seeing the waiters or Hyams and Co., and took the table next to Mr. Bunn's. Rather to Smiler's astonishment she flashed a glance in his direction, which she repeated immediately she was seated at her table.

Smiler hesitated a moment, then, for he was not and never had been diffident with fair unknowns, risked a half smile.

The lady bowed, and with her bold expressive eyes indicated the vacant chair at her table.

Smiler rose. Neither he nor Mr. Welch noticed the faint gleam of triumph that suddenly lit up the eyes of Hyams and Co.

"Bill," said Mr. Bunn, "order what you fancy, and wait at this table for us. I've got an appointment meself."

The working-man nodded, and Smiler took the chair next to the unknown.

"Excuse me," she said, with a slight American accent. "But aren't you Captain Wilkinson Laker? We met at Monte Carlo last year, I think."

"No, lady, that was me brother," lied Smiler readily. "I'm Major Luke Laker—retired."

"Ah, I thought I saw the resemblance!" She paused to order coffee. "You have served with your regiment in India, have you not?"

"How did you know that?" questioned Mr. Bunn, temporising.

She laughed quite naturally.

"Why, by your wearing a heavy fur coat indoors on a moist close day like this. Officers who have served in India take a long time to

become accustomed to the climate of England again."

It was skilfully done. Put as she had put it, the bringing of the coat into the conversation was entirely natural. Indeed, any one but a person of almost ultra-refined taste would on such a day have remarked upon the wearing of a heavy fur coat indoors.

But just then Smiler Bunn was electric with suspicion, and some vague instinct of self-protection stirred in his heart like a little live thing waking from sleep.

He stared rudely into the woman's eyes, and even as he stared saw a strange and menacing change come into them. They grew suddenly hard and cold and threatening, and Smiler drew back.

"Ah, I know who *you* are, all right!" he said. "You were in Hyam's shop when I bought the coat—only you've altered yourself a bit since then—paint and stuff. But it's all right, Gertie. Don't waste no time trying to come no confidence trick on me. *Your* pals is sitting at

the other table. Hadn't you better kite across to 'em and tell 'em it's no go ? "

He started to rise.

" Sit down ! " she whispered sibilantly, and there was that in her voice which caused Mr. Bunn to resume his chair. If her eyes had been hard before, they were like black diamonds now. She looked dangerous and snakish. Smiler was not afraid, but he was a little—superstitious.

" What do you want ? " he said sourly.

" I want to make a trade with you—and we've got to do it quick. Listen here ! "

" I'm listenin'," said Smiler.

" Last week you were pointed out to me by a man named Israelstein."

Smiler winced. Israelstein was a receiver with whom he did business.

" Israelstein told me you were a gun—a pickpocket. And Israelstein knows."

" Never heard of the man—— " began Smiler, but she broke in swiftly.

" Ah, cut it out ! " she snapped. " What's the good ? I'm telling you what you are. I'm

not shooting off a sermon at you. Well now,—see here! Have you ever heard tell of the Chicago Kitten—a woman pickpocket across the water? Some folk call her Kate the Gun."

Smiler opened his eyes. In common with most pickpockets he had heard of her—and he knew that she was considered to be at the very top of her criminal profession. And apart from her extraordinary skill, he also knew that she was said to be a desperate enemy, but a fine friend. That she was desperate enough, Smiler, like the Chicago and New York police, knew. That she was a useful friend was knowledge that he had yet to acquire.

"I've heard of her," he said sullenly.

"She's me—I'm Kate the Gun!" said the woman simply. "And, say, don't make me lose my temper. They call me the Kitten at home, but I ain't feeling very kittenish just now. Say, keep friendly."

Smiler remembered hearing of two dead men in the States, the manner of whose deaths had never yet been accounted for, although Kate

the Gun had twice been asked the question—by the Law. Twice she had proven her lack of knowledge concerning the deaths—but there was a grim and sinister significance attaching to the fact that they had gone to *her* for explanation of the murders, and had put her on trial for them, that gave Mr. Bunn an uneasy thrill. His glance wavered for a second. Then he pulled himself together.

"All right—I'll make a note of it," he said jauntily. "What do you want?"

She favoured him with a hard little smile.

"That's better," she murmured. "Well, now, I don't like butting into the business of a brother gun, I want you to understand, but this business is different. Now, you've just bought a coat from Hyams, and he wants to buy it back—see? He reckons there's something in the lining. Well, in the ordinary way, if any grafter came to me and asked me to get away with what a brother gun had bought or even hooked, it would be the stony stare for his, and rapid, too. Hyams is a useful man to me and my gang—

never mind why. He is, and I want to oblige him. You get that, don't you? Well, I don't go much on coat linings, and, for all I know, Hyams is hunting for trouble. Anyway, he's willing to give you ninety pounds for the coat, and, *say*,"—she fixed him with an eye like a stiletto—" unless you're crazy you'll take it. Now don't you say 'No.' Remember who I am—and add to that the little fact that I've got over here with me two Chicago plug-uglies that'd sandbag you like a dog the first time you went out alone at night and drifted more than a dozen yards from the nearest cop. They're what I call my guard of honour, and they're the two toughest propositions that ever came out of the States. Now, don't think this is a dream nor a vaudeville act either. It's cold business, in London, in the year one nine one nit, and if you think it's safe, why, go right ahead and keep the coat. But you'll be plugged, sure. I'm doing this to oblige Hyams, you understand, not because I want to knock you. If you'll sell the coat you'll oblige me, and you're not the man

to refuse to oblige a lady anyway. Are you?" she concluded sardonically.

"Not under the circumstances," said Smiler, rather gracefully, he thought.

"No, I had a kind of idea you were a polite sport when you were really up against it. Well, then, it's a trade? And if any one was to drive up in a chariot and ask my opinion I should say you've got a wad of easy money, and that Hyams is on a gold brick that'll break his heart like a camel's back. But that's *his* funeral anyway."

She rose and went across to the expectant quartet at the other table. Bill Welch stolidly continued to order and swallow Benedictine—a liqueur he had never encountered before, and with which he had fallen in love at first sight.

After another bout of whispering, Smiler saw the Jews search themselves with very serious faces, and finally pool a number of bank-notes, which Kate the Gun took and counted. Evidently Hyams' heart had failed him, and instead of taking the whole risk, he had formed, as it

were, a miniature limited liability company with his three friends, so that each put up a share of the purchase money and would receive a proportionate share of the concealed bank-notes.

Kate the Gun brought over the money to Mr. Bunn, and, having counted it, that gentleman slipped off the fur coat and surrendered it to the Jews. Then he joined Bill Welch, and the pair of them went down the restaurant and paid the bill. They lingered a moment at the door to see what Hyams Ltd. would do with the coat. They were not left long in doubt.

Hyams had borrowed a penknife from Cohenstein, and very carefully was opening the seams. They were all standing round, craning over. In a few minutes Hyams took out the fur lining—he was not the sort of man to waste it—and they all leaned eagerly forward.

There were no bank-notes there—not even a postal-order.

Cohenstein fainted on the spot. With a howl of despair Hyams tore a fistful of hair from his head. Mr. Morris silently laid his head upon

the table and cried like a child. The remaining Jew frantically re-examined the coat.

"But de notes vhas dere," moaned Hyams. "I heard 'em kerackle when de man took de ghoat. Like it as if der vhas dozens and dozens of notes."

He grasped himself at the back of the neck with both hands and lamented.

Kate the Gun, who was looking on with an air of disdain—she would have made less outcry over the loss of ten times the total loss of the four—suddenly gave a hard little enlightened laugh.

"Say that again, Hyams!" she said sharply. "Did you say you heard a rustle like dozens of notes when that skate took the coat?"

"Yes—like a fortune of notes," lamented Hyams, gripping himself like a man wringing his own neck.

The Chicago Kitten laughed again, opened her bag, and turned her back.

"Listen, you clams!" she said politely.

Her hands moved quickly, and into the sudden

silence of the restaurant stole a quick, dry, crackling rustle—unmistakable, electric, alluring, and altogether lovely—the rustle of "fivers" and "tenners," and "fifties."

From where they stood Messieurs Smiler Bunn and William Welch could see what she was doing—merely rapidly counting a rather thick packet of notes.

If you hold a number of notes in your left hand without resting it on a table or support, and, wetting the tips of the right-hand fingers, count the notes, you will create a quite noisy rustling.

Kate the Gun wheeled round on Hyams.

"Why, you muttonhead," she said cheerfully, "that rustling you heard in the shop was made by *this* mother's pet. I was counting my wad when you were selling that coat. The sound never came out of the coat; it came out of the room behind the coat. The door was open—I left it open myself."

A thought struck her, and her eyes narrowed like those of a wild cat.

"Say, yeh don't think *these* notes are yours, do yeh?" she said in terrific American.

But they hastily shook their heads and spread out their palms.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she demanded, obviously more from curiosity than because she cared whether the quartet got back their losses.

Instinctively they turned towards Smiler Bunn.

But Mr. Bunn had turned also instinctively, half a minute before—turned out of the restaurant door, round the nearest corner, and into a taxi.

That was a happy, happy day for Smiler Bunn. Also William Welch.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PIG-IRON KING.

A FEW days later Mr. Bunn was standing on the kerb just outside the shop of one Israelstein, *bric-a-brac* dealer and receiver, thinking out a luncheon scheme of sufficient magnificence to fit in with his financial circumstances.

He had been doing unusually well for some time past, and he now proposed to run through a menu which would take about an hour to deal with comfortably. The wine should be champagne, he informed himself, with a good-humoured smile. He had just disposed of a bracelet, for which a celebrated countess still owed eight hundred pounds—and which even now would have been encircling her wrist had she possessed the foresight to have increased her debts by a shilling or two for a proper guard-chain; but she had neglected to do so, and,

quite by chance, she had come in contact with Mr. Bunn one night at the crowded exit of a theatre. Smiler had been grieved at her carelessness, but—business is business, and she had not even noticed her loss until she sat down to supper.

The era of prosperity had taught Smiler that the best food is usually to be obtained at the best restaurants — a fact he once had some difficulty in believing—and accordingly he had decided to float along to a well-known restaurant in the Strand.

"I'll have a drop of tomato-soup and a red mullet, and steak with mushroom ketchup and a pancake, and a slab of Stilton and some celery, and a pint o' Mumm and two glasses of old port, a couple of green Chartreuses, and coffee, a whisky-and-soda to top up with, and then I'll have a bit of a nap. Yes."

He smiled, and, looking more than ever like a stout and unusually well-found butler, buttoned his fur-lined coat, and was about to fade away towards the Strand when he felt a slight tap

on the shoulder. He turned so swiftly that it looked like a conjuring trick. His face was suddenly white and his appetite was gone. But he need not have been alarmed. The gentleman who had tapped him on the shoulder was by no means a detective. Smiler saw at a glance that he was anti-detective and "*a bas* the police" to the core — a "crook" if ever there was one.

"Say," remarked the man, "ain't youse de skate what sold a lady a foy coat for ninety plunks for a Jew syndicate a few days back in a Dago joint on Oxford Street?"

Mr. Bunn stared. He understood a little American, but this was beyond him.

"What y' mean?" he asked. "You've got a hole in your tongue, ain't you?"

The man snarled at him, but another slightly less severe-looking person with him broke in.

"Aw, cut it out, Michael," he snapped. "Let me speak to him." He turned to Smiler and, with a hard grin on his face, said in very fair English, "Ain't you the man who sold a lady

from Chicago a fur coat a few days ago in a *café* in Oxford Street—a coat you'd bought from a dealer who got reason to believe there was bank-notes in the lining, and who put this lady up to buying it back from you?"

Smiler considered things. He remembered Kate the Gun's "guard of honour." She had described them as "two plug-uglies from Chicago and the toughest propositions that ever came out of the States." Evidently these two persons were the "plug-uglies." Smiler was not quite sure as to what a plug-ugly was—but, anyhow, they looked as though they might be.

The second speaker paused for a reply, but not receiving it, went on—

"We know you are, anyway, so don't waste air denying it. Well, the lady wants you. You're to go to her. We'll take you. That's what we are here for. Oh, it's all right. She's not going to bite you. You're one of the lucky ones—she likes the look of you, and she'll make your fortune, very likely, or get you ten years. Well, that's about all there is to it, so if it's all

the same to you, we'll be hiking along to her. She just hates being kept waiting!"

But Smiler was unwilling—indeed, he was almost angry.

"You two had better go and put your heads in a hole in the wall somewhere," he said. "Why should I come?"

The men looked genuinely astonished.

"Oh, just because——" answered one.

"That's only an unreasonable remark," said Smiler loftily. "You've got to remember you ain't talking to a child. Nor you ain't discussing with no fool, neither. *Why* should I go visiting a lady who don't hesitate to describe herself as a pickpocket? If you mean the lady I mean, she calls herself Kate the Gun—which is a very low and disgraceful profession. When I want to associate with 'guns' I'll drop you a line; but just now, being an honest man myself, I'm content to associate with things that don't go off quite so easy as guns. See?"

But the two men were too greatly in earnest to allow Smiler's sarcastic protest much consideration.

Their faces hardened, and the voice of the spokesman dropped to a fine, silky tone, that sounded curiously ominous.

"Say, my fat friend, you play lighter on your talk-thing. The less music you produce from the back of your pearly teeth the less chance you'll have of getting plugged. Listen here. Maybe you've heard about that centurion who was accustomed to remark to any sport 'Go hence,' and he went henceforth, and 'Come hither,' and he came hitherto. Well, that's like Kate the Gun's manner. Only she's twentieth centurion and the historical gent was way, way back in the single-figger centuries. What Kate the Gun says *goes*. You freeze on to that, if you're feeling defiant. If you're only frightened, you can take it she won't do you no harm. She's got a proposition to make to you, and you can't know much about her, after all, or you'd holler for a taxi to get there. She's a hummer, Kate the Gun is, and when she shakes the golden-apple tree, she gets a basketful of fruit every time. And wouldn't you like one

or two fruit out of the basket? Don't you cherish money at all? Oh, say, let's get a move on—why waste time?"

It was a curious blend of raillery and threat, but it decided Mr. Bunn. After all, he was in the same line of business, and if the lady had an idea which required his co-operation in return for a share of the profits, why, he would be foolish to miss the chance.

"All right," he said. "I'll come. But you've spoiled as good a lunch as any man ever thought out."

"Thought out! Well, if that's all the damage we've done, all you got to do is to dream out a extra-special dinner to-night!" said the more garrulous of the two men. He hailed a taxi-cab, and the three drove away towards the West End.

As the cab started, the "plug-ugly" who had first addressed Mr. Bunn, and who had been brooding somewhat ever since Smiler's remark about his tongue, leaned across and addressed the English pickpocket.

"Say," he said, "don't youse get fresh wid me. See to here. They ain't no hole to my tongue. My tongue ain't no cheap goods; and, say, if it was, I don't allow no slob like youse to learn me what de fashion in tongues is, see? Youse get gay wid me some more, and I'll out you, see?"

"Aw, cheese it, Michael," said his friend, and Michael, with a smothered oath, reluctantly proceeded to "cheese" it. But conversation languished—until presently the cab pulled up outside a block of big flats near Kensington Court.

Two minutes later Mr. Bunn and his companions were received at the door of a very large first-floor flat by an unusually smart parlour-maid, and were shown into an elaborate morning-room, wherein sat Kate the Gun, very expensively gowned, and apparently awaiting them with some impatience.

"Good business," said the lady as she saw Smiler.

"How do?" remarked Mr. Bunn.

There was a little pause. Smiler was astonished to see that the parlourmaid had not left the room. Indeed, she was coolly lighting a cigarette and seemed quite at home. Evidently she was one of the gang—and, not excluding even Kate the Gun, she was unquestionably the most attractive member of it. She looked curiously *chic* in her jaunty cap, her scrap of apron, and cleverly plain black dress. If Kate the Gun was handsome—and she was so—this parlourmaid of hers was lovely.

Smiler took a second look at her, and felt rather more in the humour for whatever enterprise Kate had in train than before.

"I guess I'll talk to our visitor alone," said Kate, in a quiet drawl, which for all its quietness proved perfectly effective. The others left the room without comment.

"There ain't much chance of mistaking who's 'boss' in *this* flat," thought Smiler, and sat down in a comfortable-looking chair near his hostess. She leaned towards him, a hard, calculating look in her eyes.

"Listen here," she said, in a purely business tone. "I'm a 'crook'—and the police of four continents know it, and can't prove it. That's *me*." She paused. It seemed to Smiler that she expected an answer.

"Certainly," he said.

"Well, now, I've given you the truth to save time and prove that I mean business. You know whom I am, see? Now, who're you—and what's your graft?"

But Mr. Bunn hesitated. For some reason or other he did not trust the lady. She noticed his hesitation and cut in incisively—

"Oh, all right—if you're shy," she said sardonically. "I'll tell you who you are. *You're* a 'crook,' too—a sort of casual pickpocket—and the police of one parish even don't know it, because you've never made a 'touch' worth making. Is that right?"

"Well, it'll do to go on with," said Smiler, rather haughtily, for his pride was touched.

"All right," snapped Kate the Gun. "Now we know each other's hands, we'll get to business.

D'you want five thousand dollars—a thousand pounds?"

"Yes," said Mr. Bunn, with the beautiful. innocent, frank simplicity of a child.

"Then listen here and I'll show you how to make it. If I use any American term you don't understand, stop me and I'll explain, for we've got to get this thing right and clear. You look as though you've got a brain spread out somewhere behind that slab of forehead, and you'll want it all. . . . Now, I want to get married——"

Smiler shifted uneasily.

"Oh, don't get coquettish; *you're* not the Willy-boy—not by a couple of barrels!" interpolated the lady with a semi-sneer.

Smiler loosed an inaudible sigh of relief. Kate the Gun was undeniably handsome, but she was too virile for him.

"And I've just got to marry a title. You don't want to get cramp of the intellect wondering why. Among other things you can see that a 'Baroness' can do more business as a high-class

crook than a 'Mrs.' if she's ambitious that way. You get that?"

Smiler nodded and looked more interested.

"Well, I've rounded up the goods all right—he's a Russian nobleman, Baron Lubomirzewski—and I suppose he's worth a dollar and a half. But I'm not shedding tears over that. It's the title I'm hunting for—*I'll* make all the money we want in the States when I'm Baroness Lubo. And he'll learn to help, too, or I'm no prophet. Now, the Baron's been coming on very well the last month or two until a few days ago. *He* thinks I'm a Pittsburg heiress—and I guess that's the particular thought that's going to rope him. He's after my rocks—the money he thinks I've got. But just the last few days he's got kind of restless. I can read him like a poster or a newspaper scare-head, and he's turned uneasy because no parent from Pittsburg turns up. See? He's thinking, 'Well, the girl looks wealthy and acts wealthy, but I don't ever see anything of the old man who's got the money. Where's her pop? Where's old Mr. Pittsburger with the

self-made look and the big squabby pocket-book?' And the Baron's right. Follow me? I'm talking in special English on purpose for you."

Mr. Bunn nodded. He began to see whither the adventuress was leading.

"Go on," he said.

"Well, it's plain enough—see? I want a father—a rich, self-made papa, who's got more money than grammar, and more bones than blood. A bone's a dollar—across the Atlantic. I want him—I've got to get him—I'm tired of being an orphan, and so I guess I'll hire him. Of course, I could have got a hundred cheap actors out of the Strand, but most of 'em would have been scared of the business. I need a crook—not an actor. And I'm offering a thousand pounds for a month's use of him. And—well, when I butted into you over that fur-coat business, you looked the boy I was wanting. Israelstein, the receiver, had recommended you, too—gave you a first-class reference, and I was looking for you anyway. That little fur-coat deal just clinched it. It showed me you were smart—and not *too* smart.

And that's all there is of it. Be my rich father for a month—*I'll* find the money for your expenses and no stinginess either—and you'll make a thousand. All you'll have to do is to lose money to Lubo at cards—I'll find that—and brag about your wealth. You've got one of those young-old faces that'll pass for forty-five with a little reconstructing. *I'll* see to that, too. You'll have a fine room in this flat and no risk—the Baron's all kinds of a fool—and a barrel of money at the end of it. Is it a trade?"

Mr. Bunn hesitated. These were deeper waters than hitherto he had ventured to enter. Then he thought of the attractive parlourmaid and half his hesitation vanished.

"Over here," he said, "we got a saying, 'money talks!' And it's a kind of a habit of mine to ask for a deposit. What's your idea about deposits?"

Kate the Gun smiled a hard smile and opened a bag that hung from her belt. She took out something white that crackled and handed it to him.

"That's my idea about deposits," she said keenly.

Smiler took the white thing that crackled. It was a fifty-pound note. He stretched out an impulsive hand.

"Put it there, Kate, my girl," he said brilliantly. "You're *a credit* to your poor old dad!"

Kate the Gun laughed, genuinely amused, as she shook hands.

"And you're no slouch, although you're British, poppa," she replied.

Then the hard, watchful look came back into her eyes.

"There's just one thing I've got to say to you," she said, "no tricks. I'm paying you well, Mr. Man, for that's my policy—see? I pay well—and if you don't feel satisfied about your pay any time, don't run over the road to the cops or anybody else and sell me for the extra bit. You come right to me and let me know what you want—and, maybe, if you're worth it, you'll get it. If you're not worth it, I'll tell you why—

see? That's fair, I guess. Only mind, no funny business. You got to run straight when you're running with me, or I'll have you fixed so you're a cemetery proposition one tick after the word 'Go.'"

"That's all right," said Smiler. "You can trust me."

"I guess I can," replied the lady, grimly. "Now, let's fix the details."

The details of the ingenious little swindle were soon fixed, and on the following day Mr. Bunn—in a light check suit and one of those soft, shapeless hats with which American millionaires are supposed to adorn themselves—presented himself with two suit-cases at Kate the Gun's flat. The door was opened by the parlourmaid whose *piquante* face had so impressed Mr. Bunn on the occasion of his previous visit.

"Come in, dad," she said impudently. "The Baron's here. They're having tea. Don't forget your name's Cataract Huggins of Pittsburg—your nickname's 'Calamity' Huggins—and you're the Pig-iron King of Pittsburg."

She helped him off with his coat.

"I'll show you to your room," she said, and slipping her arm through his in the most friendly way, made for a door facing them.

"I like your face," she informed him. "It's so big—so solemn. I'm Fanchon—Kate's junior partner. Here's your room."

She came in with him quite naturally.

Smiler turned round suddenly and put his hand on her shoulders, looking into her eyes.

"You didn't ought to be one of a gang like this, my girl," he began; but Fanchon put a dainty hand over his mouth—or as much of it as she could cover.

"Neither did you. Don't behave like a bishop," she said. She took a photograph from the mantelpiece. "That's the Baron," she said.

Smiler took the photograph and looked at it with some interest. Suddenly his eyes bulged out a little and he drew in his breath. Fanchon was watching him rather closely.

"What's the matter?" she asked, her voice a shade more tense than usual.

"Nothing," said Smiler, hesitating, his eyes still fixed on the photograph. "He's a good-looking chap—for a Russian—ain't he?"

Fanchon was still looking very intently at Smiler.

"Yes—and he is so good, too. Do what you can for him," she said suddenly, and went out.

Mr. Bunn stared, as the door closed behind her.

"Strike me!" he said, "that's funny. What did she mean by that? 'Do what you can for him?'" he pondered. "There's something queer going on in this flat, if you ask me. Perhaps the girl's gone on him, too!"

He looked at the photograph again.

"Why, you dam' old swindler!" he said affectionately, to the man in the photograph. "How did *you* get here? You're supposed to be in Siberia for life. Why, this is like old times, strike me glorious if it ain't. And Kate the Gun reckons I'm going to help do *you!* Last man in the world. What, do me brother Ant'ny. Ah, come off it!"

He sat down on the bed, thinking profoundly.

Had Fanchon been there then she would have noticed a brief but unmistakable moisture in the eyes of Smiler Bunn. For the photograph was one of his younger and only brother—one Anthony Bunn, who, after a short experience of the English stage, had embarked upon the life of an adventurer some five years before. But where his more steady-going brother Smiler had confined himself to a safe, conservative business in London, Anthony had begun on a Belgian race-course, and after a highly successful and brilliant spin through France, Monaco, and Austria, had come to grief in St. Petersburg in the matter of a safe full of faked securities, and had finally spun himself into Siberia.

For the past two years it had been an ambition of Smiler Bunn's to amass enough to take a tour through Siberia—with the idea of finding and helping Tony to escape.

But it seemed now that his brother had saved him the trouble.

Presently Smiler blew his nose, swore happily at a sparrow that was loafing about on the sill

of the open window, slapped his knee gently as though a valuable idea had occurred to him, brushed his hair, and left the room.

Fanchon was waiting for him at the end of the corridor.

"I say," she pulled his head down to whisper to him—this girl behaved more like a man's daughter than one of his fellow-conspirators, thought Smiler. "If I said anything silly in there just now, you'll forget it, Pig-iron, dear, won't you?"

Smiler grinned.

"Sure," said he, and she showed him into the drawing-room.

Only Kate the Gun and Baron Lubomirzewski were there, and it was well that the Baron's back was to the light and that Kate also was slightly behind him, or assuredly she would have seen the sudden spasm that wrung his face as he looked towards and recognised his brother. Smiler's stare was as blank as a stone wall; he was desperately afraid Anthony would hail him as brother. But the "Baron" was too clever

for that, and Kate's introductory—"My father, Baron; father, this is Baron Lubomirzewski"—warned the man out of Siberia to be careful. He caught a grip on himself instantly and bowed like a mandarin.

The Pig-iron King behaved perfectly. He had profited greatly from the hour's drilling which Kate had given him on the previous day.

"Hello, Baron!" he said affably. "My little girl's written me half a hundredweight of correspondence about you, one way and another, and I'm vurry pleased to make your acquaintance," he said, with what he flattered himself was an excellent pig-iron manner.

The Baron bowed again.

"It is a privilege to be numbered among your friends, sir," he said, speaking with a marked Russian (as spoken in Siberia) accent, "and one which I hope never to lose."

"Well, Baron, if you look at it like that, we'll do what we can to keep the stock up to par!" replied Smiler, not quite sure as to what he

meant, but using a phrase Kate the Gun had told him was worth remembering.

Then they sat down.

The Baron was very good-looking, in the clear-cut, English fashion which his brother remembered so well—and it soon became abundantly clear to Smiler that Kate appreciated the fact. She was not the sort of woman to fall passionately in love with any man—she was of too cold and sinister a temperament for that—but Smiler soon realised that the personal appearance of the Baron was by no means the least important of the reasons why the adventuress wanted to marry a man of title.

He produced a case of excellent cigars (provided by Kate the Gun) and offered one to the Baron. But that polite sportsman hesitated, with a deprecatory glance at the curtains.

"Oh, my little girl don't value her curtains more than her father's comfort, Baron," said Smiler, pig-ironly. "Do you, honey?"

"Honey" hastened to reassure the Baron, and

the cigars were promptly dealt with in the customary manner.

Very skilfully Kate brought the conversation round to liners, from liners to Liverpool, from Liverpool to New York, from New York to Pittsburg, and once in Pittsburg led it on to the subject of steel, from steel to pig-iron, and the fortunes made from it by "Calamity" Huggins in particular. She juggled for a space with millions—and then Smiler put the crown on the whole skilful farce by correcting her once.

"Are you speaking in dollars, honey?" he asked, with an indulgent smile, when finally she said with extraordinarily clever naïveté, "Poppa's made forty millions out of his ridiculous pig-iron, you know, Baron."

"Dollars, poppa? Of course," she smiled.

"Better make it pounds sterling," said Smiler, calmly, and lit another cigar. For a man who eight months previously was living chiefly on red herrings, he did it remarkably well.

They heard the Baron gasp, distinctly. (Kate was not the only brilliant actor in the room, and

this talk of money made everything clear to the man who had been clever enough to escape from Siberia. The scheme was translucency itself, now—even to the knowledge that his brother Smiler's appearance in it was pure chance.)

So he gasped, and Kate the Gun's eyes shot a gleam of approval to Smiler. After that the Pig-iron King took a rest, and left the young couple to themselves, while he refreshed himself with about eight hundred and forty winks on the couch.

Presently Fanchon appeared with tea and whisky and soda. (Pig-iron Kings do not value tea as a beverage, according to the idea of Smiler Bunn.)

For all his apparent laziness, Smiler caught a look which passed between his brother and Fanchon—she was very demure now—that helped him to understand the girl's anxiety for Anthony. If two people ever were really in love, these two were. But what spoiled Smiler's whisky and soda was the suspicion that Kate had seen the look, too. For a few seconds a bitter light gleamed

in her eyes, and Smiler saw it. But when Fanchon went out and the Baron turned again to his hostess, the light was no longer there. It had lasted long enough, however, to remind Smiler that, no matter how easy things seemed, the element of humour was less conspicuous in this affair than in many of those in which he had figured, whereas the element of very real danger was present. Kate the Gun was not a woman to be toyed with. No!

She began gradually to steer the conversation round to cards, and card-playing—a pastime in which, it was quickly apparent, the Baron took a profound and doubtless profitable interest. He had the hands of a card-sharp—long, slender, delicate, in spite of his Siberian interlude.

The lady brought the subject up to the point where Fanchon was required to bring some packs—the Baron had offered to show Smiler a new game which he had invented. Smiler wanted to play for money from the initial hand, but the Baron—who was returning to dinner—quietly evaded the proposal.

"After dinner, if you like, sir. But this is not an easy game, and if you will forgive a young man's persistence, I beg you to play a few hands now for practice merely. I call my game *En Garde*, and you will perceive, after a deal or so, that it is an excellent name. The niceties of the game are not apparent to even the most brilliant of beginners until one has played at least thirty hands."

He might have made it three hundred. Smiler was neither a babe nor a suckling with what it was his habit to term the "books," but he—and Kate the Gun also—speedily perceived that *En Garde* was precisely the sort of game a Russian nobleman of limited means might be expected to invent. It was what is vulgarly known as a "skinner."

Smiler, of course, was delighted with the game. It suited the *rôle* he was expected by Kate to play—that of a good and heavy loser—and it suited an idea he had just conceived—to lose appallingly, but to go halves with his brother later on. It suited his brother—who stood to

win anyhow, for the man did not live who could beat him at any card game, and certainly not at this vulturine invention of his own. In any case he could always give his winnings back to his brother, if Smiler really lost his own money. And it suited Kate the Gun, for it was an easy way of supplying her Baron with money, and it proved that he had brains as well—brains of the kind that Kate would find useful when, once married and by reason of the social *éclat* her marriage would help to give her in the smart set on the other side of the Atlantic, she commenced her long-cherished campaign against the fifty-thousand dollar lots of jewellery, furs, and similar *bric-a-brac* she had envied so long. Hence she was willing—anxious even—to be liberal with supplies to Smiler. A thousand pounds or so now was nothing in comparison with the enormous *coups* she saw her way to making when, as Baroness Lubomirzewski, she began operations in America.

Presently the Baron rose, announcing, with a meaning stare at Smiler, that he proposed to go

to his club and dress. Would Mr. Huggins care to stroll thither with him? Kate the Gun, who was standing at the window, nodded her head almost imperceptibly. She was charmed with the way in which the two men got on with each other—and she had no suspicion that all was not well with her scheme.

Smiler saw the nod and jumped at the Baron's invitation. He informed Kate that they would be back at eight o'clock, and after a brief but brilliant tour in politeness on the part of the Baron they went out. Fanchon helped them on with their coats—her "Pig-iron dear" first.

It occurred to Smiler that, as he was taking a look round the hall, he heard the sound of a soft kiss behind him. Probably it was only Fanchon helping Anthony with his coat—at any rate Smiler did not pay much attention to it. He was occupied in examining a fine hat-brush he had discovered in a recess. The back was "curiously wrought" in silver. Nobody seemed to be watching him, he loved knick-knacks, and so he quietly but firmly "pinched" it.

For Smiler Bunn was a man who hated waste.

The two—the Pig-iron King and the Baron—left the house together.

"Why, John——" began the Baron softly before they were off the steps.

"*Not a word—not a blasted word!*" muttered Smiler dizzily. "Wait till we're at the club," and hailed a taxi.

But it was not to any club they drove. It was to a dingy house in a street on the north-east side of Gray's Inn Road that the Baron directed the four-wheeler into which they changed after having changed into a hansom (all for safety's sake), to proceed.

And not till they were in the shabby garret that was the "Baron's" home did they shake hands, and tell each other the news.

It was good news.

Chiefly, it dealt with the best method by which one may escape from Siberia, and, having effected this laudable purpose, how one may get to England and proceed to make a living.

"You see, Jack," said Mr. Anthony Bunn,

"I got acquainted with Miss Huggins—or Kate the Gun, as you call her, and was just working out a plan to relieve her of some of that beautiful money of her father's, when it struck me that she was inclined to get matrimonial. Well, I had no reason to suppose she was anything but an American heiress, and, naturally, I met her more than half-way. It seems to me it's a pretty lucky thing she's engaged you as her 'father.' For it's a certainty that if I'd met a stranger there to-day who played the fond parent as well as you I should have proposed to her without wasting any time. For you do the Pig-iron King act as well as I do the Baron. Seems to me that there's a suspicion of false pretences about the whole batch of us. Well, now about these card-games."

That night Baron Lubomirzewski won a cool two hundred pounds from "Calamity" Huggins at the gentle game of *En Garde*. But the Pig-iron King—quietly paying away, as it were, with the right hand what he received from Kate the Gun with the left—stuck to him manfully and

made an appointment for the following evening, when they would renew the struggle. He was a good loser, but nevertheless he seemed just a little piqued at his inability to make much impression on the Baron's skill at the new game.

"Say, Baron," he said suddenly, as they finished the last hand, "you must be about a thousand dollars ahead of the game? I'll just cut you once double or quits."

Kate the Gun stiffened a little. She had not set any limit on the amount Smiler was to lose, but this was a trifle too magnificent for her.

But the Baron agreed, and with a smile of indulgence befitting the heiress to forty millions or so, she came over to the table to see the cut. She arrived too late to observe the slight flicker of the Baron's finger as he bent the edge of a card rather near the bottom of the pack.

"Will you cut, sir?" he said, placing the pack on the table. Smiler, offering up a prayer for a deuce, cut—and got it. Two of clubs. The Baron got a king of hearts—slightly but not noticeably bent at the edge.

Smiler paid up, and the Baron presently departed.

"You don't want to get any idea that I'm the Bank of England," said Kate, rather sourly, when she and Smiler were alone. "I'm satisfied with your performance to-day, although the matinée was cheaper than the evening show. You're the slickest loser of other folks' money at cards I ever heard of—and I guess you can close up to-morrow when you've lost fifty pounds!"

She assisted herself to a whisky-and-soda, obviously dissatisfied with something.

She took a cigarette and smoked in silence a moment. Suddenly she turned her hardest, most disconcerting stare on to Smiler.

"What d'you think of Fanchon?" she asked.

"Fine girl," said Smiler very casually. "Very near in love with her."

"Huh!" went Kate the Gun, offensively. "You don't reckon a cheap skate like you'll cut much ice with Fanchon, do yeh? Say, Fanchon 'll hook on with a bag of money when she does

the nuptial-knot act." She leaned across to him earnestly. "No. I had the Baron in mind when I first mentioned her," she said. "It seemed to me that he kept his lamps on her pretty industrious every time she blew in with tea and truck, and when she was waiting at dinner, why he lamped her till she blushed, and, say, I didn't know she had a blush concealed about her."

Smiler thought swiftly. Kate was restless, and this vague jealousy looked like complicating things. He decided to smother it—if he could.

"Oh, she blushed then because I squeezed her hand on the sly," he said fatuously.

Kate laughed sardonically.

"*You!* Why, you lobster, you don't reckon Fanchon got any use for you, do yeh? You've got one or two points, perhaps, but I guess Fanchon would flinch before she handed you a job as butler, much less marry you. No, sonny. If you don't believe it, try the devout lover with her, and see what she gives you!"

"Oh, all right!" said Smiler. "Here's off to bed. Good night," and he left the lady to herself.

Curiously enough, he met Fanchon herself outside the door.

"Good night, Pig-iron, dear," said Fanchon pertly. "Pleasant dreams."

Smiler looked down at her. He noted afresh and with a remote pang the sweetness of her face, the perfect curve of her red lips, and the faint, fascinating misty shadows round her eyes—it was late and Fanchon was tired—and, for once, he wished he was of the type of man for which women care. He would have had her out of that flat and free of the dangerous company of Kate the Gun without delay, he told himself. It was difficult to believe that this child—she looked little more—was so calculating and mercenary as Kate had said.

"Good night, Fanchon, my girl," he said, rather heavily. Then, quite unexpectedly, "Be a good girl," astonishing himself as much as he astonished her.

She patted his hand friendlily.

"Yes, dad," she said, and went on into the drawing-room.

For a week the thing went like a comfortable dream. Smiler had made himself quite at home in the flat, and was losing heaps of money to the Baron. Everybody seemed satisfied but Kate the Gun. What she did not like was the fact that the Baron seemed no nearer to inviting her to share his name then he was before the appearance of her blatantly wealthy father. She was not contented with the progress made. She was spending a great deal of money, but was getting nothing back for it.

She decided to watch the Baron and Fanchon more closely then before—and on the tenth day of the scheme she got proof in abundance.

On the evening of that day the Baron, as usual, took tea at the flat and left at about six o'clock. As he went out of the room and down the corridor to the hall, Kate followed him stealthily out. Fanchon, as usual, helped him on with his overcoat and received—and gave—the customary

kiss. The two were, and had been for weeks, desperately in love with each other, and, despite Smiler's warning, they were rapidly reaching that stage of fever when they would become indifferent as to who knew it.

Kate the Gun saw the kiss and, with a gasp of rage, stepped into the hall. Smiler had followed on her heels, taut with excitement. He had foreseen this.

Fanchon and the Baron turned suddenly, and at sight of the bitter menace on the face of the adventuress they paled a little. Fanchon gave a long low whistle—apparently of surprise—low, but very clear. It might have been a signal.

"Ah, you scum," snarled Kate the Gun, tigerishly, her lips working with rage. "Did I lift you out of the gutter to throw me down like this?"

She spoke to Fanchon—and added an epithet that made even the men quail. The Baron's walking-stick was near her, and she snatched it, and raised it so quickly that Smiler had not time to attempt to check her. It was a heavy cane

with a massive silver handle—a murderous thing in the hands of a powerful woman like Kate the Gun.

But it never fell.

Fanchon made a swift movement, and something suddenly flashed and glittered in her hand—something that pointed without a tremor at the heart of the woman with the stick.

"*Put up your hands, Kate Baraud—quick! I'll take no chances!*" Fanchon said rapidly, in a voice that was difficult to recognise as hers.

Over the barrel of the revolver her eyes, hard and steady and bright as jewels, clung to those of Kate the Gun.

The stick fell to the floor with a thud as Kate glared back.

"Why, I've been after you for two years, Kate," said Fanchon, quietly. "Have you ever seen one of these?"

She extended and opened her left hand—the revolver in her right never wavered for an instant—and in the palm of it lay a little badge—the

badge of Westerton's, the great American detective house.

A man suddenly pushed past Smiler. It was the cook—a German youth. At least, that is what Kate the Gun had imagined him to be when she had engaged him a year before.

"One moment," he said softly, and as the woman turned there was a flutter of hands and a sudden sharp click. The man stood back.

"There we are, Kate, my girl—quite comfortable," he said, in a quiet, friendly voice. "You've broken all records, but—we had to get you in the long run!"

Followed, a curious silence. Kate was breathing very quickly, and her eyes were black with rage. She looked first at Fanchon, next at the man who had cooked for her so long. Smiler and his brother she ignored. They mattered nothing to her now.

Then she looked balefully at the handcuffs on her wrists. There was still silence. But at last she drew in a long, long breath, and—smiled.

"Aw!" said she magnificently. "It's your

money! You win. Put up the gun, Fanchon. I guess this lets me out for fair. Fanchon, you're a clever little devil, and you," she turned to the other detective, "you're a pretty good cook. Let's go into the drawing-room and have a drink, and talk it over."

She looked at the Baron.

"Would you have married me, sport?" she asked curiously.

The man from Siberia shook his head.

"No," he said simply. "I knew the scheme from the start."

Kate's eyes glittered.

"What! Did that swob give me away?" She indicated Smiler, who bowed—quite gracefully for him.

"Good guess," he said. "Did you think you could bully me all the time for nothin'?"

Kate the Gun threw up her head.

"This comes of running with cheap 'crooks.' Fancy a thing like you throwing me down. Ah, come away," she said haughtily, and went steadily down the corridor, the detective following

her. They watched her go—she went to a life-sentence, and she knew it. But she had earned it, that was some sort of consolation. Fanchon and her fellow detective had collected enough evidence of her many crimes during the previous year to render her harmless for the rest of her days.

Fanchon turned to Tony.

"Well, Baron," she said wistfully, "now you know what I am—just a woman detective. So I suppose we had better consider it a case of 'Let bygones be bygones.' I sail for New York as soon as we get the extradition papers."

She did not seem to observe Smiler, and evidently she still believed his brother to be a Baron.

Tony went up to her and took her in his arms.

"Listen to me, Fanchon——" he began, and Smiler saw that he was about to make a clean breast of it.

But making a clean breast of things to a detective—whether one was in love with her or not—

was not the sort of proceeding which appealed to Smiler.

"Half a minute, Tony," he said. "Is it—er—wise?"

"I'll chance it, Jack," said Tony. Smiler reached for his hat.

"Ah, then," he said, "I think I'll be getting along. She ain't in love with *me*. So long, Fanchon." He paused at the door. "If when Tony's told you the truth, and you've decided to be reasonable and not let your duty interfere with your love, you both like to meet me outside the Trocadero, I'll stand the pair of you a dinner worth walkin' a mile for."

"All right," said Tony; and Mr. Bunn, not hastily, but without unnecessary delay, proceeded to put a few streets between him and the detectives.

"It's a funny thing, this love is," he soliloquised as he went. "But I don't reckon she'll give me and Tony away."

And he was about right.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVENTURE OF "J. BIRD."

"It's a remarkable thing how proud and ambitious a few good hauls make a man," Mr. Bunn was musing one afternoon, soon after he had moved into a comfortable furnished flat in Ridgeford Mansions, Torrington Terrace. "Look at myself, for instance. A couple of years ago I wasn't capable of thinking in quids, and if I was I never had a chance. I was too busy hunting for bobs. And my clothes was nearly rags, my grub was trash, and me grammar was muck. Not that I reckon myself a duke, even now. But I *do* consider I've got on in the world. Worth a couple of thousand o' goblins anyhow, and my way of speaking has improved something astonishing. And me clothes is remarkably neat and classy."

He took up his bank-book and ran his eye affectionately over the total once again.

"Very well done indeed, Smiler," he soliloquised comfortably; "you have a very happy knack of putting your hands on the right thing in the right place at the right time, and it'll carry you a long way yet."

He got up from the sofa and locked the bank-book away.

"Yes, with ordinary care and a bit of luck you'll die a prosperous gentleman-farmer yet, my lad. And in the meantime you shall take an evening off, and have a special dinner. And we'll make it this evening, Smiler, if it's all the same to you," he continued playfully.

He strolled quietly into his bedroom and very leisurely proceeded to dress for the forthcoming "snack."

But as he rung the bell with the intention of desiring his landlady to bring him a slice of currant cake—there was nothing he enjoyed more than to beguile the tedium of dressing with a thick slice of cake—he made an alarming discovery. He looked at his reflection in the mirror very closely, and, turning repeatedly,

surveyed himself at every angle. Then he heaved a profound sigh.

"Yes," he said reluctantly, at last. "I *am* getting stout—too stout!" He paused reflectively, smoothing his chin. "I shall have to go without any coffee to-night, and take more exercise!"

But the bogey of *embonpoint* was not to be so easily laid. It haunted him all through his dinner and the series of cigars which followed it, and an incident which he witnessed while strolling home, and which he chose to interpret into an omen, or a warning by Fate, decided him to take active measures to reduce his weight without delay.

It was quite an everyday affair, but one which no "crook" could witness unmoved.

A pickpocket of the "baser sort," attracted by a flashily-dressed lady, who obviously was the wife of a bookmaker (who probably ran a beerhouse also), had made a two-handed clutch at the very obese and silver-mounted bag which she carried by no means unostentatiously. He got it, and bolted for dear life, head down, and

full pelt, for an alley some twenty yards up the street. He ran blindly into a policeman, who was just emerging from the alley in question, and that was the beginning of the end. As the man was led away to the haven where he fain would not be, Mr. Bunn, who had watched the episode, sighed.

"Poor bloke," he said, "that's what comes of holding your head down. Always bunk with your head up, lookin' the whole world in the face. If you do that you can see the cops and dodge 'em; and the man was too fat—too fat—and he forgot to hold his head up, and it might have been me! Wurr!" Smiler shivered. "I'm too fat, too. But I always holds me head up. But, all the same, I'll take more exercise. What's the matter with a bicycle tour? Just a week potterin' along and potterin' along; that'll get my weight down. It'll be pleasant, and I'll do it!"

He strolled leisurely home, ordered supper, and sat down to look at the late evening papers. There was nothing much in them. The police-courts were busy, as usual. Mr. Bunn noted

with vague regret that an old friend of his had been involved in an argument with a judge, but had got rather the worst of it (six months), and after his usual survey of the personal advertisements, he had turned to the Society column. Here a paragraph arrested his attention at once.

"The Duchess of Cornchester, whose recent article on 'The Simple Life' will be remembered by our readers, left London to-day for Salisbury, from which town she proposes to start on her caravan tour through the New Forest. The tour will extend over two months, and her Grace will travel *incognita*."

Smiler Bunn frowned thoughtfully, as he read the paragraph.

"Cornchester—Duchess of Cornchester!" he muttered. "I've got her in my book, I believe. Let's have a look." He took from a drawer a black note-book, and ran his finger down the index. "'Collins, Carroway, Cornelius, Custard, Cornchester.' That's it! 'Cornchester, Duch. of, Em. and dia. neckl. Once belong to Sult. Turk. Val. Always wears. Never part. See *Daily Whaup*, May 18, '02.'"

Smiler closed the book and put it away. He remembered the story now. The Duchess of Cornchester, some years before, had saved the life of a young man who had been seized with cramp while bathing at a seaside resort. She was unmarried at the time. The young man had turned out to be the Duke of Cornchester, and, a week later, had presented his preserver with the most expensive diamond and emerald necklace he could find. For some vague feminine reason or other she had sworn always to wear the necklace, and when some weeks later, the "beautiful and fearless girl" (*vide* Press) married the Duke of Cornchester, practically every newspaper in London chronicled the "romantic" vow—much to the interest of those of the London and Provincial "crooks" who read Society news. And there are more of them do this than many people are apt to realise.

Smiler smoked a cigar to the bitter end while he pondered the position.

"Well, now's my chance if ever I'm going to get that necklace," he soliloquised. "A caravan's no place for a thousand quids' worth of jewellery

—not by no means. But very likely she's got out of the romantic stage by now. It's a good few years ago she got married, and marriage *tells* on a woman very nearly as much as it does on a man. Still, these Duchesses are rum 'uns—likely as not they keep their vows. Sometimes, anyhow; and as I'm having this bicycle tour, in any case I might as well have it in the New Forest as anywhere else. Might come across this caravan when I'm there. You never know. I'll swear it was never meant for me to be touring about on a bicycle in Wales, wherever *Wales* is, while a diamond necklace was touring about in a caravan in the New Forest. No, I must look into this."

And he rang for his supper with the air of a general about to cross the Alps.

Some two days later a fat person in knickerbockers might have been seen sitting on a chair outside the Red Deer Inn in the village of Downton, Wiltshire, carefully dealing with the contents of a large jug. Leaning against the wall was a bicycle covered with white dust. It was mid-August, and the English summer was

excelling itself. Any one riding a bicycle in such weather was liable to be affected by the heat, and the fat person with the jug seemed to be particularly distressed about it.

"For two pins I'd give it up altogether," he was saying to himself. "Only I hate giving up; and heat like this can't last—that's one comfort, anyhow." He turned and stared along the Salisbury road. "They ought to be along pretty soon now," he said, and even as he spoke, a pair-horse caravan rounded the bend.

"Thought so," said the fat person, and hastily went inside the inn, taking the jug with him. He sat down in the window-seat, from whence he could command a view of the road.

"Let's see, how far is the New Forest from here?" he inquired of the landlord, who appeared to be entertaining himself with a spirited imitation of the man in the Iron (or pewter) Mask.

"The Forest, sir? Well, some reckons it's twenty. Which end of the Forest, mister?"

"Which end? Why, *this* end, you fathead! The nearest end," said the stout person, with a stare.

"Oh, this end's two mile about, mister."

The fat person pondered.

"Um!" he said, at last. "I'll stop here to-night. You can book me a bed. Name of Bird—J. Bird."

The landlord made a note of it, and J. Bird turned again to the window.

"Jay Bird," said the landlord. "Now, that's a Lunnon name, mister, I'll lay. There's some funny names about, ain't there? Now, what'd you reckon my name was?"

"Hogg," said J. Bird promptly—or Smiler Bunn, as hitherto he had been known.

The landlord chuckled.

"Noa," he replied, seeming pleased.

"Dogg!" said Smiler, snappishly.

"Noa." The landlord's chuckle was less pronounced this time. The idea that J. Bird did not wish to talk to him was slowly grinding its way through his skull. "Guess again!"

"*Devil*, then. And Hog, Dog, or Devil, it's all the same to me!" roared J. Bird, who wanted to think. "You shut up! I didn't ride seven miles in this weather to guess your darned name.

I don't *want* to know your name. I don't care *what* it is. Any blooming name 'd do *you!* You go out into the stable and call yourself by it—and mind you come when you're called!"

The landlord scratched his hair. His suspicion that his customer was not a chatty man was practically a certainty now.

"Oh, yes—certainly that's polite and civil," he said, vaguely sarcastic, and discontinued the conversation.

In a few minutes the caravan lumbered slowly past the inn, and Mr. Bunn—that is, J. Bird—surveyed it attentively from behind the curtains.

At the Salisbury Hotel, from which it had started, J. Bird had quietly interviewed an ostler that morning, and from this man he had been able to glean a fair idea as to the probable route upon which it would proceed. But he had seen nobody connected with the vehicle, nor had he troubled to wait until they put in an appearance. There was time for that and to spare—nearly two months, Smiler judged, for he did not expect to "come to grips" with the necklace for a considerable period.

But he did not expect, nor, in his opinion, did he deserve, the series of blows which Fate proceeded to deal him as he looked out of the window of the Red Deer at the caravan.

Walking slightly in front of the horses was a huge and extraordinarily offensive-looking boar-hound—muzzled. There was something very ominous about that muzzle.

Following the caravan was that boar-hound's wife, and she looked even more biassed and quick-tempered than her mate. She was unmuzzled—and there was something very ominous about that lack of a muzzle.

A nervy-looking bull-terrier, with pink-rimmed eyes, padded along in the shade under the caravan.

J. Bird rubbed his chin very thoughtfully indeed, as his quick eye took in the canine escort. In his eagerness to see all that was to be seen he pushed the curtain clear away from the window. The movement of the white curtain caught the attention of a girl who was sitting next to a man who sat by the driver (there were three people sitting in front). She turned, and her eyes met those of J. Bird, who recognised her instantly.

It was Fanchon—the girl from Westerton's, the great American detective agency.

Smiler saw her grip the arm of the man who sat next to her and rapidly whisper to him. The man craned forward and round, staring at the window, and Smiler saw that it was Tony Bunn, his brother! Smiler was not surprised for more than a half-second. He saw instantly how it had happened that these two should be on the box of the Duchess of Cornchester's caravan. It was perfectly natural that they should be there. He had realised this even before his brother had jumped down and started for the door of the Red Deer.

Tony Bunn was a man who lost no time on any occasion. He was in the room almost before Smiler had decided upon his course.

"Hello!" said Tony.

He was too cautious to use any name.

"Hello!" said Smiler. "What'll you have?" and ordered another jug of gin-and-gingerbeer without waiting for a reply. He bore it to the window-seat, and the two sat down.

"Look here, Jack," began Tony Bunn, in a

half-whisper. "There's nothing doing in necklaces this trip."

Smiler smiled.

"How's that, old man?" he asked cheerfully.

Tony looked serious.

"I'll tell you. When you met me last—a month ago—I was passing as a Baron, and I was a 'crook'?"

Smiler nodded.

"Well, I'm not a 'crook' now. I'm a private detective. Fanchon and I are married, and in two months' time we sail for the United States for good. She wanted to see a bit of English country, and she got an offer from the Duchess of Cornchester's solicitors, who knew of her. The Duchess was going on a two months' tour, and wanted a clever and lady-like companion who knew—well, what Fanchon knows. Fan jumped at the offer, and dragged me into it. She told the Duchess that she couldn't take the responsibility of escorting a five-thousand-pound necklace about country lanes without a good man to help her. She recommended me. Westerton's cabled her two months' holiday to get married in, and

her recommendation of me was good enough for the Duchess. And here we are! Now, Jack, you can't get that necklace anyhow. It's impossible. The dogs won't allow any one near the caravan when we're camping, and even if you fixed the dogs, there's me, and even if you fixed me, there's the Duchess's coachman, and even if you fixed him, there's Fan, and I don't know of any man in the world who could fix her. She's as clever as paint and as good as gold, and I've got to keep 'good' too—for Fanchon's sake. See? After this trip she's going to get me a job with Westerton's, across the Atlantic, and we'll settle down in the States for good. That's all. You've got to give up the necklace idea, Jack. Here's luck!"

Tony drank airily, but his eyes were bright and anxious over the rim of the glass.

For Smiler was smiling a smile that was "child-like and bland."

"Well," said Tony, a shade stiffly. "You don't mean to say you're still going to try for it?"

Smiler nodded, filling his brother's glass.

"Fair warning's fair warning, old man," he said. "Ain't it? Now, you know perfectly well that I'm part mule and part fool and part man. That's me. Now, you listen. I want that necklace, and I've got to get it." Tony shrugged his shoulders. "Wait a minute. Now, there's no need for you and Fanchon to *work* on your honeymoon. I've got a bit, and you can have five hundred any day. Now, you take this five hundred, and chuck the job, and have your honeymoon in a motor, properly. Fanchon'll see more English country that way, too. You see, if you and Fanchon were going to settle down in England as private detectives I'd get out of this job at once. But you ain't. You're leaving England for good in a few weeks. And Fanchon's reputation isn't even at stake, either. She's not working for Westerton's at all now. She's on a holiday. So her reputation won't suffer with her employers, if I get the jewels. I don't suppose Westerton's would ever hear of it, anyhow. See? Well, then, don't you consider it's a darn selfish thing to ask me to sacrifice a chance of a five-thousand-pound

necklace for the sake of—nothing, except Fanchon's and your reputation on a two months' holiday job, for which I'll bet a fiver you aren't being paid more than a hundred quid, if that? And I'm offering you, as a brother, five hundred quid freely and fully. So the money you're earning's no excuse. You reckon I can't get that necklace. I reckon I can, for I'm improving, and I'm only going in for big things now. So, if you stand in my way, Tony, it's darned selfishness, and that's all there is in it."

Put that way, it certainly sounded convincing. After all, there was no real reason why Tony and his wife should work on their honeymoon instead of doing rural England properly in a motor-car. Tony's face showed indecision as Smiler firmly filled his glass.

"Think it over, old man," said Smiler. "You ain't the man to be a dog in the manger, and interfere with your own brother's private affairs. I know that. Sit down and think it over."

With a gesture of confidence he turned, staring out of the window. Tony pondered. Was the five hundred Smiler offered him a bribe,

or was it just genuine brotherly affection? He believed it was the latter. He remembered that Smiler had not hesitated to tell him of the schemes of a certain adventuress whom, not long before, he, Tony, had been about to marry for the sake of the money she did not possess. And Smiler had warned him at considerable personal risk. For the adventuress—who had posed as an American heiress—was a dangerous criminal, who ultimately had been arrested by Fanchon, a lady detective from New York. It was during this affair that Tony had met Fanchon, fallen in love with, and, it now appeared, subsequently married her. Tony had been a "crook" also in those days, but marriage seemed to have reformed him.

He thought it over.

"After all, it's rough on old Jack. There *is* no need to consider the money the Duchess is paying us, or Fanchon's reputation as a 'star' lady 'tec.' This isn't a Westerton contract she's carrying out—it's a holiday task. Still——"

Smiler turned again.

"Well?" said he.

"I don't know," answered his brother. "I

can't decide. I'll mention it to Fanchon, and let *her* decide."

"Oh, all right," replied Smiler; "just as you like. It's all the same to me. I've got to get that necklace, so Fanchon can decide whichever way she thinks she'd like to. You can tell her this, Tony. I'm *out* for the necklace, but I ain't going to hurt anybody. I ain't a violent man—it's bad for the stomach. So if Fanchon thinks she'll go on guarding the Duch, she can—knowing that neither she nor you nor the coachman nor anybody else'll get hurt or have any rough business through me. You put it to her, and if she's willing to resign, send me a wire saying just 'Mine's motors.' If she means to go on with her two months' job, wire 'Caravans.' Then I shall know where I stand. See?"

Tony nodded gloomily.

"You're a rum card, Jack—you always were. Suppose we decide to stay on, how're you going to get the necklace?"

Smiler smiled yet again.

"I don't know," he said simply; "no more than the man in the moon." He refilled his

brother's glass. "But I don't let a little thing like that worry me. Here's luck! Don't forget to send the telegram—to J. Bird, at this inn. And now I'm going out to the poultry-yard to pick a nice bird for dinner—unless there's such a thing as a duck about. Will you stop and have some dinner? Duck say, and a green pea or two, and a gooseberry puddin' and a bit of Wiltshire cheese, and a pint or two of real home-brewed? That'd go pretty well, I reckon, wouldn't it?"

But Tony Bunn refused. He wanted to get back to the caravan. For he had a worrying notion that Smiler would not be the only gentleman of fortune after that necklace. The Duchess had been paragraphed too freely for Smiler to be the only one to recall her vow never to part with it.

"Ah, well!" said Smiler. "Good luck to you, Tony! Take care of the necklace. I'll see you in town before you go to America. Don't forget the telegram. And, mind, in case I don't see you again, I shan't bear you any malice if I don't get the stones."

Then they shook hands on their curious compact and parted.

Some hours later J. Bird, toying with the unimportant end of his dinner, received a telegram. He opened it. On the limp form he read one word only—

"CARAVANS."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ain't that just like a woman?" he said. "Obstinate as mules, that's what women are!"

He leisurely finished his meal. Then he lit a cigar and looked at his watch.

"Half-past seven," he muttered, and rang the bell. "I'm going to bed," he said to the astonished landlady. "You can send a pint of home-brewed beer up at eight sharp, and a goodish-sized Welsh rabbit, and another pint at half-past nine. I've got a lot of thinking to do, and a man can't think on an empty stomach." And he added, under his breath, "This job will want all the thinking I can spare, too!"

Then he went reflectively up the stairs.

* * * * *

Next morning J. Bird was up at six sharp and caught the first train to town, leaving his bicycle at the Red Deer, with instructions that it should be handed over to the person presenting a signed order for it. Two days after the departure of J. Bird, a fat gipsy, with an extraordinarily dark complexion, little gold rings in his ears, keen twinkling eyes, and dressed in a lamentably shabby velveteen coat, old tight riding-breeches and cloth gaiters, with a slouch hat of the slouchiest kind, and a bandanna handkerchief round his neck, called into the bar, and after two swift pints of beer, made a few cautious inquiries concerning a certain amateur caravanning party, which had recently passed that way. He failed to glean much news, but that did not seem to worry him. He absorbed a further pint of beer, with surpassing skill and precision, and left. The landlord, watching him from the door of the inn as he got his rather heavily-laden pony-cart under way, was afflicted with a vague idea that he had met the gipsy somewhere before, but he could not recall the meeting, and so, with a gesture of absolute

indifference, returned to his bar. And the gipsy, trudging slowly along by the side of his "outfit," jogged away in the direction of the New Forest.

"Well, I ain't so badly made up if Hogg, or whatever his name is, couldn't recognise me," said the "gippo" aloud to himself, as he drifted round the corner. And his voice was the voice of J. Bird, otherwise Smiler Bunn.

The shades of night were falling with their customary speed and accuracy before the gipsy had passed through the wide, heathery expanse which marks the beginning of the New Forest, on the Wiltshire border, and pulled off the road into a glade of beech-trees not far from the wood in which is placed the triangular iron-cased stone marking the spot where the Red King was killed. Smiler was about to camp for the night. He had travelled rather farther that day than he had expected to, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that his forced march had landed him within comfortable distance of the Stoney Cross Hotel—that hostelry which looks out over the site of Rufus' Stone.

He speedily had a fire built and burning, and

having filled his kettle from a big jar of water, he attached a generously-distended nosebag to his pony's face, and turned to his own lavish stores. First, he deftly pitched a small patent tent, and removed from his cart a number of neat cases and packages, including a crate containing, among other things, a twelve-pound ham, a couple of boned chickens, two Armour-plated tongues, a slab of pressed beef, many pickles, much grocery, a dozen fine blood-oranges, a middling-sized pineapple, half a dozen jars of bloater paste and other "relishes," tins of condensed milk, a string of Spanish onions, four Camembert cheeses, a big bar of chocolate, a double handful of mixed dried fruit, an assortment of cans containing lobster, salmon, prawns, oysters, mushrooms, and so forth, a tin of golden syrup, a big currant cake, two loaves, a chunk of streaky bacon, five tins of Fry's cocoa, a pint bottle of liquid coffee, a cold steak and kidney pudding, a yard of liver sausage, a box of biscuits, two bottles of whisky, a flask of brandy, a pair of opera-glasses, a deer-stalker cap, and a spare pair of boots.

He dumped the crate down and surveyed it affectionately.

"Yes," he murmured, "I ain't no fasting man. I want to get my weight down, but I ain't going to starve while I'm doing it—no fear!"

Outside, the pony snorted.

"Oh, you've got nothing to snort about, old man. There's a sack of oats in the cart for you! This is going to be a long and difficult job, my lad, and don't you forget it!"

He arranged his rugs and mackintosh sheets, and proceeded to dine. For the rest of the evening he sat at the opening of his tent, smoking a quiet pipe and watching the moon rise. A bat flickered over and about the dwindling fire in an erratic and fluttering dance, hawking for moths; a wood owl, not far off, hooted cheerfully at intervals; and occasionally a lonely pheasant, roosting somewhere in the trees behind, made sleepy sounds. And Smiler Bunn sat at the door of his tent like Robinson Crusoe, and thoroughly enjoyed it. At eleven o'clock he crawled between his rugs and slept the sleep of the just.

By eight o'clock on the following morning he was on the road again. Nothing of interest happened that day. He ate well, walked well, and slept well. Twice he inquired casually about the caravan, and learned that it was not far ahead. A caravan in the New Forest is the most easily tracked thing in the world, especially when the caravanners are not hurrying.

At noon on the second day Smiler came upon the spot where the Duchess and her party had camped. Smiler recognised it by the huge tracks of the boarhound in the soft peat round a pool not far from the site of the camp.

He examined the place carefully; he was in no hurry, and it was interesting work. He found a number of cigarette ends—some were slender, gold-tipped things, that he attributed to Fanchon or the Duchess, and many were big, blackish, Caporal ends, obviously thrown away by Tony. On a heather bush near the pool he found a handkerchief, evidently hung there to dry, and forgotten. There was a tiny coronet in one corner, and Smiler made a note of the fact that the Duchess of Cornchester seemed to be a

forgetful Duchess. That was worth knowing; but his next discovery was far more valuable. He came across a scrap of waste paper. He turned it over and found, written in a pencil scrawl, the following note—

MRS. MORESBY'S CARAVAN.
Inquire at
THE BELL INN, BROOK.

Bones and dog's meat, 3*s*. Paid.

Obviously it was one of those scrappy invoices that butchers pin with wooden skewers to meat to be delivered. And Smiler smiled his bland smile as he read the "invoice."

"I thought Fan and Tony were smarter than to leave things like this about," he said to himself. For he knew now two things which he had been very anxious to know. One was the name under which the Duchess travelled, and the other made it clear to him that the dogs were not fed on biscuits alone as he had feared, but that they were given meat. That was valuable knowledge to Smiler, for he had a "condiment" in his cart

that he purposed adding to the meat of the dogs when the opportunity offered.

The camp yielded no further clues. But he was perfectly satisfied with his discoveries, and even more satisfied with his skill in realising their value. Just as he reached the road again and was requesting his pony to move along, a big touring car came up behind him.

Some one in the *tonneau* shouted, and the driver slowed down to a crawl and stopped. There were two men in the car, and one of them leaned out, shouting a question to Smiler.

"Seen a caravan about anywhere? A varnished, swell-looking turn-out, with two good horses?" said the spokesman.

Smiler Bunn paused, scrutinising the men. He recognised them. One was "City Joe," notorious among London thieves as the most skilful safe-breaker in England, and the other was a gentleman whom Smiler had once met at Israelstein's—the receiver—a man whose usual line of business was "smashing" or counterfeiting. He called himself Captain Panton. The driver he did not recognise.

Smiler did some of the most rapid thinking he had ever accomplished. He knew what this beautiful pair were after, and he decided to choke them off without delay. The Duchess of Cornchester's necklace was for "J. Bird," or nobody.

"Yes; I've seen the caravan," he said slowly, and ostentatiously put his hand in his pocket, gripping something which reposed there. And it was not a pipe, but something heavier.

"I've seen the caravan," he repeated, "and a little way ahead of it I saw a man from Scotland Yard, and on the box I saw another man from Scotland Yard, and the smartest lady detective in town, and a little way behind it there's another man from Scotland Yard—and he's *me*, City Joe!"

The man's jaw dropped suddenly.

"He's *me*, Captain, my lad!" said Smiler. "*And what are you going to do about it?*"

"Do," said City Joe, with a slightly feeble laugh. "Why, going home. What do you think? We aren't mad."

He spoke quickly to the driver, and the big car turned and headed back in the direction from

which it had come. Both the men, to Smiler's certain knowledge, were clever criminals, far too clever to take any risk at all. There was no further conversation. In a few seconds the car was doing forty miles an hour towards London.

J. Bird smiled benevolently as it passed from sight in clouds of dust, and once more he desired his pony to "step along."

So began the really practical part of one of the most interesting and strenuous attempts against the Fetich of Wealth which that old campaigner, Smiler Bunn, had yet conducted. Day after day he quietly hung on to the tracks, as it were, of the caravan ahead. There were times when, under cover of friendly trees, he would stand, like Robinson Crusoe in his bower, watching through his field-glasses the caravan climbing slowly and comfortably up a far hill. Hour upon hour of that warm August he spent surveying the camp from a carefully chosen ambush hundreds of yards away, noting a thing occasionally which taught him more and more about the customs of the caravanners. Those

were the days when he discovered that he hated all dogs in general, and boarhounds in particular.

Occasionally, too, he picked up a further useful atom of information from the deserted camps of the wanderers. Just outside Brockenhurst, for instance, he found the fragments of a torn letter. They were so small as to be little more than shreds; but, working throughout the whole of one blazing summer day, he managed to piece together about three square inches. It had been a labour of infinite weariness and niggling detail, but his reward was commensurate with his work, for the result showed him that the literary mosaic he had manufactured was part of a letter to his brother Tony, signed by one "Muriloff." The fragment ran—

"Borilsky is in London, and has sworn to re-capture you. He has no clue, but hopes to . . . (here part of the letter was missing) . . . regardless of cost. I am permanently in England, and will warn you if necessary . . . danger not pressing, but recommend caution. MURILOFF."

Smiler Bunn read it, and bolted half a sausage

through sheer satisfaction. He knew that Tony had escaped from Siberia some months before—in the days when he had not yet married Fanchon, and was still a "crook." And this fragment of correspondence gave him the first faint glimmerings of a cut-and-dried scheme. He would not have done his brother an injury for all the necklaces in Christendom, but his scheme could be carried through without Tony suffering anything beyond a few hours' slight inconvenience. When he closed the flap of his tent that night "J. Bird," had crossed his brother off the list of "active" guardians of the necklace. But there remained the coachman, Fanchon, and the Duchess.

Given time and opportunity he thought he saw his way to render the dogs helpless.

For days he fruitlessly considered the question of dealing with the coachman, and was almost at the point of despair when an idea came to him. It was risky almost to the point of the impossible, but there was just one chance, and he decided to try for the chance.

That left Fanchon and the Duchess, and a fortnight's thought convinced him that he must

trust wholly to luck in so far as they were concerned.

Trudging slowly through the dust by the side of his pony-cart, he thought over his scheme with extraordinary patience, added a little, took away a little, trimmed, polished, and theoretically tested it, and, at long last, decided to stand or fall by it. He heaved a sigh of relief, and pitched camp for the twenty-fifth time.

It was now September, but the summer heat had not yet commenced to abate. If anything, it was increasing. That evening J. Bird turned his eyes from the far smoke-wreath that rose in a straight, steady column from the camp of the Duchess, and looked with unusual interest at the setting sun.

"Burn up, old sport!" he exhorted the glowing orb. "The hotter you can make it the next few days the better!"

Four days later his chance came.

The Duchess's tour was now nearing its conclusion. The caravan had visited practically every place of interest in the Forest, and, despite the present heat, very soon the nights would grow

chilly. The Forest was golden brown now, and even the big fir plantations looked yellower and more withered than usual. The Duchess was wearying of the vagabond life; so were Fanchon and Tony Bunn. And the coachman had been tired of it before it began. He had no use for sleeping in tents, that coachman.

Even the indomitable J. Bird was beginning to weary of the eternal dogging and stealthy watching. He had lost nearly thirty pounds in weight, and hungered vaguely for the London pavements, the wailing anguished roar of the motor-buses, the quacking and hooting of the taxi-cabs, and the hot puffs of air that he had been used to encounter as he passed the restaurants.

He realised that the taut care and alertness which had characterised the movements of all the party ahead save the Duchess at the beginning of the tour was relaxed, and he judged that he had to work quickly if he was to get his out-of-pocket expenses for this trip.

And so, when the caravan encamped one torpid, thunderish afternoon in a big clearing some

half a mile or so from Beaulieu, J. Bird cleared for action. It was three o'clock when the caravan camped. Smiler, hovering on a hill far behind, saw, through his field-glasses, the big van pull off the road, joggle through a big clump of trees and into the clearing, and he hurried his outfit up, approaching as closely to the actual camp as he dared. He was near enough to see his quarry's movements comfortably with the naked eye. The tents of his brother and the coachman fluttered white through the trees as the two men raised them.

Smiler tethered his pony and rapidly looked up an ordnance survey map, referring to his watch at the same time. He appeared satisfied, for he chuckled.

Then he stepped across the road, and making a fairly wide circuit of the big camp, turned to the telegraph office at Beaulieu, where he sent a lengthy wire to a motor-car firm at Salisbury. The postmistress seemed slightly astonished when she read the telegram he handed in. Gipsies very rarely telegraphed from Beaulieu for motor-cars to come from Salisbury to meet

them late at night in lonely little villages in the New Forest—very rarely indeed. But the man seemed to know what he was at, so, with a remote curiosity as to what J. Bird wanted with a car at that time of night, the postmistress sniffed and sent it off.

"There's my back door opened, anyhow," said Smiler, cheerfully, as he made his way back to his headquarters. Once there, he made a careful note of the time, and proceeded to spend half an hour over a lavish meal.

When he had finished, he smashed all the boxes and the two crates of provisions he had brought, and put the fragments on the fire. He next took about two pounds of cold boiled liver which he had procured by special order at the last inn he had passed, and with this and the contents of a scientific-looking bottle with a red label, he compounded half a dozen very tempting-looking "rissoles." He surveyed them as they stood in a row on a plank.

"I've never *yet* heard of a dog that 'd refuse cold boiled liver," he soliloquised. "And *that* little lot'll keep 'em dreamy for a good five hours."

Next he took out a battered, but roomy suit-case, and ran through the contents. These comprised a light sac overcoat, a horsey-looking cap, a grey check suit, a pair of brown boots, gloves, collar, tie and coloured shirt, small mirror, and a case of cigars. All these he placed so that they could be seized with the greatest convenience by a man changing in a hurry, and, closing it, hid the suit-case away under a bush, upon which he spread in a casual, wind-blown sort of way, a newspaper, so that it should show up plainly in the dark.

Then he gave the pony a heavy feed of oats, during the disposal of which he took a spade and dug a deep hole some sixty yards from his camp. Into this hole he threw his folding tent, rugs, spare clothing, all the tins of provisions he had left, and everything with the vendor's or maker's name on it, filled it in, levelled the earth, and scattered the surplus soil. The spade he threw into a pool close at hand.

Thus he had left to him only a pony and cart, a hidden suit-case, and six tit-bits suitable for objectionable boarhounds. The field-glasses he slipped into his pocket.

It was five o'clock by the time these preparations were completed. The pony had finished his oats, and Smiler removed the nosebag, weighted it with stones, and, together with all the harness, pitched it into the pool to keep the spade company. He cut a stick, led the pony by the forelock to an opening in the trees, and pointed his head towards the forest.

"Well, matey, you've been a good little pony, although you ain't much to look at," he said, and patted its neck. "You can't go and tell all the other ponies I haven't fed you well—that's one thing. I'm going to give you your liberty, old man. You'll probably get copped again, but—well, there 'tis. *Git up!*"

He gave the pony so business-like a clip across the quarters with the stick that it almost startled the little animal into turning a somersault, and sent it off for the open forest at a gallop.

He went back to the cart, overturned it, and, having carefully wrapped his "present for good dogs" in brown paper and put it in the suit-case, which he re-hid, went and sat on a fallen tree,

and smoked a reflective cigar, consulting his watch at intervals.

With the exception of the dying fire, the wornout-looking overturned little cart, and the newspaper on the bush, there was nothing to show that his outfit had ever existed.

He finished his cigar, took an ordinary three-pronged, black-handled table fork from a tree into which he had stuck it, and this (the only relic of his camp left) he bound tightly to a stiff, but fairly slender, six-foot pole, which he specially cut and trimmed for the purpose. When finished, it looked like a caricature of a prehistoric spear. He thrust it under the bushes, and, with a final look round, strolled away towards the last village the caravan had passed through. It lay about two miles back, and he had no fear of meeting any of the caravan people in that direction.

He went to the Stag Inn, the only hostelry in the place, and, having purchased refreshment for himself and the landlord, borrowed a sheet of notepaper and pen and ink. This is what he wrote—

"Porpoise Hotel,
"Southampton.

"Borilsky active. Knows something. Look out. Mistrust any foreigner. Imperative I should see you here to-night. Shall wait from eight to ten, smoking-room. Come for my, if not for your own, sake.

"MURILOFF."

Smiler remembered that Tony had told him Muriloff was the name of one of those who had escaped from Siberia with him; also it was the name of the man who had sent a previous warning.

Smiler read the note carefully, and sealed it. He had written in a desperate scrawl, which looked as though it might have been written in furious haste by the man who had sent the other warning.

"I *think* that'll get Tony away for a couple of hours all right," he said, and smiled blandly. "But it'll be tricky work delivering it."

He took another drink, and strolled out into the growing dusk. It was now about half-past seven. He went first to the place where he had left his suit-case, "toasting-fork," and the delicacies for the dogs.

Then he went towards the other camp, cautiously making his way through the trees until he stood by a small pool some twenty yards from the caravan. There was absolutely no wind, and he moved so quietly that the dogs who were lolling near the fire on the other side of the caravan, did not appear to be aware of him. He waited there, watching from behind a tree-trunk, some three yards from the pool. Both the Duchess and Fanchon seemed to be inside the caravan. Tony appeared to be attending to some cooking at the fire, and the coachman was strapping rugs over his horses, which were tethered between the pool and the caravan.

The coachman was the man Smiler wanted. Gipsy-like and ill-kempt though he was, he did not wish Tony or Fanchon to see him. They had keen eyes, both of them, and quick wits.

The success of his scheme depended almost wholly on his being able to convey "Muriloff's note" to the coachman, for delivery to Tony, without his being recognised or suspected. He

was on the point of going over to the coachman, when he saw that the man, evidently having finished with the horses for the night, was coming towards the pool, probably with the intention of washing his hands.

Smiler stepped out, note in hand, and met him at the pool.

"Is this Mrs. Moresby's camp?" he said, quietly.

"Yes. What d'you want?" answered the coachman, civilly enough.

"A gentleman in Southampton asked me to deliver this note. I was coming through the Forest. He says I was to say he didn't know if a telegram would be delivered. I've been hunting for a long time, but trust a gipsy to find a camp in the Forest. The poor gipsy knows the Forest. It's his home. Farewell!" said Smiler, artistically, thrust the note into the coachman's hand, and disappeared among the trees.

"*Done it, by God!*" he whispered, as he half-circled the camp to get a clear view of Tony.

Lurking well back among the trees, he saw

the coachman give the note to Tony, saw Tony read it in the firelight, and saw him nervously thrust it away into his pocket.

"He'll go—he'll go, for a quid," breathed Smiler, and listened.

Tony crossed to the caravan and spoke quietly. Smiler could not hear what he said, but he heard very clearly the feminine laugh that followed.

"Why, of course," said a voice. "What can happen in an hour or so? I insist that you go!"

It was the Duchess of Cornchester speaking. Evidently Tony had expressed doubts as to the wisdom of leaving them. Then the watcher saw Fanchon come out into the firelight. She read the note, nodded, and kissed Tony.

Two minutes later Smiler saw the glitter of the firelight as it fell on the plated rims and spokes of a bicycle. Smiler stole round and watched the red side-glow from the bicycle lamp disappear down the road leading to Southampton.

Tony was safe for at least an hour, and probably

much more, for he would be sure thoroughly to satisfy himself that the note was a false alarm before he started back to the camp.

Then Smiler turned his attention to the dogs. He stole in towards the fire until he was dangerously near. The boarhounds were stretched out facing it, their heads on their fore-paws. They looked like two huge wild animals in the uncertain flicker of the firelight, and their smooth, glossy coats shone in the glow of the flames. Beyond the radius of the fire it was quite dark. The bull-terrier was over by the caravan. Once Smiler trod on a prematurely fallen dead leaf, and at the scarcely perceptible rustle one of the big brutes raised her head and glared round, with ears pricked and lambent, baleful eyes. Smiler held his breath. Presently the hound resettled herself. There was no wind, and no doubt she was too accustomed to queer forest noises by now to go out among the trees and satisfy herself as to the sound. Perhaps she thought it was a hedgehog or a belated squirrel.

But for a few seconds Smiler hesitated. He

sincerely believed that the dogs would be on him instantly at the slightest mistake, and his belief, it may be said, was wholly accurate.

"This is a dangerous job," he whispered inaudibly. He was quite unarmed, except for the six-foot "toasting-fork" which he required for another purpose. He had purposely left his revolver in his suit-case for fear of accidents, and because, as he had told Tony, he had no wish to use violence.

Then, setting his teeth, and carefully measuring his distance, he pitched four of his doctored balls of liver out towards the boarhounds. They fell with soft, flabby thuds about two yards short of the animals, and the dogs' heads were up and staring round almost before the sound of the thuds had ceased.

Smiler, watching with one eye only showing from behind the trunk of the tree, saw the great beasts slowly get up and move deliberately towards the spots where the baits had fallen. In the uncertain shifting light they looked almost like black maneless lions.

Then the bull-terrier padded quickly across

the camp to them, and Smiler's heart mounted steadily to his throat. He saw the boarhounds each sniff at a ball and swallow one apiece at a gulp. Immediately after the bull-terrier snapped up the remaining two. The three dogs remained standing, staring out at a slight opening among the trees rather to the left of Smiler.

They sniffed, seemed to hesitate; and then sedately walked back to the fire and stretched out again.

Smiler breathed and listened to the beating of his heart. He marvelled that the dogs had not heard it.

He felt more comfortable now that the really physically dangerous part of his scheme was carried out. In fifteen minutes the dogs would be absolutely unconscious. They were not poisoned. Smiler Bunn was not the man to poison a dog if he could possibly avoid it; but they were very effectually drugged. They would be safe for some hours.

He gave the drugs a quarter of an hour to complete their work, and then moved round the camp once more. The coachman was inside

his tent, and as Smiler took up his position, just behind the horses, where he could command an excellent view of the camp, the two women descended from the caravan. Smiler stared at them through his glasses. They were chattering like two children—the Duchess was no more than twenty-six or thereabouts, and Fanchon was even younger. They might have been two schoolgirls rather than a leading Society woman and a lady detective. They seemed excellent friends. But what interested Smiler most was the Duchess's blouse. It was one of those collarless affairs with a thin gauzy material about the neck and chest that women wear in the summer (that was why Smiler prayed for hot weather), and there were no jewels round the lady's neck.

Smiler bit his lips with excitement.

"If she's kept her vow it's in the caravan," he whispered tensely.

Fanchon went across to the fire and began to attend to the cooking which Tony had left. The Duchess lay back in one of the deck-chairs which were about the camp and lighted a slender

cigarette. The door of the caravan was left open. Evidently their long immunity had rendered even Fanchon a little careless.

Smiler hesitated no longer. He took three quick bounds to the horses, cut their head-ropes, flung away the knife, and administered two swift stabs at the startled animals with his "toasting-fork." It was not enough to injure them, but it was too much to endure quietly. They were fairly well-bred beasts, and with snorts of pain and surprise, they bolted.

Smiler shot back to the trees as the coachman ran out.

"Waters!" cried the Duchess, "the horses have broken loose again!"

"Yes, y'r Grace; it's them forest flies again," said the coachman, and tore into the dark after the horses.

Twice before on that trip the New Forest fly had goaded them into breaking their head-ropes and bolting.

A healthy forest fly is a calamity even to a forest pony, to say nothing of softer, corn-fed, stable-housed horses. And Smiler knew it.

The Duchess laughed, and Fanchon turned again to her cooking.

"Poor Waters!" said the Duchess, carelessly, and, picking up a very silver-plated banjo, began to extract a rather halting two-step from it. She did not appear to notice that her dogs paid absolutely no attention to the horses' dash from the clearing, and Fanchon's whole attention seemed to be taken up with a kettle that was boiling over.

Smiler was in luck. But then he had trusted a little to luck. Thieves do.

He stole silently across to the caravan, and quietly and lightly, as only stout people can move, nipped inside.

There was a second's tense, heart-stopping pause. But the banjo did not cease, and Smiler heard the rattle of a kettle or a saucepan. He had marked that the windows of the caravan were shuttered for the night, and he did not hesitate, therefore, to press the button of his electric lamp. The ray shone on two narrow, but cosy bunks and a tiny dressing-table with a row of drawers below.

He glanced round. Never had he used his eyes so swiftly and keenly as he did in this warm, daintily-fitted, perfumed woman's nest. And suddenly his mouth went dry. Just above one of the bunks he saw one end of a tiny drawer protruding slightly. He pulled at this end, and it opened, swinging out with a half-circular movement, working on a pivot. Obviously it was a secret drawer, and cleverly devised at that. He would never have discovered it had the Duchess closed it properly. But it seemed that she was too careless, or unused to doing without her maid, even to take that precaution.

"People like this deserve to lose their jewels," breathed Smiler, as his fingers, groping in the drawer, closed on a series of cold, clean-cut, hard lumps, attached to each other by chains.

He pocketed it like a juggler, and stepped gingerly through the darkness to the narrow door. He had switched off his electric torch.

And then, just as his foot touched the turf, he heard an ominous, sinister, clear-cut click half behind him.

He turned like lightning. Fanchon was looking

him in the eyes over the barrel of a revolver that he knew.

"Good evening," she said coolly. "Don't run!"

There was a warning in her voice that he dared not ignore. He stared at the black mouth of the weapon with a sort of fascinated half-smile. It looked as large as the mouth of a cannon to him.

Fanchon's voice pulled him together, however.

"Throw the necklace on the ground, near that lady!" said Fanchon, incisively.

There was a metallic tone in her voice that Mr. Bunn found very unpleasant. He had heard it once before, when Fanchon arrested Kate the Gun, the American adventuress whom his brother had nearly married.

Smiler braced himself up—and smiled.

"No," said he blandly. "I can't bear to part with it."

Fanchon started at the sound of his voice.

"Do as I say," she said curtly.

"I'm very sorry—no!" said Smiler.

Fanchon's eyes burned. The Duchess looked on, with an air of wanting to clap her hands.

"I'll count three, and if you do not put down the necklace, I'll shoot. I swear it—Jack. For Tony's sake, I'll not kill you. But I'll break your leg." The plated revolver shifted slightly. "I can do it, you know," said Fanchon.

Smiler saw that the weapon pointed at his knee.

"One!" said Fanchon.

Smiler shook his head gently.

"Two!" said Fanchon.

"Can't be done," said Smiler.

"Three!" said Fanchon.

Smiler smiled, but his lips worked a little stiffly.

"Oh, Jack, it's not fair!" said Fanchon, suddenly, in a surprisingly changed voice. "I can't do it, Duchess! This man is my husband's brother, and he once tried to be kind and good to me when he thought I was in danger!"

And she burst into tears.

The Duchess opened her arms and took Fanchon in them as though she were a hurt child.

"Oh, aren't you *ashamed?*" said the little Duchess to Mr. Bunn.

Her voice shook with scorn.

Smiler bowed profoundly.

"Yes," said he frankly, "I am," and disappeared into the darkness.

But he went no more than a few yards into the trees. Then he paused and listened. Fanchon was sobbing with hurt pride and vexation as though her heart would break, and the Duchess was petting her only as one woman can pet another.

"Don't cry, my dear. Please, don't cry. I don't mind losing the necklace a bit," said the Duchess. "It's not your fault. Come, Fanchon —see, I'm laughing. Really, I don't regret the necklace. Don't cry any more. You did it splendidly. Let's make some tea, and forget all about it."

"Here, curse it all—— " muttered Smiler.

This was more than he had bargained for. It sounded somehow as though everybody in the world was decent but himself. He stepped back into the firelight.

"Well, you're a sportsman, Duchess; strike me glorious if you ain't! Here you are—take

it, quick, before I alter my mind!" he said, offering the necklace.

Fanchon looked up and saw the jewels, blazing back the dancing light of the flames.

"Oh, Jack!" she said, with a gasp.

"So I should think," said Smiler, grumpily. "Mind you tell Tony I gave it up of my own free will."

He strode over to the dogs and patted them where they lay like marble things.

"Poor old sports!" he grumbled. "All for nothing! They'll be all right in the morning," he explained. "They're only drugged."

Then he said, very sulkily, "Good night," walked quickly across the clearing and disappeared—this time permanently.

Fanchon and the Duchess stared at each other in a lengthy silence, broken at last by her Grace.

"There! now he'll grumble for days. Isn't that *just* like a man?"

Fanchon nodded, half-laughing, half-crying.

Then they made tea, in order to talk it over properly.

Just *like* a woman!

CHAPTER V.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HOUSE WITH THE BABOONS.

One day in late autumn Mr. Smiler Bunn paid a visit to the Zoo. He arrived there at about half an hour before closing time, and proceeded without delay to a lonely nook at the back of the eagles' aviaries, where, unobserved by a living creature, except an elderly, bald-headed vulture of intoxicated appearance, he took from a hand-bag a bowler hat and a false moustache, both of which he rapidly donned. He thrust the bag under some shrubs and went back to the entrance lodge. There were many people going out of the Zoo and none coming in. He knocked peremptorily at the door of the lodge and scowled at the mild-looking individual who opened it.

"Mr. Heber Ilch?" he asked sharply.

"Yes," said the mild-looking man. Smiler handed him a card.

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR SAVIDGE,
Scotland Yard.

"This is a very unpleasant thing for you, Ilch, my man," he said.

The unfortunate Ilch staggered.

"Wha—what do you mean?"

"This shortage in the gate receipts. Don't speak—don't incriminate yourself—anything you say may be used in evidence against you, and don't you forget it—see? Nobody accuses you *yet*. You're to go to the superintendent at once to attend the inquiry. All the other gate-keepers are there already. It'll look bad, your being late." He scowled more than ever. "If you're innocent you're safe—if you're guilty, Lord 'elp you. You'd better be careful. And now slip across to the super's house. You'll probably lose your job, anyway. And don't try to bolt—*you're watched!* There's half a dozen detectives

within reach. Here, lock your door and hook it."

Mr. Ilch put his hands to his head like a stunned person. It was not surprising that he should feel stunned, for there never was and never will be a more honest man in London than Mr. Ilch—now deceased. His accounts were perfectly in order—and he was in a hurry to prove it. Locking the door of his lodge, he galloped hastily off in the direction of the superintendent's house. Mr. Bunn watched him till he turned a corner, then taking a key from his pocket, he opened the door, calmly stepped into the lodge, cleared all the gold and silver out of the till in two swift grabs, stepped out, relocked the door, passed carelessly through the exit gate, and took a taxi.

"Simple as kiss me hand," he said complacently; "I always reckoned it was. Poor blooming Ilch! I reckon his receipts 'll be a bit short to-night anyhow. Serve him right for not having the courage of his convictions."

He leaned forward to the hole which leads to the

taxi-driver's ear and commanded him to drive to the Religious and Temperance Tract Association's offices in Paternoster Row. This was to cover his tracks.

He stopped the taxi at the top of the Row, and took a four-wheeler to Liverpool Street. From Liverpool Street he took a 'bus to Piccadilly Circus. From the corner of Piccadilly he strolled along to a quiet restaurant in Wardour Street, where he proceeded to order so thorough a dinner that he became a prime favourite of the waiter at once. He took a small table in a remote corner with his face to the wall and his back to the world, and proceeded to count the result of his incursion into the realm of natural history, while the waiter brought him a sherry-and-bitters.

"Thirty-three pound twelve," he mused, and looked at his hands. "Thought I had bigger hands than that. It's deceiving work, grabbing money. However—it's not so dusty, Smiler, my lad. Be satisfied—don't be a hog. It's unlucky to be hoggish."

Then the waiter placed his *apéritif* before him and went away to command his soup. The restaurant was quite empty and quiet as Smiler leaned back in his chair thoughtfully smoking a cigarette. As he sat there musing he became vaguely aware of a low murmur of voices behind the wall facing him, and in an absent sort of way he listened to this murmur—much as a man lying half-asleep on a sunny beach listens to the murmur of the water. But the voices rose a little, and suddenly Smiler stiffened, sitting bolt upright. One of those voices he had heard before—and had not been anxious to hear again. Moreover, he had not expected to hear it, at any rate during this life.

It belonged—unless he was woefully mistaken—to no less a person than Kate the Gun, whom he had last seen being led away by a detective who had arrested her, and from whom he had understood that she was likely shortly to be extradited for the purpose of receiving something in the neighbourhood of a life sentence in New York.

And incidentally Smiler Bunn had been largely responsible for her arrest.

The thought of Kate the Gun being at large gave him a feeling as though his stomach had turned a handspring! And not unnaturally either, for he was well aware that Kate—if it really was she behind the wall—would stick at nothing to get even with him for his part in her arrest.

He listened again.

Yes, it was Kate the Gun behind the wall. There was no doubt about that. He did not know *how* she got there, nor did he care. She was *there*—that was enough for Mr. Bunn. He turned and beckoned to his waiter.

"Give me a liqueur of best brandy. I'm feelin' rather bilious," he said softly. "You can stop that dinner. I've lost me appetite. Bring me a steak and chips, and a pint of Scotch ale instead. I'll have a Welsh rabbit to follow it."

"Yessare?"

The waiter started away, but Smiler quietly called him back.

"Listen," he said.

The man listened.

"Where does that talking come from?" asked Smiler.

"Private room, sare. Three gentlemen and one madame. They have but now come. One minute before you arrive, yessare?"

Smiler produced a sovereign.

"See this?" he said.

"Oh, yessare?" said the waiter, blandishingly.

"Well, now, listen to me. I want to hear what those people are saying without being seen—see? And it's worth one quid to me. One James o' goblin. Understand?"

"Oh, yessare? Will you come to zis table."

He conducted Smiler to a table round a corner—a table tucked away behind a pillar, and partly covered with newspapers. Obviously it was the table at which the waiter sat when he was not working.

"If you sit here, sare——"

The man placed a chair and Smiler sat down.

The wall was now on his left, almost touching his elbow. Level with his ear there was a slight depression in the paper-covered wall.

"A hole in ze wall," said the waiter in a whisper. "It goes through. Nozzing but papare at zis end of ze hole, and nozzing but papare at ze ozzare end where is ze private room. You place the ear nearer to ze wall—a-ah, you hear? *Merci, m'sieu, merci.*"

He took his sovereign and stood away. Mr. Bunn more or less fixed his ear to the wall-papered tunnel leading through to the "private" room and listened tensely. Kate the Gun was speaking.

"And when I get that fat slouch I'll hand it to him good and hard. Bunn's his name, is it? When I've finished with him he won't be much more than a biscuit—and no champion biscuit neither. He threw me down, and if it hadn't been for you, Billy, I'd have been well on my road to jail?"

Smiler nodded thoughtfully. He had an idea now, and when another voice was raised in

answer to that of Kate the Gun that idea was confirmed. The voice which answered the adventuress was the voice of a man whom Smiler had only seen and heard speak once before in his life—the man who, disguised as a German chef, but really a detective, had arrested Kate the Gun on the occasion when Smiler had saved his brother from her. Had this man done his duty Kate would have been extradited and in an American jail by now. But she was here—obviously because she had bribed the detective, who possibly had become one of her gang. The other two men were the "plug-uglies." Smiler knew that the moment they raised their melodious voices.

Then Kate the Gun said in a lower voice—

"Now, see here, this year's trip's been a freeze-out for us up to now, and we've got to make good quick. I'm no Oil Trust, and it gives me a sore head to see good golden bucks paid out day after day and nix paid in—see? Now, what about this lonely miser at Horsham—say, it sounds like a dime novel? You got wise

to him and his gold plate first, Michael. Now put us next to the facts and we'll work out the scheme." She spoke very softly, and "Michael," one of the "plug-uglies," answered in the same key.

And Mr. Bunn glued his ear to the wall and closed his eye in order to hear better.

Not till an hour later did he arise from that table, hand the waiter another five shillings, and hastily quit the restaurant. He left the meal he had ordered wholly untouched and stone cold; the waiter inherited that.

Two minutes after his departure there issued from the "private" room a party of four, made up of one nice-looking old lady with silvery hair but rather hard eyes, a quiet little man of German appearance, a tallish, well-built clergyman with a face like a prize-fighter, and a keen-eyed man who looked like a Colonial cardsharp. On the whole the gang of Kate the Gun were admirably disguised.

None of them took much notice of a four-wheeler a few yards from the door of the

restaurant; the blinds of the cab were drawn down, and only the bland blue eyes of Smiler Bunn were visible as, peering round the blind, he carefully scrutinised the party as they left the *café*.

The four vanished up the street, and Smiler drove thoughtfully to a famous Fleet Street hostelry, where he devoured a meal which made the waiter look anxious.

Then he returned to his flat in Ridgeford Mansions, where he proposed to utilise an hour in silent thought. First of all he carefully marshalled and mentally arrayed before him the facts. There was, it seemed, a miser who lived in a lonely old house just outside the Sussex village of Southwater, near Horsham. The place was known as the Tower House, because it possessed a tower of some kind. *In* the tower, it was said, the miser kept a chest of rare gold plate. *On* the tower, for some weird, miserish reason of his own, the owner of the gold plate kept a searchlight. The name of the miser was Amberfold—Colonel Amberfold. And the gang of Kate

the Gun proposed to "pinch" the plate of Colonel Amberfold in four days' time precisely.

That was all the information Smiler Bunn had gained from this hour at the tunnelled wall of the "private" room—that and a slightly sprained ear. They were a clever gang, and had gradually lowered their voices to little more than whispers.

Nevertheless, it was enough to furnish food for thought. Smiler rose, switched off the electric light save only for one shaded lamp on a writing-table, and, taking a large apple in his hand, reseated himself to plan things out. He had quite decided to enter into competition with Kate the Gun's gang. It was nervous work certainly, for they were a tough "bunch," but it looked like being well-paid.

The thing that puzzled Smiler most was the searchlight which Michael, the "plug-ugly," had mentioned. He couldn't see *why* the miserly Colonel had gone to the expense of installing it. Vainly he racked his brains, vainly he ate apple after apple, groping for a reason. And so at

ten o'clock he grumpily ate what he termed a "lay-out" of eggs and bacon and went to bed.

On the following day a long, grey, speedy-looking motor-car slid to a standstill outside the "Black Lion" Hotel, Horsham, and its solitary occupant—a heavy-looking man with a reddish beard and moustache—having turned the car over to an individual who looked as though he usually washed in lubricating oil, and who claimed to be in charge of the garage, entered the hotel and reserved himself an apartment for three days. Then he passed on into the dining-room. The name that he wrote in the register was Huish—Coomber Huish. But the voice with which, immediately after he had registered, he proceeded to galvanise the waiter into activity was the voice of Smiler Bunn. After the meal he gave the waiter half-a-sovereign.

"That was a steak worth eating, my lad. And the tomatoes was hot stuff. You look after me and I'll look after you—see? Here's half a bar for you."

When the waiter recovered his breath he learned

that Mr. Coomber Huish was an author and was engaged in writing a book on astronomy. He had come to Horsham, it seemed, because only from a spot midway between Southwater and Horsham in all England was a certain comet to be seen during the next three days.

"I shall probably be out half the night—p'raps all night—while I'm here, surveying the stars and this comet, and if you want to do yourself a bit of good you'd better arrange with somebody to sit up at night to let me in," said Mr. Huish. "Side or back door 'll do. I don't want to disturb the whole hotel every night. It'll be worth half a quid a night to anybody who obliges me."

The waiter implored Mr. Huish to leave it *all* to him, and Mr. Huish was graciously pleased to do so.

He took a little run on his car on the Southwater road during the afternoon.

It may be explained here that the first thing Smiler Bunn had done on his return to town after the episode of the Duchess of Cornchester's

diamonds in the New Forest was to take a thorough course of lessons in the art of motor-driving and managing.

During his spin he had found occasion to pull up and refresh himself at the "Vine" Inn, Southwater, and, thanks to a few innocent questions, a certain freedom in the standing of drinks, and the natural garrulousness of the landlord, he had learned quite a number of interesting facts concerning Colonel Amberfold of the Tower House.

They were neither pleasant nor encouraging. Smiler, lying on a lounge in the smoking-room after a heavy meat tea, reviewing the information he had gathered, came to the conclusion that Colonel Amberfold was a person to whom he had taken a pronounced dislike. Like most misers, the Colonel lived quite alone in the house, but he had taken precautions. The fighting baboons, for instance; Michael had not mentioned them.

Yet the Colonel kept a brace of them—surly, dangerous, dog-toothed, hairy demons that feared nothing in the world when their anger was

aroused. "Better than house-dogs," the landlord of the "Vine" had said, and after he had listened to a description of how they had dealt with a poacher's lurcher, fatally, which had come within their reach some time before, Smiler had been inclined to agree with him.

"And every night one of 'em chained on a forty-foot chain to the front door, and the other on a forty-foot chain to the back door," mused Smiler. "Well, it looks like a window entrance for me. Fighting baboons—ugh! Give me 'plug-uglies' for choice. Seems to me I'll have to break my usual rule here. 'No violence' is a very good rule as a rule, but I don't see much sense in gettin' scragged by a blinking baboon. Fair's fair anyhow, and from what I can hear these apes are as strong as lions and as cunning as tigers. No scraggin' for Smiler, I don't think!"

He thought again of the wanton savagery with which—according to the landlord of the "Vine," at any rate—the baboons had killed the wretched lurcher, and, quite suddenly, and to his extreme

surprise, he felt a surge of blood to his head, hot and furious. He was angry.

"Why, what's this?" he muttered, got off the sofa, and looked at himself in a mirror over the fireplace. "Lost your wool, have you, Mr. 'Uish? Well, and quite right too, my lad. Dogs are fair play—dogs are *gentlemen*. But baboons is beastly. Tear you to pieces, do they? Ah—well, we'll see."

He left the smoking-room and the hotel still a little flushed.

When he came back half an hour later he had in each of the side-pockets of his jacket a Browning automatic pistol and cartridges to match.

He laid them on his dressing-table and smiled upon them.

"Lucky to get you two gents in a one-eyed town like this," he said affably. "Just the lads to teach etiquette to baboons, ain't you?"

He slipped them into a drawer and locked it. Then he went down to get what he termed "a mouthful of dinner."

* * * * *

The residence of Colonel Amberfold lay rather far back from the main road, and was approached by a narrow lane some hundred yards long. A field stretched between the main road and the dense shrubberies which surrounded the house, and the lane ran down one side of this field. At the road-end of the lane was an ordinary five-barred gate giving entry to the field.

It was at this spot that between twelve and one in the night following the arrival of Smiler Bunn at Horsham a curious happening might have been witnessed by any one with a habit of nocturnal prowling and ability to see in the dark.

It was a black, moonless night; the darkness was so profound as to render it almost impossible to see even the white road. But at twelve o'clock there appeared floating silently through the darkness a small dim light coming along the road from the direction of Horsham. It grew gradually larger and brighter, and brought with it the whirr of a powerfully-engined and carefully-driven motor-car. The car slid level with

the lane and slowed to a crawl. Quietly the driver turned the car so that it faced towards Horsham again, stopped it, and, getting down, ran quickly across to the gate in the field and opened it, fastening it back. Then, very carefully, he backed the car into the field, and left it there with its sharp semi-racer nose pointing straight across the corner of the lane to the main road. Thus the car could remain practically invisible from the road, but nevertheless could take the main road again, as it were, at a single bound, if necessary.

The driver chuckled softly, extinguished the light, and, leaving his overcoat in the car, moved quietly away down the lane towards the Tower House.

Mr. Smiler Bunn was what he termed "on the job."

Not fifteen minutes later a big, brilliantly-lighted car boomed up from the other direction—as though proceeding to Horsham—passed the lane, slowing as it passed, and some five hundred yards further on stopped, the roar of the engines

dying out gradually. It had been run close into the edge of the road. There were three people in the car—two men and a woman. The men alighted and spread out an assortment of motor tools upon the driver's seat. The woman—she was wearing a man's cap—got down and took off a fur cloak. She was dressed in man's clothes, and with a quick whisper moved silently away from the car. Instantly one of the men stood on the seat of the tonneau and stared steadily towards the Tower House. The woman had slipped through a gap in the hedge level with which the car was pulled up and headed stealthily away towards the house. Kate the Gun and her gang seemed to have put their raid forward two days.

Hardly had the second car stopped when a third, moving silently as only a steam-car can, and absolutely unlighted, glided up on the heels as it were of the big petrol car, and stopped soundlessly at the head of the lane. There were three men, including the driver, in this car, and had Smiler Bunn been there he would have

recognised them from their voices alone—for Smiler never forgot a voice or a face. One of them was the plug-ugly Michael, who had told Kate the Gun of Colonel Amberfold's hoarded plate. The others were two London thieves whom Smiler had encountered more than once before. One was a skilful scoundrel, whose favourite line of business was safe-breaking, but who was willing to embark on any little enterprise that promised profit without too much risk. He was known in certain police and criminal circles as "City Joe." The third man was one "Captain" Panton, a "smasher" or counterfeiter, and a close companion of City Joe. These three whispered together for a few moments, and finally two of them went quietly down the lane.

Things looked ominous for Colonel Amberfold's gold plate. No less than three individual expeditions were "out" after it on this very dark night. And the curious part of the whole business was that there was no coincidence about it all. It was due to perfectly natural causes.

Smiler Bunn was trying to forestall Kate the Gun, whose attempt on the plate he thought was to take place two nights later. That accounted for Smiler.

City Joe's trio also were trying to forestall Kate the Gun, thanks to Michael, the plug-ugly, which gentleman, dissatisfied at the share he was to receive as a member of Kate the Gun's gang, had deserted the standard of that American adventuress and formed his own gang. That accounted for the presence of the steam-car party.

And Kate the Gun, expecting that Michael would endeavour to cut in before her, had shifted her raid two days before in order to get the plate before Michael had time to form his own little army.

* * * * *

Smiler Bunn lay flat on his stomach—much to the discomfort of that usually pampered organ—in the dense shrubbery which surrounded the Tower House.

Only his head protruded from the undergrowth.

He was staring intently towards the house through a pair of night-glasses.

He had taken his bearings that afternoon disguised as a tramp, and he knew that only twenty yards of ill-kept lawn lay between him and the front door and windows of the house. The sky seemed to have lightened a shade during the last twenty minutes, and he could just make out the black bulk of the building.

He had lain there some minutes listening and staring—a Browning pistol resting in the crook of his left arm—and during those minutes he had heard and seen absolutely nothing. But he was uneasy—with an uncanny, creeping uneasiness that he had never before experienced. The place was utterly soundless, but the darkness felt inhabited. It was as though out there in the darkness, perfectly still, perfectly quiet, there were things standing, waiting for him to step on the lawn.

He put down his glasses and clutched his pistol; the butt felt warm and comfortable and reassuring. A Browning automatic pistol is the

last word in rapid-firing pocket-size weapons, anyway, and Smiler was feeling glad of it.

He snuggled down in the shrubbery, listening. There was no hurry after all, and he wanted his nervous fit to pass off before proceeding to locate the baboons.

Then, as he lay there, he became gradually aware that the darkness seemed to be waking up. Away across the lawn something yawned enormously; Smiler heard the long sighing inhalation and exhalation of breath, and instantly after a snap of huge teeth brought sharply together. Then something grunted and a chain rattled a little.

Half a second later came the clear, crisp crunch of a soft sole on gravel—just one, no more. It was as though some one had inadvertently stepped off the turf bordering the coach drive on to the gravel, and then suddenly stepped back on to the turf.

"Hullo?" breathed Smiler. "Who's this?"

From the black patch against the sky right away to the right of the house, which Smiler knew was

formed by a clump of half a dozen stunted fir-trees, came a low squeak and a sudden soft, liquid pop. In the silence Smiler heard it distinctly. Some one under the firs had drawn a cork from a bottle.

A cold thrill fluttered along the spine of Mr. Bunn, as, following the sound of the cork, he heard several grunts from somewhere near the front door of the house. A chain rattled as though it was being drawn across a gravel path, and in a moment the rattle was joined by the swishing sound of the chain as it was dragged over grass.

Evidently one of the baboons was suspicious. The sound of the chain ceased. The animal appeared to be staring into the shrubbery, then it grunted again; it seemed to be under the fir clump. Smiler remembered that it had a run of forty feet, and drew back into the bushes. The swish of the chain began, and, judging from the sound of it, the animal returned to its shelter by the front door. Followed a sound of eating —and thirty seconds later three hoarse barks,

an almost human howl, a moan, the thud of a fall, and silence.

Smiler felt his skin creep and his hair lift. For a moment his blood seemed to freeze.

He had seen nothing at all, but he knew what had happened as though the tragedy had occurred in broad daylight.

One of the baboons had been poisoned.

Out there in the mysterious dark some one, clever as himself, was working swiftly, ruthlessly, silently.

And his instinct told him it was Kate the Gun ; she was out there somewhere under the fir-trees. Probably she had poisoned a banana with some swift poison from the bottle she had just uncorked.

But if that was so it was not she whose single footstep he had heard on the coach-drive. It was impossible for her to be in two places at once, and the fir-trees were at least forty yards from the spot where the gravel had crunched.

He stiffened abruptly. Two men had suddenly run softly, on tiptoe, round the edge of the lawn. They passed no more than two feet from

his face. And then his heart stood still, for there sounded from the Tower a quick hiss and crackle, and a blinding spear of white light stabbed out into the darkness, swooping across the shrubbery like the sword of Fate.

The searchlight. Its great clear-cut javelin; passed swiftly over Smiler's head, hung steady for a moment—that was when it picked out Smiler's car—quivered and steadied again and yet again, as it disclosed both the other cars. Then it lifted and swung away to the left. The cold clear beam settled upon a cottage in the village and suddenly began to flicker as a cinematograph projection flickers. The centre of its circle was a window—or what was evidently intended for a window. It looked now like a black shutter. The cottage was really the police-station—a miniature affair that sheltered one constable only. The district sergeant lived in the next village.

And Colonel Amberfold was signalling desperately to the constable. That was why he had installed the searchlight; the fierce, white glare

flickering on and off into his bedroom would almost wake a dead policeman, to say nothing of even a village constable.

Suddenly there was a muffled cry from under the firs. The searchlight wheeled and swooped down. Smiler Bunn, lying flat to the earth, a "gun" gripped in each hand, saw in the cold light one with a face that was unmistakably the face of Kate the Gun twist furiously away from the grip of two men. She was dressed in man's clothes, but a lock of black hair falling down her cheek betrayed her.

In her right hand was a revolver, and she jammed it in the faces of the two men with a look and gesture of such ferocity that they quailed back from her.

Not five yards from the group a monstrous black misshapen thing, grotesquely human, jumped about straining at a glittering chain, and uttering queer grunting barks.

Even as Smiler recognised the two men a thin sharp voice quavered down from the top of the Tower—

"Clear out or I'll shoot! I've a shot-gun here!"

Three white faces turned upwards and dropped instantly as the glare of the searchlight hit the pupils of their eyes. Then the chain of the baboon snapped suddenly and the brute flung forward with a howl. It looked like some kind of devil.

One of the men swung a weapon blindly at the ape; it appeared to be a bar of black steel; but really it was a sandbag, and it took the baboon on the side of the head.

There was no sound, but the baboon dropped like a dead thing. Michael, the "plug-ugly," was one of the most expert sandbaggers in the world.

Kate the Gun flung her revolver viciously at the head of the other man. Smiler recognized him as City Joe, and ran forward out of the beam of light. Smiler heard her panting as she passed him, running to the coach road.

There was a savage snarling oath from Michael, the American ruffian, and he pitched his sandbag into the darkness after her.

"Come away, you fool!" cried City Joe, gripping the "plug-ugly's" arm. "There's nothing doing to-night."

"Aw, in a minute," said Michael, and shook the other off.

He raised a fist clenched round a revolver, and staring straight into the eye of the searchlight pulled the trigger once—twice.

With the second report the dazzling ray vanished—precisely as though it had been blown out.

Out of the profound and pitchy blackness that followed Smiler heard a low groan from the Tower. More footsteps pattered across the lawn before him, and suddenly all was silent. The whole affair had not lasted five minutes.

A faint acrid fume of burnt powder found its way into his nostrils and he shivered slightly.

He lay there listening; almost immediately he heard from somewhere near the head of the lane the rush of a suddenly started engine, followed by the diminishing note of a receding motor. Evidently one of the parties had gone.

He rapidly thought the thing over. Now was his time if he meant doing anything. The others had cleared the way to the gold plate for him if he cared to risk waiting there. But with a dead man on the Tower it was a dangerous risk—if the man at the searchlight *was* dead. If the shots had alarmed the village, the sooner he was out of it the better. He felt fairly certain that the searchlight had alarmed nobody—least of all the policeman. For not half an hour before he had "shuttered" that policeman's bedroom window himself with a specially-made black-painted wooden shutter muffled in sacking and attached to two long bamboo poles. And even a searchlight cannot shine through half an inch of deal.

He listened for a few seconds longer; they seemed like weeks. There was no sound from any quarter. He remembered that two shots in quick succession are heard not infrequently at night in a district where game is reared and poachers are plentiful.

"When thieves fall out," he muttered, "honest

men get a bit of their own back, and I'll chance it."

He crawled out from his shrubbery and stole across to the house, pulling out his electric flash-lamp. In the afternoon he had marked a certain French window. This he found, and two minutes later he was inside the house.

First he went up into the Tower.

At the top he found the Colonel—a lean, mean-looking little man—lying in a heap under the broken searchlight. He turned him over and hastily examined him. He was unhurt save for a nasty graze along the side of the head just above the ear. One of the "plug-uglies'" bullets had cut a long furrow through the hair, but a touch told Smiler that it was no more than skin deep. He lifted the man carefully, and carried him downstairs to a sort of bed-sitting-room immediately below, and laid him on the bed.

Then he turned briskly to a big safe in the corner. If there was anything worth stealing in the house, he fancied some of it, at any rate,

would be here—the garrulous landlord had told him that only about two rooms in the place were furnished, and a glance or two as he entered had confirmed this.

The safe was locked, but with unerring instinct he turned back to the man on the bed. The keys were in the pockets of the shabby dressing-gown.

Ten seconds later half of Smiler Bunn was in the safe and half out—and his hands were busy.

Presently he paused and turned to the figure on the bed.

"You're a miser all right, mate," he said humorously. "But you're a dashed good miser. I will say that for you. I've never heard of a miser before who mised precious stones instead of precious money, but I'm glad to find that there's *one* any'ow, and I'm pleased to meet you, mister."

He rose from his knees and held a handful of loose-cut jewels under his flashlight. There were all kinds there—diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and lesser stones—none astonishingly big, but all valuable.

Smiler slipped them into his pocket and addressed the figure on the bed—

"Of course, I know as well as if you'd told me that this little lot ain't the pick of the bunch," he said in a friendly voice; "the big 'uns are hid all over the house, here and there. But I ain't no hog, Colonel, and I ain't got time to look for 'em any'ow. So *you* can have them. So long! You'll be all right—bar a bit of an 'eadache."

He put a water-bottle within reach of the Colonel, and quietly cleared out.

His car was waiting exactly as he left it, and he lighted the lamps and climbed in.

"London, first stop. Change here for Horsham!" he said playfully in the manner of a railway porter, and ran her out on to the main road.

"Ah, well," he chuckled, "when thieves fall out——"

But the remainder of the proverb was drowned by the rising note of the engine.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ADVENTURE OF TWO GENTLEMEN FROM SAN FRANCISCO.

With his accustomed silence and dexterity, Sing-Song, the Chinese servant, whom Mr. Smiler Bunn had recently engaged, completed the clearing away of the dinner things, and went out into the kitchen of the small but comfortable little flat in Soho Square, in which Mr. Bunn had just settled down, in order to prepare coffee.

His master lay well back in his easy-chair, smoking a very excellent cigar peacefully, and with every appearance of profound though slightly somnolent enjoyment. Mr. Bunn never minded risking dozing after dinner, for he knew that Sing-Song was to be relied upon punctually to appear with strong black coffee at that critical after-dinner moment when a man, hovering upon the threshold of slumber, stands in peril of

sacrificing a good cigar for a somewhat unsatisfactory "snooze."

True to habit, Sing-Song stole in a few moments later with his tray. But, having poured his master's coffee and *crème de menthe*—latterly Smiler had taken to *crème de menthe*, under the mistaken impression that it would reduce his weight—the Chinaman did not proceed to shuffle noiselessly back to his own place, as a well-conducted Chink should. He "hung about"—as Smiler would have described the attitude of respectful but bland expectancy into which he had adjusted himself.

"Well, Sing, my son," said Mr. Bunn benevolently, "what d'ye want?"

Sing-Song's beady eyes twinkled faintly.

"Mastel not folgetting plitty lady—allee same lady callee on mastel at Tollington Tellace?" he inquired.

He referred to a call made by Kate the Gun upon Mr. Bunn at the flat he had previously occupied in Torrington Terrace.

He took a puff at his cigar.

"No, Sing," he said thoughtfully. "I haven't exactly forgotten it. It might—or it mightn't—have grown a little kind of hazy in my mind, but I haven't what you might call *forgotten*. Would *you* forget it, my lad, if a woman like her called and threatened to murder you if you interfered with her affairs? Or would anybody"—his voice rose suddenly—"forget it but a fat-headed fool?" He calmed down again. "Why?" he asked.

"And mastel not folgetting the men—fliends of plitty lady?"

Evidently Sing meant the two "plug-uglies" and an ex-detective who composed the gang of Kate the Gun.

"No fear," said Smiler emphatically. "One of 'em would have sandbagged me if I hadn't got out of the door just in time. What about that lovely little lot?"

"They dying—killee soon—hatchet men coming San Flancisco," said the Chinaman with a gentle smile.

Smiler sat up. This was pleasant news—very pleasant news indeed.

"Sit down, Sing. Take a cigar. Somebody going to kill Kate the Gun, d'you say?"

"Yess," Sing-Song smiled.

"Good—take *two* cigars. And they're going to mop up the rest of the gang as well? Is that it?"

Sing-Song nodded.

"Take the box. This is the best news I've had for many a day. Now, make yourself comfortable; have a drink, gimme a match, and we'll have a cosy little half-hour talking it over."

Sing-Song, with a slow, expressive gesture, silently acknowledged his sense of the condescension, and took a cigar, which he placed somewhere in his clothes. It looked rather more like a conjuring trick than the pocketing of a cigar. He remained standing. His smile grew wider, blander, and rather less attractive.

"See Yup tong San Flancisco angly against plitty lady and lady's men," he explained lucidly.

Mr. Bunn sat up straight.

"Now look here, Sing, my son; is this a new kind of language puzzle? Is it my move now?

Have I got to say a word or two that *you* don't understand as a kind of answer to that string of language that I don't understand? To put it straight—what d'ye *mean?*"

"Tong—tong at San Flan—sent hatchet men for killee lady," he said anxiously.

"Tong? *How* tong? What d'ye mean by tong? Whose tong?"

Sing moved his hands in a helpless sort of way.

"Tong allee samee club—hundleds of men—allee samee belong to tong. Club of men—Chinamen—allee ovel wold. Hundleds tongs. See Yup tong one tong. See Yen tong anothel tong. See Tee tong anothel tong—hundleds tongs."

Smiler began to understand.

"Kind of Freemasons, I suppose. A tong is a branch of a big society. What's the main tong called?"

"*Not* main tong," said Sing-Song. "All tongs diffelent. I belong See Yup tong," he explained. "See Yups muchee killee See Yens—hatee See Yens. Mastel undelstanding?"

Smiler nodded doubtfully.

"Yes. Sort of friendly societies, I reckon. Kind of leagues. Well, what about 'em?"

Sing-Song nodded.

"Long time ago plitty lady and two men livee in San Flancisco. They findee some Chinamen belong See Yup tong smuggle opium into San Flancisco for sellee Chinamen. So plitty lady's men watchee See Yups go meetee China mail in launch outside halboul. Men on China mail steamel thlow packets opium ovelboald into watel. See Yup men pickee up opium in launch, steamee into halboul, and take opium ashole—no payee duty. Mastel undelstanding?"

Smiler drank a cup of coffee and recapitulated.

"Let's look," he said slowly. "Kate the Gun and her gang found out that some Chinamen who were members of the See Yup society were smuggling opium off the mail steamers into San Francisco. Well, what did the pretty lady do?"

"Take anothel launch one nightee, follow See Yup men's launch, waitee till See Yups pickee up

opium, then boald Chinamen's launch and stealee opium—takee opium on plitty lady's launch—then lam Chinamen's launch—allee samee cut See Yup's launch in half—sinkee launch—and lun away—steamee back to halboul and takee five thousand dollals' value of opium. See Yups sinkee in watel—die—thlee dead men—dlown—allee gone!"

Sing-Song made a curiously expressive gesture with his hands and waited for Smiler to grasp it. Things seemed clearer now. In plain English, Kate and her gang had chartered another launch, and steamed quietly out of the harbour one night. Presently they encountered the launch with the Chinamen, probably returning to the harbour with the opium on board, and promptly had boarded it, taken about a thousand pounds' worth of the drug, and then, in cold blood, rammed the launch of the unfortunate smugglers, and sunk it. Smiler nodded as he thought it over—it sounded like Kate and Co. But apparently it was a mistake to interfere with the affairs of "high-binder tongs" (or criminal societies). Smiler signed to Sing-Song to proceed.

"See Yup tong findee out—one Chinaman not dlowned. Pickee up by ship and go Austlalia. Long time aftel this Chinaman come home San Flancisco and tellee See Yup tong. See Yup tong lich—plentee money—they tly findee plitty lady. Findee in London. So they send two hatchet men killee lady and men. Hatchet men coming mail-boat."

"Well, what'll *they* do?" asked Smiler, deeply interested.

"Makee plitty lady—Katey—pay ten thousand dollals—two thousand soveleigns—and plomise not killee. But when Katey finish payee two thousand soveleigns—they killee allee samee."

"Well, that's a dashed dirty trick. If Kate parts with two thousand quid on a promise that they won't hurt her, and after getting it they kill her and her gang, why, that's rotten!" said Smiler.

"Allee samee lotten tlick dlown Chinamen San Flancisco," replied Sing-Song impassively. Then he flashed a quick meaning look at his master. "Mastel glad?" he inquired simply.

"Katey hate mastel. Sometime pelhaps she killee mastel. Hatchet men coming stop Katey killee mastel. Mastel glad?"

Smiler looked serious. He remembered the threats of Kate when she had called on him.

"Well, I don't know," he said doubtfully. "I *ought* to be, I suppose. But these dashed high-binders with their hatchets sound very hot stuff."

Sing came a step nearer.

"Mastel thanking me?" he continued softly, with his bland smile. "I blinging hatchet men. I belong See Yup tong, and I lecognise Katey when she call at Tollington Tellace. I send lettel to tong at San Flancisco, and they send hatchet men. Mastel thanking me?"

Then Smiler saw what the Chinaman was driving at.

"Oh, yes, my son, I'm thanking you all right. But not in cash, Sing-Song—not by any means in ready money. It sounds to me as though you're getting *your* whack some other way.

How much will the tong give you as reward for finding Kate ? "

" Hundled pounds," admitted Sing.

" Well, then, don't be a greedy hog. Do you want to be paid twice over for landing the woman ? Never heard of such a thing. Go and make some more coffee and *keep your place.* D'ye hear—*keep your place!* Don't come planning murder with *me.* Damme, for two pins I'd kick you out of the flat."

Still smiling his simple " child-like " smile, Sing-Song bowed and departed for the kitchen, but had hardly left the room before Smiler called him back.

" D'you know where Kate the Gun and her gang are living now ? " inquired Smiler.

" Gleat Lussell Stleet—numbel five hundled and ten," answered the Chinaman.

Smiler took out a five-pound note.

" Ah, well, here you are. You're a good lad, Sing—as long as you go straight with *me.* I don't want to be mixed up in your private affairs —they're *your* look-out—but you do your

professional duty to me and I'll look after you. Only, if you come any funny business with me I'll have you locked up before you can say 'opium.' Have you got that well into your head?"

Sing indicated that he had, and proceeded serenely out to the kitchen.

Smiler lighted a fresh cigar.

"A very interestin' yarn," he mused. "Very interestin' and probably a lot of Chinese lies. There's no doubt Sing-Song'd make a very effective liar. But what I want is a very effective cook. I can do the lyin' myself. However, if it's true, there ought to be a bit in it for me somewhere. Why should I be left out in the cold when there's thousands of pounds knockin' about? But I don't much like the sound of these high-binders."

He was turning the thing over in his mind when Sing-Song entered again.

"Lady and gentleman asking seeing Mastel. I bling them?" he asked.

"All right," said Smiler, moving to a

writing-desk and opening a drawer, from which he took something. He had an idea that it might be Kate the Gun paying another of her little friendly calls. But when he saw who his visitors were he dropped the pistol back into its drawer and smiled.

"What, Tony—and Fanchon?" he said warmly. "Why, hello! How are you? Come in—come in! There's a first-rate cold chicken and half a ham, and a bottle of claret or two, and Sing-Song 'll get a salad somewhere—although, mind you, it's a bad time of year for salad. Sit down, Fanchon, my girl; you're looking like a rose. How long have *you* two been in England?"

The new-comers were Smiler Bunn's brother, Tony Bunn—Bohun he called himself—and his wife. They made a very attractive pair. As Smiler was in the habit of saying to himself, people who saw the brothers together must have been reminded of a stout mule and a lean thoroughbred—Smiler being the mule. And Fanchon was delicious—about the last girl in the world one would imagine to be a lady detective.

"We got in yesterday, Jack," Tony said, taking off his coat and smiling at the obvious pleasure with which his brother was helping Fanchon remove her furs.

He knew that Smiler had been inclined to fall in love with her himself once upon a time. But they were all the better friends for that. Smiler entertained no delusions as to Fanchon's good taste in preferring the distinguished-looking and kindly Tony. In fact, he was proud of her judgment.

"And, Jack, you've got to help us, this time," said Fanchon. "We've come over for Kate the Gun and her gang." She looked at her husband. "Tell him all about it, Tony. We'll have supper afterwards."

"No, Fan," he said, "it's your yarn, and you can tell it better. I'll have a cigar and listen."

He reached out for the box, and Smiler pushed a syphon and whisky towards him.

"Wait a minute," said Smiler, and rang the bell. Sing-Song appeared. "Get those Japanese

cigarettes, Sing-Song, and then take a walk for half an hour."

Sing-Song produced a box of dainty-looking cigarettes, which he placed, with a bow, at Fanchon's elbow, and left the room. A few seconds later the outer door of the flat closed quietly behind him.

"He's a downy bird, that Chink," said Smiler. "And I don't want him listening. Go ahead with those cigarettes, Fanchon. I've been keeping 'em specially for you."

Fanchon lighted one and began her story.

"You know that when Tony and I met I was over here after Kate the Gun. Well, when she was arrested, I left her in charge of the other detective from Westerton's who was over here also, and took a holiday, during which Tony and I were married. I took no further interest in Kate—we were on our honeymoon, and had quite enough other things to think about." She looked meaningly at Smiler. "Well, after the honeymoon, Tony and I sailed for New York. We went straight to Westerton's, and, on the

strength of having run Kate the Gun down, I naturally expected they'd give Tony a berth. But I got a shock then and there. Kate the Gun, whom I had left in charge of Miller, the other detective, had never arrived. From the moment I left Kate's flat nothing more was heard of them —by Westerton's, anyway. The chief was very sarcastic about it.

"'You've got nerve, Miss Grey, to ask us to put your husband on the staff,' he said. 'We sent you to England for Kate the Gun, and you bring us a husband. Very nice husband, no doubt, *but—he—ain't—little Kate!* Haven't you got mixed a trifle? Where's Kate?'

"'Kate!' I said. 'With Miller, of course. I left her with him, safe enough. I think I'll ask you a question now: "Where's Miller?"'

"The chief nodded and laughed. I won *that* deal comfortably, for Miller was my superior. They had specially impressed that on me when we started for Kate.

"'To tell the truth,' said the chief, 'I don't know.'

"'Well, I can guess,' I said. 'Kate's with Miller all right, but Miller's her devout lover now, not her guard. You haven't forgotten how Kate coaxed that detective in St. Louis four years ago? She ruined that man, and now she's bluffed Miller. What you'd better do is to send my husband and me across again to get her. If we don't we won't trouble Westerton's again. We'll pay all our own expenses and draw no salary until we call in here within three months with Kate in tow. But when we do bring her you shall refund expenses and pay us salary dating from to-day. What do you say, chief?'

"He thought it over. Then he stood up.

"'That's a go,' he said, and made himself pleasant. And so, Jack, here we are. We want Kate, and you must help us get her. Do you know where she is?" concluded Fanchon.

Smiler shook his head slowly.

"Well, I can't say at the moment," he answered cautiously. "But leave it to me for a day or two, and perhaps I can manage something for

you. I've had one or two glimpses of her lately, and very likely I shall have another soon. All you two need do is just to take it easy and enjoy yourselves until you hear from me. I'm glad to see you both, and I want you to look on this flat as a kind of Liberty Hall. I know you won't interfere with me if I don't interfere with you. But I'd like to ask you a question before supper."

"Well?"

"Suppose—only suppose, mind—you'd offended one of these high-binder tongs the Chinese have got among them—particularly the Chinks in San Francisco, I'm told—and this tong was a rich tong, and had sent a couple of hatchet men over here for you, what would you do?"

Fanchon and Tony glanced at each other. They seemed in perfect agreement when Fanchon replied, quite seriously—

"I'd strike out for the North Pole in a balloon—or else buy a private well and live at the bottom of it. But even then I shouldn't consider myself safe. They're half men and half

demons, some of these high-binders. They're not after you, Jack, are they?"

Smiler noted the look in her eyes and smiled.

"Oh, no!" he said airily; "I'm after them. I'll tell you in a few days' time. And now for a bit of supper. I'm a bit peckish myself. Touch that bell, Tony, old man."

And with that the two had to be content, for that evening at any rate.

* * * * *

On the following morning Mr. Bunn, having safely disposed of an alarming breakfast, bade Sing-Song be seated and listen attentively.

"I suppose, Sing-Song, my lad, these high-binders stick to one another—the members of the tongs, I mean? Take you, for instance. You belong to the See Yup tong, the same as these hatchet men—so you say, anyhow."

"Yes, mastel."

Sing-Song's face was perfectly impassive.

"And you're going to get a hundred pounds for helping them get Kate—when she pays up

the ten thousand dollars they mean to fine her—before killing her ? "

" Yes, mastel."

Sing seemed quite unconcerned.

" But suppose I were to promise you two hundred pounds to betray your high-binder pals, you'd do it like a bird, wouldn't you ? "

" Oh, yes, mastel ? "

The Chink's eyes lighted up.

" Jump at the chance, in fact ? "

" Yes, mastel ; velly quick jumpee ! "

Smiler stared a little.

" Well, Sing-Song, you're a dam' villain. 'Pon me soul, you're the blooming limit. I've got a good mind to knock your head off. I suppose you'd betray me like a lark, if you had the chance ? "

But Sing-Song shook his head indignantly.

" No, no. Nevel betlay mastel. Mastel kind —givee me work, money, food, when me hungly, livee in guttel. Nevel betlay mastel ! "

He lapsed earnestly into a rapid string of Chinese oaths. It seemed as though he was swearing fidelity to Smiler upon the souls of his

ancestors—if he had any. It was perfectly true that Smiler had literally rescued him from the gutter at the time he had engaged him.

"Oh, all right, then," said Smiler, to pacify him. "You'd betray anybody but me; let it go at that. Now, I want Kate the Gun. She'd be wasted on those two high-binders. But she seems to have the price of a fine—if she'll pay it. Think she will?"

"Oh, yes, mastel. She 'flaid of hatchet men."

"Oh, that's news to me. She ain't the sort to be afraid of anybody," demurred Smiler.

"'Flaid of hatchet men," repeated Sing confidently. "Evelybody 'flaid hatchet men."

But Mr. Bunn took exception to this sweeping statement.

"That," he said, "is where you make your blooming little error, my lad. I ain't. I'm afraid of a good many things—an underdone potato, for instance—but I ain't by any means afraid of any measly Chink, and don't you run away with the idea that I am. See? You get rid of your superstitions about that, Sing, my

son. Now, I've got a plan. What's the name of these hatchet handlers, and where'll they live while they're after Kate? And when do they arrive?"

"They come in two-thlee days. Yung Kow one man, Lung Sling othel man. They livee in house neal docks—mastel knows house—I livee in allee samee house some time."

Smiler nodded.

"Very good," he said. "Now you listen to me, and don't forget what I'm going to say to you—if you want to handle that two hundred quid."

The Chinaman fell into an attitude of attention while Smiler issued instructions.

* * * * *

Two mornings later, Mr. Bunn chanced to be approaching a *café* in the West End, when he saw a well-dressed woman a few yards in front of him turn into the restaurant. He saw just enough of her profile to recognise Kate the Gun. On the impulse of the moment he followed her in. The place was moderately full. She took

a seat at a small table and ordered something American to drink. There was a chair vacant at her table, and Smiler proceeded to occupy it.

"Morning, Kate!" he said cheerily. "How goes it? How's trade?"

Kate stared bitterly at him. She looked worried.

"Aw, cut it out!" she said slowly.

There was a long pause, during which Kate surveyed him with brooding, baleful eyes. Presently she gave a shrug.

"I ought to have outed you at the start," she said. "You're a Jonah. One way and another, you've spoiled my trip to Europe. I'm only waiting here for one thing now, and that's to spoil *you*," she added, with sudden malevolence. She looked so dangerous that Smiler decided to leave well alone. He rose.

"Ah, well; good luck, my girl," he said gravely. "See you again," and left. Then he seemed to think of something, and came back to the table. "Oh, how's Miller?" he asked.

Kate sneered at him, and turned her back.

Smiler smiled and moved out. He knew where Miller was. Tony and Fanchon had recognised him in a crowd on the previous day, and had given him in charge. The police had entered the charge as one of picking pockets, but since then the New York cable had been in use, and the police had received enough information from Westerton's to justify their acceding to Tony and Fanchon's request for applying for a remand. Certainly Miller was safe.

It remained now to deal with Kate and her "plug-uglies"—the two remaining members of her gang.

At breakfast on the following morning Sing brought in with the melon, with which Mr. Bunn liked to begin his meal, a smile that resembled the Japanese flag.

"Hullo, what's bit you?" asked Smiler, surprised.

"Yung Kow and Lung Sling reachee Englin yestelday, mastel," he said. And his smile broadened.

"Oh, did they? Have you seen 'em?"

"No, mastel."

"Well, how d'ye know they're here, then? Seen it in the Society column of the *Morning Post*, I suppose?" he added satirically.

"Not *Molning Post*—anothel papel. Look!"

He opened that morning's *Daily Whaup*—Smiler's favourite newspaper—and pointed with a yellow finger to a paragraph. Smiler looked—and stiffened a little.

One word of the heading of the paragraph stood out blackly—*MURDER!* Something vaguely cold fluttered for an instant down the spine of Mr. Bunn—just as the sight of at least three other words, if suddenly brought to the notice of any "crook," causes that "crook" to wince a little. They are REWARD! WANTED! and ARREST!

"Hum!" said Smiler; "let's look."

He took the paper and read the paragraph. It was quite brief, and described the finding of the body of an unknown man at about one o'clock that morning. A constable had found the body huddled up in the area of a house at

the corner of Great Russell Street. His skull was fractured, and he had been stabbed in the back. His pockets had been rifled, and contained nothing. Scrawled on the inside of his hat was his name, "Michael Duloon." The paragraph concluded with the time-honoured optimism to the effect that the police were engaged upon a clue.

Smiler nodded sombrely as he put down the paper. *He* knew who Michael Duloon was, and his knowledge increased his respect for the swift but effective methods of the "high-binder."

Michael Duloon was one of Kate the Gun's plug-uglies, the "tough" from Chicago who had once tried to sandbag Mr. Bunn. But Michael would wield no more sandbags.

"Pass me that sole, Sing," said Smiler, quietly, and proceeded with his breakfast.

He was not remotely sorry for Michael. He was only a little surprised—that the plug-ugly had not been dealt with in that fashion years before.

"That leaves Kate and the Bishop," he

murmured to himself. Then he suddenly fixed Sing-Song with his eye. "Kate's mine!" he said grimly. "You understand that?"

"Yes, mastel."

"Don't you forget it, then! Pass me the kidneys and fill my cup, you high-binder!"

Sing-Song hastened to attend to his work, and the procession that formed Mr. Bunn's morning meal passed steadily along until Sing-Song finally held a match for his master's cigar, and Smiler strolled to the window to smoke it. As a rule, he watched the sparrows while smoking, but this morning he had other things to occupy his attention.

Kate the Gun and the only member of her gang remaining to her were standing outside, looking up at the window. They were talking earnestly.

It occurred to Smiler that they attributed the death of Michael to him.

"H'm! Didn't take long to find out where I lived!"

Then it suddenly dawned upon him that Kate

had shadowed him home the day before. He shook his head.

"That was a fool of a thing to do. I must be getting careless," he muttered.

In a second or so the two had moved away.

"It's a good job they daren't go to the police, or I should be in charge in about ten minutes," mused Smiler.

Then suddenly his eyes narrowed. Coming slowly round the square were two men—short, squat, thick-set men, with dark yellowish-brown faces and evil, almond-shaped eyes.

"Strike me glorious, 'ere's the 'igh-binders!" ejaculated Smiler, startled for a moment into the illiterate speech of which during the past two years, by dint of fearful effort, he had largely cured himself.

He stepped back a little, watching the men. One was exceedingly well-dressed in the English style—morning coat, silk hat, grey trousers—and the other looked like a Mongol who had stolen and put on a complete outfit of a touring American's clothes. But all the clothes in the

world could not make them look like anything but murderers—at any rate, to English eyes. They passed quietly on, following the direction taken a minute before by Kate the Gun and her companion.

Smiler leaned out of the window, watching them go, and he heard at his back the voice of Sing-Song.

"Mastel see them—Yung Kow velly smalt dlessee, Lung Sling dlessee allee samee Amelican man?" asked the Chinaman.

"I did," said Smiler, "and I don't like the look of 'em." He went to his writing-desk and took an automatic pistol from a drawer. "You can clear off down to the Docks now. See? It's just half-past ten. I shall be there at twelve sharp," he said quietly. "And listen just once more." He twisted Sing-Song round with a grip that surprised the Chinaman—"*No funny work!* You're in with me, my lad, and I want Kate—and I won't wait!"

"Yes, mastel," said Sing-Song.

"Sling your hook then!"

Sing-Song slung it, and Smiler put on his hat and fur-coat, and hurried away to the nearest telephone, where he rang up the hotel at which Tony and Fanchon were staying. He spoke earnestly into the receiver for many minutes, and then hastened out and took a taxi.

He was bound for a certain weird old rabbit-warren of a house down by the Docks, which was tenanted chiefly by rats and Chinese. It was partly lodging-house for Chinese sailors (or any other sailors that were sufficiently foolish to stay there), and partly opium den. Sing-Song was very fond of the place, and was rather popular there. It was he who had first introduced Smiler Bunn to the house. The proprietor—an elderly, oblique-eyed villain—respected Smiler extremely. He always paid so well, and, at the same time, was so very capable of taking care of himself and his possessions. Smiler was perfectly safe in that house, and knew a good deal about it. But he was one of a very select few. It was at this cheerful resort that the high-binders were staying.

Chung Loo, the proprietor, was expecting Smiler. He received him in a cellar, which, by the simple process of white-washing the walls and putting in a table or so, he had fitted up as a sort of underground casino for the use of a cut-throat looking crew of fan-tan players.

Chung Loo drew Smiler into a superior kind of coal-hole, which adjoined the cellar, and which he used as his private study, and, with Sing-Song, they began to talk.

Chung Loo was also a member of the See Yup tong, whose headquarters, it appeared, were in San Francisco. He listened attentively to the proposal which Smiler and Sing-Song made to him, and shook his head.

"You askee me betlay Yung Kow and Lung Sling," he said, recapitulating the offer they had made. "You say you givee me hundled pounds to savee lady flom them and givee lady to you?" He shook his head. "I am See Yup man. I cannot betlay See Yup hatchet men."

"But *why* not, Chung?" urged Smiler, rather surprised at such loyalty.

Chung Loo grinned.

"Yung Kow givee me thlee hundled pounds when lady pay," he said.

Smiler shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, you Chinks are all alike!" he said disgustedly. "I'll pay you four hundred, then."

Chung Loo beamed.

"Velly nice," he said. "Velly pleased." He glanced over his shoulder, and dropped his voice to a whisper. "Yung Kow and Lung Sling muldelels. Policee come, pelhaps—if they killee lady. Chung Loo 'flaid policee!"

"That's all right; very natural feelin'," said Smiler. "Now, I don't want any fuss. What you've got to do is easy. Sing and I reckon these high-binders will blow in any minute now with the lady. Anyhow, we're going to wait until they do. Well, when they come in, persuade them to lock her in a room alone for an hour or so. Raise an alarm of police or something—see? But *I've* got to be in the room they lock the lady in, and it's got to be a room with an

exit to the river. Understand that. Have you got such a room in the house ? "

Chung Loo nodded.

" Very well, then—that's all. I'll leave it to you. There's somewhere in the room where I can hide, I suppose ? "

" Big chest—camphol wood—sailol's chest," said Chung Loo.

" Big enough for *me ?* "

Chung Loo nodded again.

" All right—that'll do. You're sure you'll be able to persuade Yung Kow and Slung Lung, or whatever they call themselves ? "

" Plentee easy. Dlug them, pelhaps—cly ' Policee ! ' pelhaps. See bimeby."

" Good ! "

Smiler took a pencil and paper and wrote a hasty note. This he gave to Sing-Song.

" Slip out to the wharf, Sing," he instructed the Chinaman, " and hand it to the man in the motor-boat that you'll find edged in round the corner. If he asks, tell him he might have to wait until midnight. Ask if he's got any food.

If he says 'No,' tell him I'll send him out some rat pie, or whatever it is you Chinks consider a delicacy in this house, later on." He slipped off his fur-coat. "Give this to the lady in the boat. It'll be cold out there towards evening. Got it all? Hop along!"

And Smiler turned away with Chung Loo to inspect his chest in the room which had "an exit to the river." This done, he lay comfortably down on a big couch in one of the inner rooms on the ground floor, and smoked in silence. He had a presentiment so pronounced as to be an instinct that the two evil-eyed high-binders would trap Kate the Gun and probably "the Bishop" that day. The amazing speed with which they had settled the old score of the See Yups with "the Bishop's" fellow plug-ugly, proved that they were in desperate earnest, and were prepared to take risks.

The afternoon wore on to twilight, and the twilight to dark, but there was no sound of the sudden arrival that Smiler lay expecting. Chinamen passed silently in and out of the house, mute,

mysterious yellow men, who went noiselessly upstairs or downstairs according to their destination. Chung Loo, sitting quietly at his account-books in a tiny recess near the entrance door of the house, noted each one, but he made no sign. He knew his customers.

In the inside room Smiler consumed cigar after cigar with Sing-Song sitting patiently on the floor by the lounge. The darkness thickened, and Sing-Song got up, went silently out, and returned with an ill-smelling lamp.

"Velly long, mastel. Lady velly clevel," said Sing softly, as he reseated himself.

Smiler grunted.

"Yung Kow velly patient, allee same time."

"Dry up," remarked Smiler, politely.

Sing dried.

Twice Smiler had sent out food to Tony and Fanchon in the motor-boat under the wharf, and he was thinking of sending a fresh supply, when suddenly Sing-Song rose softly as a leopard rises.

"Mastel!" he said.

A tiny bell hanging from the wall at Smiler's side tinkled softly, in a secretive sort of way, and Smiler slid off the couch.

"Quick, mastel!" whispered Sing.

They hurried from the room, and passed swiftly downstairs. As they went they heard a slight shuffle and a flutter of woman's clothes in the hall-way above. Smiler and Sing-Song hurried downstairs until they must have been three stories underground. Then Sing-Song glided away down a dark, narrow passage, and Smiler entered a small, cellar-like room opening out into the passage. It was pitch-black, but he had an electric torch. By its glow he climbed carefully into a huge chest that stood against the wall, let down the lid, and waited.

But he was not kept waiting long. Within five minutes, he heard the door of the room suddenly flung open, the rapid shuffling of feet on the floor, a hasty whisper of "Policee! Policee! Quick!" (that was the voice of Chung Loo), a muttering in Chinese, the closing of the door, and finally the scrape of a rusty key.

He flung back the lid of the chest with his shoulder, and, with a repeating pistol in one hand and his electric torch in the other, he peered out.

A woman, gagged and bound, lay on the floor. Her eyes appealed to him over the gag. It was Kate the Gun.

Smiler removed the gag.

"Hello, Kate!" he said cheerfully. "You're up against it, this time. But don't worry—your little Smiler's here." He helped her to her feet. "We've got to be quick. Now, look here, you've got to choose. These high-binders—they're after you for that opium-smuggling job in San Francisco—mean to get your money, and then kill you—see? They seem pretty serious over it; but you know more about 'em than I do. Well, I can get you out of *their* way all right; but I can only turn you over into Fanchon's hands. You know her—she arrested you once before, but Miller got you off. She's come over from New York on purpose for you. Well, you can take your choice. Which'll you go to? The high-binders or the detectives?"

Kate gasped. She was white and sick with fear.

"Get me out of this—anywhere," she said. "Good God! They strangled 'the Bishop' before my eyes without a sound. In my own flat——" She trembled shockingly. "Hurry!" she implored.

Smiler pitied her. She had despised him, insulted him, hated him, and, finally, tried to kill him; but Smiler suddenly forgot it all.

"Come on, then," he said, and added, almost apologetically, "Sorry about the detectives; but, well, there it is, you know. Can't have everything just as we'd like it, can we?"

He did not unbind her hands.

He tapped three times on the door. The key turned, and the door opened. Sing-Song was standing outside.

"This way, please," he said.

They followed him into the blackness of the passage.

Three minutes later they were in the motor-launch, and Tony was steering out into the open river.

It was quite ten minutes before Kate recovered herself.

"Well, Fanchon, that was a close call," she said. "But you've got me for fair this time."

Her face was white in the moonlight.

Fanchon nodded.

"You're well out of that," she said, and Kate shuddered.

"It's the first time I've ever been scared. But I was scared good. Ah, well; I'm not so broken-hearted about my finish, after all! I was tired of the crooked game. There's nothing in it. You roll pretty high while it lasts, but you burn out quick. Give me a quiet corner in some nice gaol now, and I shan't cry any."

She turned her brilliant eyes on Smiler.

"You're a wise old bird," she said flippantly, "and you've queered me for fair; but I guess I'll forgive you. I've got a pretty thick wad of notes left. But I shan't want more than half where I'm going. *You'd* better have the odd half."

Her voice was suddenly one of pure gratitude.

The place with the Chinamen had frightened her nearly to madness.

Smiler shook his head.

"To tell you the truth, Kate, I meant having the lot, before turning you over to Fanchon and Tony here. But—back in that cellar—it seemed a bit *too* low down. You can pay Chung Loo four hundred and Sing-Song two hundred, if you want to ease your mind. It's due to them more than to me that you're alive now. I promised 'em that."

Kate's eyes glistened.

"Sure, I'll pay it," she said, and lapsed into silence.

They landed at a river police-station below Blackfriars, and as they prepared to leave, Kate turned to Smiler.

"Well, so long," she said.

"So long," said Smiler.

And that was the last he saw of her.

She sent a packet of banknotes to him next morning by Fanchon for the two Chinamen who had helped Smiler.

Fanchon told Smiler that she seemed suddenly to have lost interest in things. They were sailing for New York on the following day, Kate having made no trouble in the matter of extradition. The murder of her two plug-uglies and her own experience with the high-binders seemed to have unnerved her entirely.

"Ah, well," said Smiler, with a sigh of relief, "so *that's* settled!"

Then he strolled round to the hotel to eat a farewell lunch with Tony and his wife.

"I think I'll take a holiday after this," he said, as they went.

"Why not?" said Fanchon.

"I've made a good deal of money lately. I can afford it, and I consider I've earned it. And so, my girl, I will."

And he did.

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