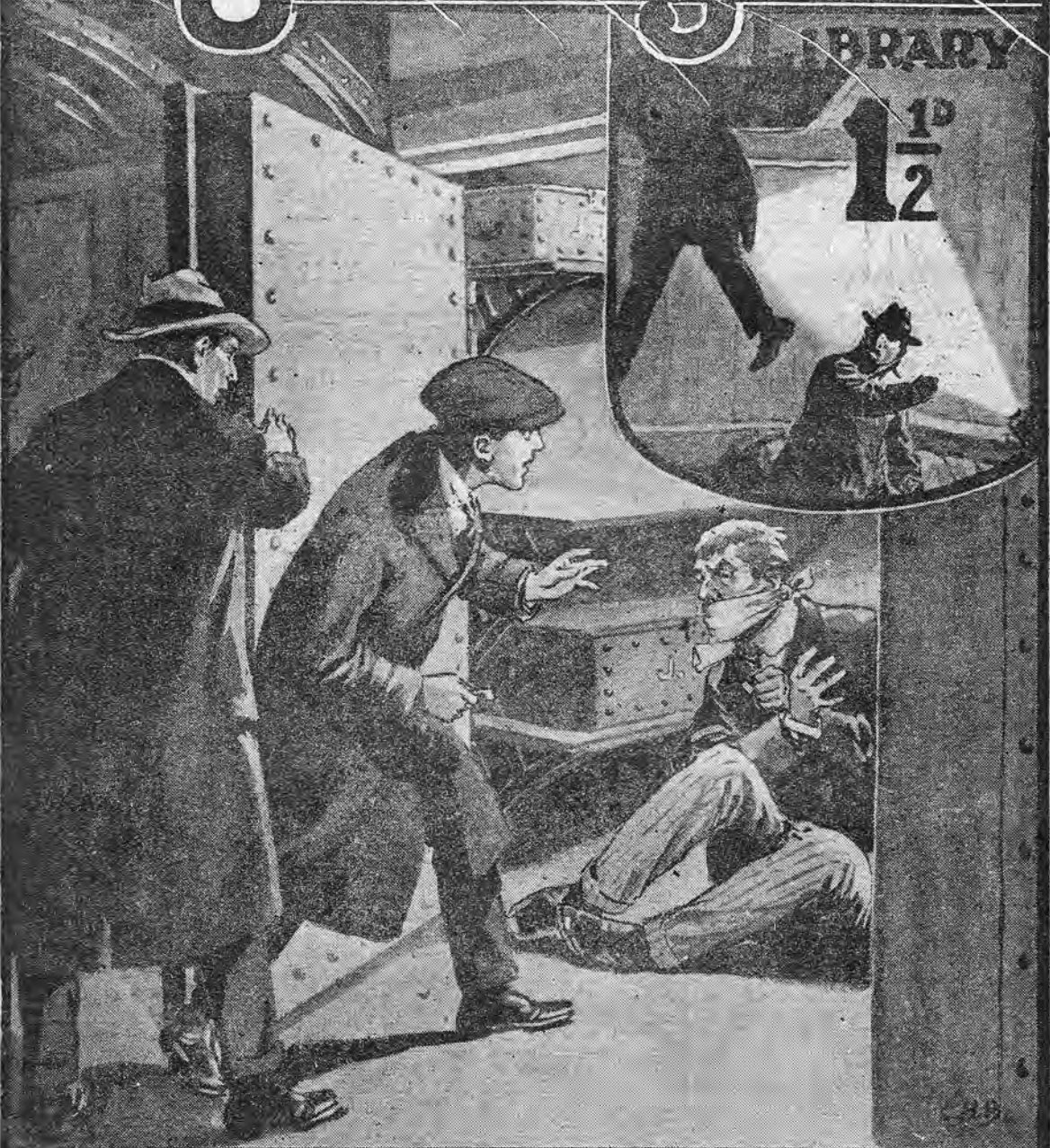


SEXTON BLAKE, TINKER, AND
'TROUBLE' NANTUCKET!

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DOUBLE-CROSSED!

An Exciting Complete Detective Novel, told by 'TROUBLE' NANTUCKET, the American Sleuth.



DOUBLE CROSSED

A Long Complete Detective Novel,
introducing 'Trouble' NANTUCKET,
SEXTON BLAKE, and TINKER.

Narrative told by 'Trouble' NANTUCKET.

THE FIRST CHAPTER. The Attack at Sea.

AS this case is really more or less my funeral, my friend Mr. Blake has insisted on my doing the necessary pen-work.

I don't know that I need to introduce myself to the readers, for I have already been mentioned in one or two of your great London detective's cases.

My name is Nantucket, and, by way of a handle, people in my country call me "Trouble." I don't say the name doesn't fit me, but it is just a sort of growth, so far as I am concerned. I don't look for trouble, it comes to me in waves.

I am an American detective, not a bull, you know, but a private one. I take up cases now and again that bring me across the "Herring Pond," and when ever I land in this little patch of mud of yours I always do my best to try and get into touch with Mr. Sexton Blake.

I figure it out that he knows more about the underworld in your country than any other man breathing.

It was a cold December morning when I landed in Liverpool on a certain errand, and on this particular occasion I did not telephone to Mr. Blake, for my quest had nothing to do with criminality. It was just a straightforward business stunt, so far as I was concerned.

There was a man way back in Oklahoma who was president of a small oilfield. He had come up to me in my New York office, and he wanted me to try and locate a certain James Spence. He gave me details of the reason of his wanting to find this individual, which were as follows:

Twenty years before, the oilfield president, whose name was Keighley, had gone into partnership with James Spence, who, although an Englishman, had been out in America several years. They were both youngsters, Keighley in his twenties, and Spence a couple of years his junior.

Anyhow, they went West, and after the usual up-and-down existence that most young men endure, they finally

struck a patch of territory on which they located farms.

In that time America's acres were cheap, and by scraping and saving Keighley and Spence managed to buy a very big block of land near to a lake.

They struggled on for five or six years, then James Spence got cold feet on the farming business, and he went off to Frisco, leaving Keighley to look after the place.

They communicated with each other on several occasions; then a final letter came from Spence, saying he was going to England, and from that day Keighley had not heard from him.

But ten years later Keighley, who had still hung on to the farm, suddenly discovered that there was an oil boom on in the vicinity, so he quitted the farms, leaving them in charge of a reliable manager, and took up a couple of blocks of land near to Oklahoma.

He did well, and made a fair amount of money, and had almost forgotten the existence of the two farms, when news came to him that another big oil corporation had been buying land all round that lake, and had struck oil.

The big oil corporation came to Keighley, and asked him to sell out the two farm blocks that he held, for they considered it was the best-paying strip in the whole district. Keighley, however, could not sell the farms until he communicated with his partner, and that was where I came in.

Keighley, when he came into my office, struck me as being a very hard case, and I could not help thinking that the average man would be mistaken when they looked at him. For, of course, had he liked to do so, it would have been quite easy for him to have sold the whole of that block of land without letting his partner know anything about it.

Yet there he was urging me to go and find James Spence, and tell him about the good fortune that was awaiting him.

Keighley gave me a scrap of paper, on which was written the name of a village—Sanderdale, Norfolk.

"I have been looking up the names of those little one-horse villages in England, Nantucket," he said, "and I dis-

covered that there is a Sanderdale in Norfolk. It is close to the coast, and it has about five hundred inhabitants, from what I can discover from the gazetteer. Anyhow, that is the place I want you to make for. Jim Spence always used to speak of the town, and told me he was born there, and I figure it out he has probably gone back."

He looked across my desk at me. "You go and get James Spence," he said, "and tell him that his land is waiting for him to claim it, and that the Stella Oil Corporation is just busting to buy."

He gave me a number of documents and letters which indicated that this oil corporation had certainly been trying to buy the land, and after he handed me over a faded photograph of Spence, taken about fifteen years before, he fished out a great wad of notes, and told me to help myself.

"You've got to go right across to England now, Nantucket," he said. "Don't spare any expense. Find that old buddy of mine, and tell him that Keighley has played the game. From what I can make out, Jim Spence's block of land is worth the best part of fifty or sixty thousand pounds, and until he comes along here and claims it I'll hold on to it for him."

There was rather a mixed passenger list, for, of course, the usual travellers had not yet settled down, and there were a great many types and characters on board.

One man in particular, a shock-headed, thick-set fellow, who spoke American with a fat accent, and whom I reckoned out was a Swede, rather tried to make friends with me, and when he began to hint that he was something to do with oil corporations I just froze him.

You see, in America nearly everything is done by intrigue, and I guessed, as I listened to this Swede, whose name, by the way, was Jarsenn, that he was probably representing the group of financiers who were wanting to buy that patch of land belonging to James Spence.

One night in the smoke-room Jarsenn came along to me and did the usual flourish of cigars, and insisted on my

having a cocktail. Then he went to the point pretty plainly.

"I know who you are, Mr. Nantucket," he said, "and I think it would be worth while to compare notes. You are going to England on a special mission, and it has got to do with that long-firm shark, Peter Keighley."

"Look here, Jarsenn," I said. "You are on one side and I'm on the other, so far as I can figure it out, but if you think you are going to get round me and work a bluff by running down Mr. Keighley, you're pretty well barkin' up the wrong tree!"

I brought my fist down on the table with a bang.

"What your opinion of Mr. Keighley is cuts no ice with me," I went on. "But I've got my own opinion, and I guess he's a white man, and that's more'n I can say for some others that I've met."

The thick-set Swede leaned back in his chair and looked at me.

"There is no need for you to lose your temper, Mr. Nantucket," he put in. "I was simply approaching you from a purely friendly angle. I don't know what Keighley's scheme is, but I am sure it's a wrong 'un. I know a little about the fellow, and the people I am concerned with know a great deal more. Keighley never did run straight, and never will!"

I felt my dander rising, but I managed to restrain myself, for the smoke-room of a big liner isn't exactly the sort of place that one wants to raise a row in.

"You're talkin' a lot about Mr. Keighley," I said. "What about your side? I suppose you represent the Stella Oil Corporation?"

I thought the fellow would have denied this, but he was bold enough, for he nodded his head.

"You're right there, Mr. Nantucket," he said. "I do represent the Stella Oil Corporation."

"And, maybe, you've been sent on board this boat to find out what I'm after?" I put in.

"That's quite true."

The sheer audacity of the fellow got my goat.

"Then let me tell you this, Mr. Squarehead!" I broke out, as I pushed my chair back and arose to my feet. "I don't want nothin' to do with you! I can't help you follerin' me round this boat, but if I see your nose anywhere near my vicinity when I get to England, it'll be pushed a little flatter into your face than it is now! You get me?"

"That's your last word, I suppose, Mr. Nantucket?" he said.

"Yes, sir," I returned; "my last word. I don't want no truck with you!"

He leaned forward, drained his cocktail, and nodded.

"I've heard that you are called Mr. 'Trouble' Nantucket," he said, "and it seems to me that the name fits. You're asking for it. I have tried to get you to listen to me, but you won't. Well, what happens after is your own lookout."

I walked away from the table then, and left the smoke-room. For two pins I'd have given the fellow a jolt on the jaw; but I just managed to restrain myself.

On the night before we reached Liverpool, however, another incident happened, which I reckon had something to do with the Swede.

I had a cabin on the port-side, and I sleep on a sort of hair-trigger so far as my hearing is concerned. It must have been something in the early morning when the door of my cabin opened. It was only just a faint click, but I caught it.

I lay in the bunk listening for a moment, to make sure that I had not been mistaken, and quite close to me I heard someone breathing.

I don't know if you have ever managed to develop a certain knack that enables you to locate just where a person is, even although you are in pitch darkness. It's a mighty handy stunt, and I had been at it before.

I always carry a life-preserver under my pillow, not that I use it often, but it is there just in case of emergency. I slipped my hand under the pillow, and got hold of that short, little weapon. Then, raising myself noiselessly, I leaned out of my bunk, and, figurin' out where the fellow was, I made a blow.

I guess my club caught him jest under the neck. He was stooping forward, feeling in the bunk below, where I kept my traps. I heard him give a grunt like a dying pig, then in another moment I was out of my bunk, and had tackled him.

My blow had made him feel mighty sick, I'll bet, but he was not by any means done for, and I'll give him credit, he managed to keep his wits about him.

As I jumped out of the bunk to close with him, he must have dropped to his knees, for my grab missed him altogether, and I pitched forward over his kneeling body, and crashed against the little washstand.

I heard him scramble to his feet, and a pair of sinewy arms went round my waist, and as I smashed my life-preserver down again the skunk drew my feet right away, and it was the carpet for me with a thud.

He had great, heavy boots on, and he trod on my toes so badly that I crumpled up with agony for a few moments, and it was that which gave him his opportunity.

He swung back, and as I tried to stagger after him he let fly with his fist, and I felt the knuckly bunch land just below my chest.

I heard him rush across the cabin and through the door, closing it behind him. But I could not shout then even if I'd wanted to, for I hadn't as much breath left in me as would have blown a candle out at the moment.

When I did recover I got to the switch, and turned on the light. Our little dust-up in that cabin hadn't improved it any, and it took me some time to sort the place up again.

As I was clearing round I found a cap under the bunk. It was one of those black-and-white checks that the real high-brow American loves to wear when he finds himself on board a liner.

I noticed that the name of the makers had been carefully torn out of it; but the lining was rather greasy, and there was a certain scent which I sniffed at.

The wearer of that cap, whoever he was, used a rather pungently-scented hair-grease, and a quick recollection came to me. I remembered that when I had been seated opposite Jarsenn that aroma had been wafted across from him to me, and I was convinced now that it was the Swede who had tackled me.

I was pretty mad by then, but it was too late to make any disturbance, so I climbed back into my bunk, after slipping the lock on my door.

Next morning, however, as soon as the breakfast gong went, I got down to the saloon, and marched right up to the table where Jarsenn was seated.

I knew, of course, that I had basted him pretty well, and I looked at him fully expecting to see some signs of my work on him. But the fellow sat there, clean-shaven, well-groomed, and there was not a single mark on his fat face or neck.

"Good-morning, Mr. Nantucket!" he said.

I think it was a glare I shot at him, then I slipped my hand into my pocket, and drew out the cap.

"This is your property, I believe, Jarsenn," I said, as I thrust it under his nose.

He didn't change a hair.

"Thanks very much!" he said, taking it from my hand. "I couldn't make out where I'd lost it. Thought I must have dropped it overboard the other night."

"You thought you dropped it overboard, did you?" I spluttered; for, I'll give him his due, he was a cool case, was this Swede. "Oh, no, you didn't drop it overboard! You dropped it in the bottom bunk in my cabin last night."

One or two other men in the saloon heard me, for I had raised my voice slightly, and a little group began to gather round the table.

Jarsenn looked up and nodded to one man, a tall, lanky fellow, who had just sauntered into the circle.

"You heard what Mr. Nantucket said just now, Major Todd," he remarked. "He says I was in his cabin last night, and left my cap there as a visiting card."

The lanky man looked at me.

"What time was this, sir?" he said.

"Somewhere after midnight," I returned.

The lanky man shook his head.

"I'm afraid you are mistaken, then," he commented. "For, to tell you the truth, Mr. Jarsenn and I and another man were playing poker until five o'clock. It was an all-night sitting, and Jarsenn absolutely skinned us."

A laugh went round the circle, but it halted when it reached me. With such an alibi, of course, Jarsenn was as safe as houses. Then again I had begun to doubt on account of his absolutely unmarked appearance.

"Perhaps Mr. Nantucket will apologise," the Swede said; and I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh, yes, I climb down!" I remarked. "But I have it in for you yet. Alibi or no alibi, this is your cap, and if your head was not under it when it came into my cabin last night, it was someone else whom you had sent there."

But I allowed the incident to close, and I realised that the fellow had, no doubt, got some confederate to enter my cabin, wearing his cap.

He had really worked a bluff on me, and a very successful one, and I made up my mind that if I came across Jarsenn again in England I would do my best to get even with him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Real Norfolk Welcome—I Hear Disturbing News.

I GUESS Sanderdale was just about the last place that the wandering tribes of Britishers settled in before they beat it for warmer climes.

It is a straggling cluster of cottages set away behind a long stretch of marsh-land, and when I tell you that the railway stops short ten miles from it, and there are only two ways of getting to the little village, either by swimming or trusting your neck and limbs to the tender mercies of one of the dingy cab-drivers that hang round the junction, you can understand how I felt when I finally landed at the Golden Dragon, which, by the way, was the name of the local and only hotel.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening when I struck Sanderdale, and it seemed to me that the village had gone to sleep somewhere about two in the

afternoon, and had forgotten to wake up. After shouting for about five minutes in the door of the inn, I managed to rouse one tired-looking servant, and he grabbed my bag, and led me up to the first floor into a room.

I had sent off a telegram from Liverpool to say that I was coming, and the servant informed me that the telegram had been delivered early in the afternoon. But it did not have much effect so far as I could see.

However, later on, when I got down into the dining-room, and was served with supper, I began to brighten up again.

There was not another visitor in the hotel, but when I was finishing the meal and drinking my coffee, and just in the act of lighting a cigar, the landlord entered, and I sort of fell on his neck and made him sit down and have a Henry Clay with me, and I began to put a few questions to him.

The incident that had happened on board the *Mauretania* made me a little more cautious than I would otherwise have been, so I did not mention the name of the man I was after at once.

I had reason to congratulate myself on that fact, for presently there was a knock on the door, and the burly figure of a real British county policeman came in.

I saw that his shoulders were covered with snow.

"What's the trouble, Mills?" my host asked the constable.

"Oh, nothing very much!" the man returned. "But I have got a little job on to-night, and I want to borrow your dogcart."

"Where are you going to?"

The constable looked at me for a moment, then smiled.

"I've got to go up to Rokeley Hall," he said. "Colonel Andrews has telephoned down to the station to say he has managed to collar the man who's been making free with his turkeys, at last."

"I'm jolly glad to hear it," said the landlord. "It's about time some of these light-fingered gentry were laid by the heels!"

"Turkeys!" I put in. "Do you mean to say that there's men about here making an industry of stealin' turkeys?"

The constable laughed.

"This is a turkey-growing district, sir," he said, "and Colonel Andrews has a rare fine flock of birds."

"And they've gotten the man, have they?"

The constable nodded again.

"Yes, sir," he said. "And you know the man, too," he continued, turning to the landlord. "I've had my suspicions about him for a long time now, but, of course, I could prove nothing, for he were far too clever for me."

The landlord leaned forward.

"You don't mean to say that it's Jem?"

The constable nodded.

"Yes, that's just who it is," he returned, with a chuckle. "Williams, the colonel's butler, talked to me over the telephone, and he said it be Jem Spence right enough."

Believe me, my ears went up with a click as I heard the name, and I half arose to my feet.

"Jem Spence, is it?" the landlord repeated. "Dang me if I didn't think it were him!"

"This Jem Spence is a poacher, I suppose?" I put in.

"He be worse than that, sir," the landlord returned. "He be the worst man in all Sanderdale, and that be saying summat!"

Of course, there might have been

another James Spence in Sanderdale, but it seemed to me that it was a very remote possibility. However, I just had to make sure, and I returned to the charge.

"What sort of a man is this fellow?" I said. "Is he a youngster?"

"Youngster! No fear. He be gettin' on towards forty now, and he looks nearer fifty."

"Is he a native of the village?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" the constable put in. "He was born here, but it isn't the village's fault that he's turned out so bad. Jem Spence was ails a rollin' stone, and for years we never heard what had become of him. But he turned up again in Sanderdale some years ago now."

The landlord nodded.

"Yes; he's been back fifteen years, I reckon," he said, "and during that time he's been more than once in gaol."

The constable chuckled.

"Oh, yes; we've got him now and again!" he agreed. "But he be a mighty slick rogue, that. He never gets more'n a month at a time, for we're never able to prove anything really bad against him. Even this charge can only be brought as poaching. But it's at the back of my mind that Jem Spence has tried at bigger things afore to-day, only we ain't ever been able to fix it agin him."

You can quite understand how my thoughts ran as I listened to this conversation. I had come all the way from New York for the purpose of getting in touch with a certain James Spence, of Sanderdale, and here I was, listening to an account of the character of that man, a character which did not promise very great things, so far as he was concerned. "I suppose there is no doubt about the man's guilt?" I put in.

"Can't say that, sir," the constable returned. "But I've got to go up to the Hall and fetch him back to the police-station, and I don't think Colonel Andrews would risk having a man locked up unless he was pretty sure of his evidence."

He drained the tankard, and replaced it on the table, then nodded to the host.

"I'll slip round and help you get the pony ready," the host said, rising to his feet. But I intervened.

"Look here, constable," I said. "I am a stranger in these parts, but I want to study your English customs as much as I can. I've got a feeling that Sanderdale is a real typical English village, and, as you can no doubt hear, I am a man from the other side of the water. Now, if you don't mind, I'd be very glad to go along with you in the dogcart, and just lend a hand."

The constable didn't make any objections to my suggestion, and so, a quarter of an hour later, wrapped in my thickest coat, which did not do more than turn the edge of that keen, biting wind that blew across the fences, I was seated beside the burly figure of Constable Mills in that dogcart, and we were trundling along through the snow over the dark road.

We moved along in absolute silence, for the snow smothered the sound of the wheels and the beat of the pony's hoofs. I don't know how far we went, nor how long we took; but I do know that by the time the dogcart flashed in between the high gates and came to a halt in front of a little lighted lodge I was just beginning to realise what the North Pole people felt like when they reached their bivouacs.

A stout man wrapped in a muffler was standing in the door of the lodge, and as Constable Mills climbed stiffly down from the dogcart I followed his example.

"That you, constable?"

"Yes."

"Right you are! Come inside!"

I followed Mills into a warm, comfortable little sitting-room, and presently there entered the room a silver-haired, gentlemanly-looking old fellow, followed by a man who was obviously the butler. "Ah, there you are, constable!" the silver-haired man said. "Sorry to have brought you out on such a night like this, and such a long way, too, but I think it was worth while."

Mills touched his helmet.

"That's all right, colonel," he said. "Duty is duty."

Colonel Andrews turned and gave a hard glance at the rather woolly-looking individual standing beside the constable, i.e., myself. Mills nodded towards me.

"This is a gentleman who's stayin' at the Golden Dragon, colonel," he explained, "and he very kindly offered to come along with me and give me a hand."

That was one way of explaining my presence, and I bowed to the colonel.

"Hope I don't intrude, sir," I said.

"I was really interested in the constable's story, and I've never been in one of your real British snowstorms before—and I don't reckon it's an experience that I'll be hankerin' to repeat."

Colonel Andrews told me afterwards that my accent was so typically American that it sort of warmed the cockles of his heart when he heard it.

"That's quite all right," he said to me, holding out his hand. "Very good of you to come along with Mills. I'm afraid, however, that it'll not be a very pleasant experience for you."

"I've never known many pleasant experiences," I said, "and I've grown accustomed to the other kind."

By this time the lodgekeeper produced a great storm-lantern, and presently we were all trudging through two or three inches of snow down the avenue, and at last came to a line of low-roofed buildings, at which we halted.

The butler, who was moved ahead, unlocked the door of one and swung it inward, and I saw the interior of a rather comfortable-looking stable.

But I didn't have much time to study that interior. Something gave a snarl and came bounding out from the darkness, and I heard the thud of a bunched fist on hard flesh. The unfortunate butler took a header into the space behind the door, and the lantern described an arc as it fell from his hand.

I heard Constable Mills yell. Then next moment I found myself mixed up with a snarling, struggling figure, and we went down together in a heap on the trodden snow.

That fellow was a real rough-house expert. I gripped at one brawny arm, and was hanging on to it like grim death, while Mills, who had butted into the fight, was sprawling across the fellow's chest, holding him round the waist.

We were two to one, and yet it was touch and go with us, for he fought like a tiger, with a blind, reckless fury that gave him almost a madman's strength.

"Light the lantern! Quick! Quick!"

It was the colonel's voice that sounded, and he came tearing across the snow to fling himself on top of us, taking a hand in the fight.

I think it was more by luck than good management that the colonel selected Jem Spence's head for his landing blows. Anyhow, the old gentleman's body landed plumb and fair across the struggling man's shoulders, pinning him down and knocking the breath out of his tough carcass for a moment.

"Hold him now—hold him!" the colonel gasped.

I managed to rise to my knees, getting

another purchase on that thick arm. Mills was also on his feet, and together we lifted Spence.

"Throw him back into the stable till we get another light!" the colonel gasped.

"I think we handled Spence rough. The three of us lugged him back through the doorway of the stable and slung him bodily inside. We heard him land on a heap of straw, and we jumped back to the door.

A moment later a beam of light appeared, and the unfortunate butler, red with rage and a nasty bruise showing on his jaw, came staggering forward with the lantern lighted again.

"Where is he? Where is the skunk?" he gasped.

As the lantern was held aloft there was a rustle from straw, and out of a stall there came striding a ragged, burly shape. It was the first time I had had the chance to set eyes on James Spence, and, believe me, he did not present a very agreeable picture.

He was half dazed from his fall, and he rubbed his eyes with his grimy hands, staring at us in a savage, scowling way. He was a heavy-jowled, unshaven, grey-haired man of middle height, but of extraordinary breadth of shoulders.

He was dressed in a ragged tweed coat, and was wearing thick-studded farm boots. Round his neck was tied a red handkerchief, and his general appearance was very much against him, to say the least of it.

"I'll have the law on you for this!" he snarled, in a growling tone, as his eyes turned towards the group standing against the door. "I will make a charge against Colonel Andrews there. I call you to witness that he has locked me up in his stable and kept me here for the best part of three hours."

As soon as the fellow opened his lips I was struck by the tone of his voice, for it was certainly much more educated and assured than I would have expected to hear from such a ragged, vagrant-looking creature.

His head was back, and his eyes were hard as flints as he stared at us, and Colonel Andrews, obviously a peppery type of British officer, began to fume.

"Confound your impertinence, man!" he broke out. "You dare to—stand there and say I was not justified in locking you up here until I could send for a police-officer?"

"You have no right to lock me up," the sullen voice went on. "You are not a police-official, nor have you any authority. I am not one of your cavalry-men that you could fling into the guard-room whenever you like!"

"I really thought that the colonel was going to have an apoplectic fit, so red and wrathful did he become. But Constable Mills evidently knew his man, for he stepped across the stable and clapped his hand on the broad shoulder of the ragged fellow.

"That's all right, Jem!" he said. "I've heard you on that sort of talk before. Colonel Andrews has made a charge of stealing against you, and if you were locked up here he had every right to do so until I came along to take you in custody."

"That's what you say, Mr. Constable," the man returned. "But maybe you'll find you are mistaken."

He swung round and looked at the colonel.

"You brought a charge against me," he said. "How can you prove it? You say I have stolen your turkeys. Well, where are they? Justice is justice, and when you make a charge you've got to prove it."

The colonel turned to me as though seeking sympathy.

"Did you ever hear such a confidently impertinent blackguard?" he said. "He was caught practically red-handed in one of my big houses where I keep the turkeys. My under poultry-keeper found him there this evening and collared him."

"I don't say I wasn't in one of the houses," Jem Spence broke in. "I went in there because I saw it was going to snow and I needed a bit of shelter. But if Tom Clay tells the truth, he'll prove to you that the hen-house I was in was an empty one. There wasn't any of your darned fattened-up turkeys in it, nor anything else. If a man can't take shelter from a storm in an empty barn without being accused of being a thief, then it's time England changed its laws."

"Don't you pay no attention to him, sir," said Mills. "I'll just take him along to the police-station, and you can make your charge to-morrow morning. He can tell his story to the Justice of Peace and see how it goes down there."

At that moment there was a footfall outside the door, and there entered a thin, red-bearded man. James Spence's eyes lighted up as he caught sight of the new-comer, and he thrust out a long arm and pointed at him.

"You, Tom Clay," he said, "tell the truth! Which hen-house was I in when you collared me?"

I saw a very embarrassed look appear on the face of Clay, and he shuffled his feet a moment, then shot a rather sheepish look at his employer.

"It were the house beside the common," he said. "You knows well enough which house it were."

Jem Spence laughed. "There—what did I tell you?" he said. "I wasn't found in your grounds at all, colonel. That house stands just beside the walls. You only use it in the summer-time to shelter the geese that go out on the common. I wasn't anywhere near your turkeys; so how can you say I was stealing?"

I really believed the fellow would have bluffed his way out of the position, but at that moment Tom Clay slipped his hand into his pocket, and drew out a bundle of bronze feathers.

Perhaps readers are not aware that turkeys really hail from my country, and I recognised the long brown feathers at once.

"I found these just behind the hen-house where I caught Spence, sir," he said, turning to the colonel. "I have searched all round, but I can't find the bird it came from, but I wouldn't be surprised if I managed to pick it out in the morning."

The colonel almost gasped with relief. "A bundle of feathers," Spence said. "They prove nothing. How am I to know that Tom Clay isn't lying about it, or that some other person left them there? It's all circumstantial evidence, and you know it."

But his bluff failed, and a few moments later we formed a return party back to the lodge, Mills and his prisoner going first, whilst I brought up the rear with the colonel.

I think it must have been near midnight before we halted at the little police-station, and I saw Jem Spence locked up in the whitewashed cell.

I had had no opportunity of speaking to the man, and I realised that it would be rather risky for me to attempt to do so then. Yet it was my duty to get into touch with him and find out who he was—or, rather, if he was the man I had come in search of.

If he was that man, I felt that in some way or other I would have to help him.

It was rather a curious position for me to be in, and one that I didn't exactly like. I had been sent to England by Peter Keighley to take back with me to America James Spence, and it was not any fault of mine that I should get in touch with him just as he was being locked up on a mean charge.

I had not spoken to the man, as I said before, and so it was with considerable surprise that on the following morning I received a note, which was handed to me by a constable from the police-station.

I opened the envelope, and drew out the letter. It was written on a half-sheet, and the handwriting was by no means bad. The message ran:

"Dear Sir,—If you are the American gentleman named Nantucket, who left New York last week to come to England to search for a man named James Spence, I want to let you know that I am that man, and would be glad if you could come up to the police-station at once and see me.—Yours faithfully,

"JAMES SPENCE."

I folded the note, and, after a moment's thought, I nodded to the constable.

"All right!" I said. "You can tell the prisoner that I'll be there presently."

As soon as the constable had gone I took a turn up and down the room. So far as I was able to see on the previous evening, the man Spence had no idea who or what I was, and this letter coming as it did now was rather a bombshell to me.

I didn't know that anyone had been able to get into touch with James Spence, and, so far as I was aware, my mission to England was a complete secret.

"How the blazes did he get to know about me?" I thought.

There was no good cudgelling my brains on that point, however, and at last, much against my will be it said, I slipped into my heavy coat and cap and made my way up to the police-station, through the snow-covered streets.

Constable Mills had not yet come on duty, and it was a bluff, red-faced sergeant who met me as I entered the little building.

"I hope this fellow is not trying to take a rise out of you, sir," the sergeant said.

"That's all right, sergeant," I returned. "I think I know the sort of man he is. But, after all, he has asked to see me, and I think I might as well hear what he's got to say."

The sergeant shrugged his shoulders, then led the way down a passage, and unlocked the door of a cell. As soon as I entered Jem Spence, who had been seated on the edge of a cot, arose to his feet.

The sergeant was standing beside the half-opened door, and Spence made a gesture to him.

"That's all right, officer," he said. "You need not hang around and listen. This gentleman is my legal representative, and we don't want your long ears picking up points. Clear out!"

I heard the sergeant smother an oath as he stalked away.

As soon as he was gone Spence dropped on to his cot again, and stared up at me.

"Now, Mr. Nantucket," he said, "what are you going to do for me? I've landed in a hole, and you'll have to get me out of it!"

The absolute insolence of the fellow seemed to hold me mute for a moment, then I stepped forward, and stared into his face.

"You seem to be very sure of me," I said.

said. "How the blazes do you know my name's Nantucket, and how do you know I'm going to help you?"

He laughed.
"I had a cable from an old friend of mine—Peter Keighley," he said slowly. "It arrived yesterday morning, and it was in answer to one I sent him."

He thrust his hand into the pocket of his coat, and drew out a shabby pocket-book, from which he withdrew a newspaper cutting.

"I saw this advertisement in last Sunday's newspaper," he said, "and I guessed it was addressed to me."

The paragraph was under the "Missing Relatives" heading, and ran:

"Spence, James.—If this should meet the eye of James Spence, who was formerly in the Silver Willow Lake district, Oklahoma, 189—, he is asked to communicate with Box 40YZ, New York Record Building, New York."

"I always study the 'Missing Relatives' columns," the prisoner went on, in his deep tones, "and when I saw that I reckoned it was me. I managed to scrape up enough money to send a cable, and here's the reply I got."

Again he drew out something from his notebook. It was a long cablegram—Western Union. It was addressed to James Spence, c/o Post Office, Sanderdale, and ran as follows:

"Cable received. I am your old friend Peter Keighley, and I have sent Mr. Trouble Nantucket, Private Inquiry Agent, New York, across to England to locate you. He will probably arrive early next week, and he will let you know all news."

"PETER KEIGHLEY."

The thick-set man reached out and took the cable back from me, placing it in his pocket-book again.

"Does that explain the mystery, Mr. Nantucket?" he said, "or have you still doubts concerning me?"

I must admit that I didn't have a doubt left, but that didn't make my position any better.

"My old pal Keighley says that you've got news for me," Spence went on, "and I guess it must be good. The first thing you've got to do, though, is to help me get out of this scrape."

I leaned towards him.

"That may be a bigger job than I can manage, my friend," I returned. "From what I can hear about you, you've got a damned bad reputation in these parts."

He smiled, revealing a set of tobacco-stained teeth.

"Never said I hadn't," he returned. "But that cuts no ice so far as you are concerned. You've been paid to find me and take me back to New York, and I can tell you that if I'm brought before the magistrates here, I'll get at least six months'!"

His smile broadened.

"I don't suppose you'll like to wait six months before you earn that fat fee my friend Keighley is going to pay you, Mr. Nantucket!"

The fellow's impertinence absolutely got my goat, but what could I do? He was right in one respect. I had promised to bring him back to New York, and until I did that, I was under contract with Mr. Keighley.

If Spence's prophecy was true concerning his fate, then I'd have to kick my heels in England for six months, waiting for his release.

Somehow or other I didn't see myself doing that, and it seemed to me as though Jim Spence was fully aware of my outlook.

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"What do you expect me to do?" I asked.

He leaned closer to me.

"I want you to get rid of those darned turkeys," he said.

I looked at him in a horrified stare.

"Then you—you did steal them?" I gasped.

"Of course I did—six of them—and they're stowed away in a wicker basket with my name on it just beyond the bridge across the common. I left them there because I was going to take them up to the junction this morning and hand them over to a man who promised to buy them from me."

His face broadened into a smile again.

"They're the dandiest gobblers you ever set eyes on, Mr. Nantucket," he said. "There isn't a bird among 'em that weighs less than twenty pounds, and I could only get 'em two at a time, for I'd got to carry them some distance. But I meant to make up the round dozen before I was finished. Only, Tom Clay caught me as I was only half-way through. You can take it from me, Mr. Nantucket, there's over eighteen pounds' worth of real, good, meaty turkey in that wicker basket, and you've got to get rid of 'em for me."

"Me? Say, what do you think I am—a crook?"

"Not a bit of it! I think you're a wise man," Jim Spence said. "Nobody knows about that wicker basket, and I don't suppose Tom Clay will have found it yet. The canal lies on the other side of the common, and the bridge is on the left. You'll find that basket stowed away in among the willows, but although Tom Clay may not have found it yet, he's bound to do so before the day is over, and that's why I sent for you early this morning."

He rose to his feet and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"If you want me to get back to New York with you to meet my pal Keighley you've got to get busy and bury them darned turkeys, or get rid of 'em somehow or other. If you don't, it's Norwich Goal for me and six months' wait for you."

A jangle of keys sounded in the passage, and a moment later the sergeant appeared in the doorway. Jim Spence dropped back on his cot and nodded towards the official.

"All right, sergeant," he said. "I'm finished with this gent. I find he is not the man I thought him to be. He won't help me, and so I'm through with him."

I couldn't help admiring the rascal's cunning, for this speech of his served to remove any doubts that the sergeant may have had about me, and when we were out in the charge-room again together the red-faced official shook his head.

"I knew it would be no good trying to help that man, sir," he said. "He's a right down wrong 'un, and it was just like his impertinence to try and get a stranger to help him."

"What will happen to him?" I asked.

The sergeant was silent for a moment.

"Oh, we'll get him all right!" he returned.

"Of course, we have not much evidence against him now, for, unfortunately, he was found in a hen-house that really stands on common ground, and anybody is allowed to shelter there if they want to. But I've had a report this morning from Colonel Andrews to say that six of his finest turkeys have gone, and they have found feathers leading from the turkey-houses across to the wall immediately beside the hen-house. They are searching the common now, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if they didn't find the turkeys hidden away somewhere, for they're not the sort of things

you can hide away in your pocket, you know!"

"If they find the birds then you'll be able to convict him, I suppose?"

He nodded.

"Not much doubt about that, sir," he returned. "As a matter of fact, we heard he was carrying on an underhanded game with a dealer in another town. We were never able to catch them, but this time I think we'll be able to get a conviction all right."

I left him then and went quietly down the main street, and I guess I was just about as depressed as I could be.

It seemed to me pretty evident that if those turkeys were found in that wicker basket with Jim Spence's name on it, it was him for Norwich Goal for six months, just as he had said, and that meant that I would have to wait that time before I could carry out my contract.

It seemed to me a darned silly thing to let six dead turkeys make all that difference, and long before I had reached the inn I had made up my mind what to do.

I was a private detective, and a representative of the law to a certain extent, but I was not any stickler when it came to personal choice.

There were six dead turkeys hidden away in a bunch of willows that were bulking large in my schemes, and those six turkeys had to go.

Did you ever hear the proverb that runs: "Out of the frying-pan into the fire"? Well, that's just how it happened to me.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

In Which I Find I Have Been Bluffed and Arrested!

I'd like anyone who reads this account of a darned stupid affair to jest figure out my position first before he really blames me.

I don't think I'm a particularly brainless sort of dub. In any case, I've had a fair experience with men and things, but I was in a cleft stick. For although I could see that this man Jim Spence was a pretty tough sort of individual, I realised that most of his crimes, so far as I knew, were of the poaching variety.

Now, although here in England, with your game-laws, you consider a man who snares a rabbit is a darned out-and-out rascal, we have got different ideas in the States.

I wanted to get the job over and handle the fee to which I would be entitled, and I simply couldn't see myself sitting down on the doorstep of Norwich Prison for six months waiting until the door opened and allowed Jim Spence to appear again.

That is why, after I had returned to the inn and studied the problem over again, I made up my mind to do what Spence had asked me.

It was early in the afternoon when I set off from the Golden Dragon, and I had made a few inquiries and found out just how to get to the common.

I was wise enough to keep well away from Colonel Andrews' house, and I struck the common at a different point. There was a good four inches of snow all along the ground, and when I reached the bleak space I could see Rokeley Hall on the other side.

There were one or two roads running across the common, and I noticed that here and there on the white surface of snow were marks of heavy, hobnailed boots. They criss-crossed all over the place, and I figured it out that they were those belonging to the search-party.

I began to be afraid that perhaps Tom Clay or some of the searchers might have discovered the hiding-place where Spence had put his basket, and I quick-

ened by pace, finally reaching the bridge, and crossing the little canal.

"I hadn't met a single soul. But that was not to be wondered at, for I guess only a madman or a private detective on the job would have turned out on such a bleak, cold day as that one."

There were no traces of footprints on the bridge, and that fact brought me a little bit of comfort. The bridge was only a narrow foot one, and when I crossed it and reached the other side I found a path running up to the left.

I could only just distinguish it, owing to the fact that it lay a few inches below the surrounding ground, and again the snow lay without mark or trace of any kind.

"I struck up the path, followed it for about a hundred yards, then I found the

fully with snow, I struck off along the path again, finally crossing the railway and gaining a wide telegraph-poled road.

There had been plenty of traffic on this road, and I turned eastward, trudging along for the best part of a mile before I found myself close to the junction town of Sindcote.

I had made a complete half-circle in my wanderings, and it was getting on towards four o'clock when I reached the junction. I had a meal; then, after a chat with the girl who served me in the little restaurant, I went across to a stables, and managed to hire a pony and trap.

I had to make a rather heavy deposit on them, for, of course, they did not know me at the stables.

I must admit that I didn't have any

able American citizen, barging round an English country road in a governess-cart on a bitterly cold night in December with six darned stolen turkeys in a basket, and, what was worse still, I didn't have the remotest idea what I was going to do with them!

We reached the main road, and after following it for about half a mile I came to a side-turning which I thought looked promising. I turned the cart up it, and about four hundred yards along I came to a shed.

It was standing on the left of the railway lines, for I could see the low embankment and the rails behind it. I turned the pony through a pair of tumbledown gateposts, across a little yard, and pulled up beside the dark shed; then I slipped out of the cart and

"TROUBLE"
IN TROUBLE!
"In the name of
jumping
smoke!"
gasped
Nantucket.
"It's—it's
Blake!"



clump of willows, and after a look round I dived into them.

Right in the heart of the clump I found the basket. It was a square, heavy wicker affair, of the type that handies use. It was clamped down with a good steel hasp, and there was a heavy padlock on it.

I noticed that on the front of it were the initials J. S., and I realised that Spence was quite correct when he had said that the basket itself would give him away.

I caught hold of the rope-handle on one side and tried to lift the basket. I could only just manage to do so, and I am a pretty strong man. It struck me then that those six turkeys stowed away there were real solid ones.

Having located the basket, my next job was to get rid of it, and it struck me then that I had been rather a fool not to have brought some sort of vehicle with me.

However, I decided later that it was just as well that I hadn't hired any conveyance at Sanderdale, for it might have appeared suspicious, and presently, after I had drawn the basket into a deeper part of the willows, and covered it care-

settled plans. My one desire was to get those six turkeys out of the way, so that Jem Spence could work his bluff.

But I figured it out that the further I could get that basket away from the common the less chance would there be of it being discovered.

It was getting dusk when I left the junction, and I had to light the lamps of the little governess-cart. The pony was not at all a bad one, and she jogged along at a nice pace, and presently I found myself going across the snow towards the clump of willows.

I halted a little above the clump, then I struck through it, and headed for the place where I had left the basket. I found it had not been disturbed, and after a pretty tough struggle I managed to drag it across the snow and hoist it into the governess-cart.

By the time I had done that I was pretty well exhausted, and there wasn't much room left in the little vehicle for me. But I managed to squeeze in, then I took up the reins again, and began to head back for the road.

Of course, I am free to admit that there was a certain amount of humour in that situation. There was I, a respect-

examined the place, finally discovering a huge door, which I opened and thrust forward.

I had a pocket-torch with me, and I flashed it round the interior. The shed had evidently been used at one time for storing railway material, for there were several rusty fishplates and sleepers in one corner.

Otherwise the shed was empty, and it seemed to me that I had found an ideal place for hiding the colonel's dead Christmas fare.

My next job was to get the basket off the governess-cart, and this I managed after a considerable struggle. I dragged the creaking thing across the space and in through the doorway, then I pulled it up into one corner, and, finding a heap of sacks, I began to throw them over the basket.

I had only just completed that task when I heard a crack from overhead. I looked up, to see a black gap above me, obviously a loft. Then suddenly a pair of legs shot through the gap, and a figure came dropping into the barn.

I caught sight of it as it fell, for I had wedged my electric-torch in a corner
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in order to light up my operations. But as the figure dropped I snatched at the torch and extinguished it.

I heard a couple of quick footfalls, then someone barged into me, and we went backwards together over the top of the basket, fighting like wild-cats.

I didn't know who the fellow was, and didn't care much. I knew that I had been found in a rather awkward position, and I meant to get out of it if I could.

But the pressure of the arms round my body was just like a steel band, and although I did my best to break the hold I couldn't manage it.

A cold shiver ran down my back as I realised the d-rned stupidity of my position. I would be caught red-handed with those darned turkeys in a basket, and not all the explaining in the world would help me to get clear of being accused as an accomplice of James Spence.

That thought sort of drove me mad, and with a last final effort I managed to swing my opponent over on to his back, and I flung myself down on him, pressing my head into his chest.

I admit that it was sheer dismay that made me fight as I did, and that last effort of mine was a sort of superhuman thing that comes to a man now and again.

I had wedged my adversary in a rather awkward position for him, for his back was across the rusted fishplate, and the cold iron was pressing against the muscles of his shoulder.

It was a big advantage for me, although I didn't know it at the time. But at last another effort on my part brought a half-gasp from his lips, and made his arms loosen slightly.

I felt the pressure yield, and made another swift struggle. His arms fell away, and I scrambled first to my knees, then to my feet. As I moved off he made a grab, and his hand caught my ankle. But I threw myself forward, dragging him a pace or two along the floor, then the next moment I was free, and was making a bee-line for that open door.

But while I was still a couple of paces from it a shrill whistle sounded from behind me, and I heard the trampling of feet outside.

I couldn't stop myself, for I was sprinting for all I was worth. The result was that the next moment I saw a bullseye-lantern flash into the doorway, and I ran full tilt into a couple of uniformed figures.

Their big, beefy hands fell on me, and one of them, thrusting his foot between my legs, tripped me up, so that I fell on my face between them.

I felt my arms wrenched behind me, and the next thing I knew was the cold touch of handcuffs on my wrists.

"Got him, Bill?"

"Yes, Joe."

I don't think that those county police of yours ever really get excited, for the tones of those two were quite phlegmatic, and as I lay with my mouth in the mud and the snow, one of them reached for my shoulder, and yanked me to my feet. Then the bullseye was flashed on me, and behind it I saw the two uniformed figures.

A moment later a third figure appeared in the doorway. It was my late adversary. He was dressed in a light overcoat, and had a cap drawn well down over its forehead.

He came towards the door, and glanced at me.

"We've got him all right, sir!" one of the policeman said. "But he's a tough 'un, he is!"

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One of the fellows had me by the arm, and he pulled me back a pace, then the other policeman and the man in the light coat turned and disappeared into the barn again, and I heard them going up towards the corner.

The man who was holding me had the bullseye in his other hand, and he flashed it on me, and I saw his ruddy face widen into a grin.

"I must say you're a cool hand," he said to me. "But you made one little mistake. Never walk through untrodden snow, for you can always be traced if you do!"

"Thanks very much, my friend!" I returned. "That's darned sound advice, anyhow, and I'll remember it in future. Meanwhile, perhaps, you'll tell me what I've been arrested for?"

He sniggered.

"You are a cool 'un!" he said again. "What you've been arrested for—eh? Mebbe you're going to tell us you came along here just for a bit o' fun, that you carried that whacking great basket up to this shed for a little wager—eh?"

"No, I don't say that," I commented. "I wanted to get rid of that basket, to hide it and its contents. I never wanted to see it again! That darned basket has been haunting me all day!"

His broad face widened, and he looked at me through the yellow gleam of the lantern.

"You're a Yankee, aren't you?" he said. "Well, I've heard that fellows over your side of the water are just about the coolest crooks that ever stepped, and blow me if I don't believe it! So the basket haunted you, did it? Ha, ha, ha! It'll haunt you more yet, believe me!"

I heard a scraping sound, and presently the policeman and the man in the grey coat appeared in the doorway, dragging the wicker basket behind them.

"Turn your light this way, Bill!" the constable said, and my custodian turned the bullseye on to the lid.

The man in the grey coat knelt in front of the basket and tackled the padlock. In a few moments it was opened, and I heard the lid creak as it was lifted. The man by my side directed his lantern on the inside of the basket.

There was a piece of green baize over the top of it, and the other policeman flung the baize back. I craned my head forward to have a look, expecting to see the feathered bodies of those darned dead turkeys.

To my utter horror I discovered that the basket was filled with shimmering silver, chased cups, and plate, tall candlesticks, and solid flat cigarette-cases.

"That's the stuff all right!" said the constable. "Here's Sir William's crest on it."

He picked up one of the cigarette-boxes, and held it up to the light, and I saw quite clearly that there was a crest on the centre of the smoothly-polished lid.

"Yes, I think it's all here."

It was the first time that the man in the grey coat had spoken, and I straightened up sharply, and looked at him. The voice was familiar, very familiar, and as he turned his head towards me I recognised him.

"In the name of jumpin' smoke!" I gasped. "It—it's Blake!"

He leaped away from the basket, stared at me, then across his face there swept a look of absolute amazement, and he barged forward, gripping me by the shoulder.

"Nantucket!" he said.

I groaned.

"Yes, Blake, Nantucket—Mr. Trouble Nantucket! And, by James, it strikes

me that this is about the top-notch in the way of trouble that I've ever found myself in!"

The two policemen had drawn away from me, and Sexton Blake and I stood there, looking into each other's eyes for a long moment, then suddenly his head went back, and he started to laugh, a laugh that I couldn't help joining in.

I don't know what those two policemen must have thought. For a moment or two we stood there in the slush and snow, his hands on my shoulders, my two hands handcuffed behind my back, and we simply shook with helpless laughter.

Finally, when he had got over his burst of mirth, the great man from Baker Street stepped back a pace and nodded to one of the constables.

"I—I think you can take these handcuffs off, Martin," he said. For, although I am absolutely at a loss to find out how he's going to explain his position, he is certainly no burglar or burglar's associate."

The burly figure of the constable moved forward, and I heard him fumbling with the handcuffs. Then presently my wrists were free. But I didn't feel at all free so far as my own personal position was concerned. I simply stood stock-still, my hands in my pockets, and stared at Blake.

"Say, Blake," I said. "What is it? What does this darned thing mean? What have I been doing?"

My old friend shrugged his shoulders.

"That's not for me to say, Nantucket," he commented drily. "All I know is

that these two policemen and I have been lying in wait for you the whole of this afternoon. We were looking for the man who had hidden away Sir William Penter's plate in a basket in the willows beside the bridge. Sir William had his house burgled last night, a most daring and impertinent theft it was, for it must have taken place about seven o'clock, while the family was at dinner. The whole contents of Sir William's banqueting-hall were removed, and the theft was not discovered until ten o'clock at night. It just happens that I was staying the week-end with Sir William Penter, and I took up the task of finding out what had happened to his stuff.

"We traced the movements of the fellow to a certain extent. He had used a small handbarrow, and one or two people had met him moving down the lane with a basket on the barrow. So that gave us something to work on, which we followed up. We found the basket this morning stowed away in the willows, and I arranged for a watch to be made ever since. You were seen to approach across the bridge, and you removed the basket from one hiding-place to another. Then you went off, and returned later in the afternoon with the governess-cart, and these two constables and I followed you on bicycles."

"Bicycles!" I broke out. For I just remembered that, although there had been no sign of footprints anywhere round the clump of willows, there had been thin lines not far away. But these marks had run right off to the west, in the opposite direction to that which I had come.

The man from Baker Street nodded.

"It's very difficult to move across snow without being observed, Nantucket," he said. "So I used a bicycle, and I never dismounted from it until I was in among the willows, where, of course, the snow only lay in patches."

He regarded me for a moment, then smiled again.

"I wanted to collar the thief, you see," he went on, "and I knew he would return for his swag as soon as he got a

chance. But, by James, I never dreamed it was you; and even now I can't understand how the blazes you got mixed up in this, because I absolutely refuse to believe that you've turned housebreaker at your time of life!"

I groaned.

"Blake," I said, "I'm a lamb. I have been double-crossed, and, by jinks, it seems to me that your duty is to jest lock me up, not in a police-station, but in a darned looney-house. I'm not fit to be allowed to move round this world taking charge of myself."

I didn't mean my remarks to be humorous, but it seemed as though they struck my listeners that way, for Blake and the two policemen went off into another roar of laughter.

Maybe I did cut a rather lugubrious figure standing there, for presently Blake slipped his arm under mine.

"There's a lot of explaining to be done, Nantucket," he said. "But I think you'll be able to manage it. And now, if you don't mind, we'll load that basket on to the governess-cart, and you and I will drive back to Sir William's place. It's only about four miles from here, and you can tell me what happened when we get there."

The lid of the basket was closed, and the two constables yanked it across the space and into the cart, then, while I got in beside it and drove the pony, Sexton Blake appeared round the edge of the barn on a bicycle, and he rode along behind me, chatting as he went.

The two policemen accompanied us until we reached a bend in the road, then, after a word or two with Blake, set off up the high-road, while we turned into a narrower track, and presently we reached the high wall of a park, and found the gateway through which I turned the tired little pony along an avenue of trees, to finally halt outside a well-lighted mansion.

It seemed as though our arrival had been expected, for the door of the mansion was opened, and a great flood of yellow light poured out.

I saw in the porch five or six figures, and as the man from Baker Street rode up to the porch and slipped from the saddle, I heard him say something; and from the lighted doorway there came a shout, while down the steps ran a slim youngster who crossed to the governess-cart and absolutely fell on me.

"Nantucket! Nantucket! What the blazes have you been getting up to now?"

It was Sexton Blake's assistant, Tinker, and the darned little strip of a youth was absolutely helpless with laughter. He just hung on to me, laughing fit to bust, and I had to stand still and wait until his mirth was over.

"A burglar—a housebreaker! If you aren't the blinkin' limit, Nantucket! What the dickens will you be getting up to next?"

I put my hand on his shoulder and shook him.

"Don't you start prophesying for me, Tinker," I said. "For it's at the back of my mind that one of these odd days I'll be takin' somebody's place who's goin' to be hung!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Few Home-Truths—Blake Takes Up the Case.

TO put the whole matter in a nutshell, Nantucket," Blake said to me, "I don't quite see how we're going to formulate a charge against this fellow Spence. In any case, I have chatted the matter over with Sir William, and he agrees to leave it entirely in my hands."

It was the morning following my experience with the wicker basket, and Blake had come into my bed-room and was sitting on the bed chatting with me.

To me it appeared that Jem Spence had deliberately tried to work me into a pretty rotten hole. He had left his swag behind him in that basket, and the turkey business had probably been a fake—a sort of alibi which he had worked up to save himself in the event of being collared.

It was a very clever alibi, too, for if Colonel Andrews had been able to prove that Jem Spence was at his house stealing turkeys, it would be obvious that Spence couldn't have been the man who was responsible for the robbery at Sir William Penter's place.

It appeared that this particular set of silver-plate was of extraordinary value, not only from the actual metal, but also from its historical connections.

It was part of a big collection that had been made by a wealthy American in Paris, and Sir William had gone across to Paris specially to bid for the articles, and had only gained possession of it after a very keen tussle with a famous London art dealer who was representing another countryman of mine.

"The plate itself," Blake went on, "is worth about a thousand pounds, but Sir William paid the best part of ten thousand for it, and he thinks he got it cheap."

"Well, I'm glad he's got it back again," was my comment.

"He also is very much relieved," the man from Baker Street returned. "Because his fear was that the thief would melt it down and sell it for what it would fetch."

He looked at me for a moment and smiled.

"You're living up to your name, old chap," he said. "But this particular venture is the high-water mark, I should imagine. I can't see how Spence came to fit things in so well so that he was able to make use of you, Nantucket."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Oh, I can see it all right!" I returned. "After he got that message from my employer, Peter Keighley, it was very easy for him to reckon out the time that I would arrive at Sanderdale. In any case, I sent a telegram to the Golden Dragon from Liverpool, and although I haven't made any inquiries, I wouldn't be at all surprised to discover that Spence had heard of that wire and knew I was on the way to Sanderdale."

"You came over on the Mauretania, didn't you?" Blake asked.

"Yes," I answered.

He rubbed his chin for a moment.

"That's rather curious," he said, "for I remember that last night Sir William was telling me that he had received a wireless message from the Mauretania. It appears that there is an agent on board the vessel. He wanted to know if Sir William would enter into negotiations for the purchase of this very plate that was stolen."

I sat up with a jerk. I was still hazy, but the glimmerings of the truth came to me now.

"An agent!" I said. "Was his name Jarsenn?"

"That was the very name," said Blake.

"Do you know the man?"

I clenched my fist.

"Oh, yes, I know him all right!" I said. "He tried to pal up with me on the voyage, and I don't know what his game was, but he didn't get any change out of me."

"Well, look here, old chap," my companion said, "as soon as you're dressed, we'll slip down and have a word with Sir William; then, if you like, you and I will go back to Sanderdale, and we'll see

what's happened to Spence. I'm rather inclined to think that the charge made against him will have failed, and he's probably released by now. In fact, I could get on the telephone while you're dressing, and find out how things stand."

He left me then, and I had a tub and slipped into my clothes, then went down to the breakfast-room, where I found Sir William Penter and Tinker chatting together. Blake joined us a moment later, and his first remark to me was a confirmation of his ideas.

"Spence has been released," he said. "Colonel Andrews, after consultation with the authorities, decided that there wasn't sufficient evidence against the fellow, and he has gone back to his cottage. I found out where he lives. He has a little place on the bank of the canal, and presently Nantucket, you and I, will stroll along there and have a word with him."

Sir William Penter, a thin-faced, studious-looking man, gave me a smile and a nod.

"You've had a most unfortunate experience, Mr. Nantucket," he said. "But I hope you won't look upon it as a usual occurrence. In any case, I am very much indebted to you, for had it not been for your intervention, I might never have discovered who it was that had broken into my house."

"It's certainly a most awkward position that you put yourself into, Mr. Nantucket," the baronet continued. "Still, you were really the victim of a very plausible rascal and circumstances."

"There are one or two points about this that I can't understand, Sir William," Blake put in. "Nantucket tells me that he knows this man Jarsenn who sent you the wireless message from the Atlantic?"

Sir William turned to me.

"Then you came across on the Mauretania, Mr. Nantucket?" he asked, and I nodded.

"Yes, and I met Jarsenn once or twice. In fact, we had a rather curious experience," I said.

I gave the baronet an account of what had happened in my state-room, and he smiled.

"Can't make head or tail of it," he said. "I know there have been one or two offers made to me from America for this collection of plate. You see, the collection originally belonged to an American, and the history attached to it is that the stuff was once used in Washington away back in the first days of the Republic. In fact, it was Lafayette who brought this collection back with him to France when he returned."

He looked at me and smiled.

"Your American collectors are very enthusiastic, Mr. Nantucket," he said, "and I am afraid that they are sometimes not quite—well, shall we say respectful, of the manner in which they obtain possession of their treasures?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"That's quite true, sir," I returned. "I am an American, but I do admit that when we set our minds on gettin' a thing we move heaven and earth to accomplish that object."

Blake leaned forward.

"Even to getting someone to steal it—oh, Nantucket?"

I shot him a glance across the table. I knew what he was driving at. It was the same suspicion that had come into my mind.

"Yes," I returned; "even to gettin' someone to pinch it."

Sir William left the table a few moments later, and returned with the wireless message, which he handed to me to read. It was to the effect that

Jarsenn, the Swede, would be in London on the day following the Mauretania's arrival in Liverpool, and he begged for an interview with Sir William Penner, mentioning the collection of silver.

"You haven't replied to this, Sir William?" I asked.

The baronet shook his head. "What was the use?" he said. "I had no intention of selling the stuff."

I folded the cable up.

"Do you mind if I retain possession of this for a few days?" I asked. "I want to go to London, and have a word with this man Sven Jarsenn. He might be able to let me have a bit more information now."

We finished breakfast, then Blake and I and Tinker got into the little governess-cart, which had been stabled by the baronet for the night, and we started off back to the junction town, where I handed the pony and cart back to its owner.

Our next task was to get a conveyance to take us to Sanderdale, and we succeeded in doing this, and pulled up at the Golden Dragon, where I found the stout host very much worried about my absence.

I tackled him on the matter of the telegram at once; and, after questioning the maidservant, he discovered that James Spence had been in the bar-parlour of the inn when the wire had been received there in the afternoon; and, as the girl had placed the message on the counter while she had been attending to another customer, there was little doubt but what Spence had been able to read it.

"There are one or two points that I can't make out yet, Nantucket," Blake said, as we left the hotel again, and went on through the village. "But one thing I am convinced about, and that is that Spence was working to order when he carried out his scheme last night. He must have entered Sir William's house somewhere about seven or half-past, just as we were at dinner. It was easy for him to run the hand-barrow down to the willows, and leave the basket there; and, of course, it left no trace, for it hadn't commenced to snow then, you remember."

He was silent for a moment, then went on:

"My opinion is, that as soon as he had hidden the basket and got rid of the handcart, he struck across the bridge and over the common, and started his operations on Colonel Andrews' turkeys. And, what is more, I fancy he deliberately hung about that hen-house, and allowed Clay to catch him, for a wily rogue such as he is would never have been so careless under ordinary circumstances."

"But, say, Blake," I put in. "If Spence was working on this game expecting me to arrive, he must have been prompted from the other side."

Blake looked at me and laughed.

"That's exactly what I think, Nantucket," he said. "With all due deference to this story that Mr. Keighley spun to you, I don't think it will wash. Did you go to the trouble of discovering whether Mr. Keighley was all he said he was?"

Now, I hadn't gone to a deal of trouble concerning the man; but, of course, I had examined the various letters he had handed to me from the oil corporation.

I explained this to my friend, and the man from Baker Street shook his head.

"We'll soon find out the truth," he said. "But, frankly, I don't think Keighley is all he says he is. He may, of course, be a rich man; that I wouldn't doubt in the least. But if he really

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wanted to get in touch with James Spence, he needn't have gone to the trouble of sending you across here. He knew the name of the village the fellow had gone to, evidently, and, well, as you know, a simple advertisement in an English paper managed to get him into touch with Spence."

His eyes twinkled for a moment.

"In fact, I'm going to test Spence," he said. "His story about the cable from Peter Keighley is correct enough in its way, no doubt; but I want to find out just how that cable was arranged."

We were outside the village now, and presently we struck a path that led to the canal, and halted at last beside a rather tumbledown cottage. I led the way up the path, and, instead of knocking on the door, I pressed down the latch and entered.

We found ourselves in the little sitting-room, and the burly figure of Spence leaped to its feet as we entered. The fellow had been sitting at the table, and there were a few papers in front of him.

As soon as he set eyes on us he gathered the heap of papers in his hands, crumpled them up, and thrust them into the fire.

Blake made a leap forward, trying to prevent that move. I saw the flames lick up round the papers, then Spence whipped round, with a snarling oath, and aimed a wild swing at the man from Baker Street.

It was a vicious blow, and nine out of ten men would have been flattened by it. I never knew anyone so quick on his feet as Blake. Even as the fist swung at him he side-stepped, and the blow swung harmlessly over his head. The next moment Blake had wheeled, and a straight left shot out, catching Spence full on the throat.

The rascal went reeling against the wall; then, recovering himself, he sprang at Blake again, and in a moment they were at it hammer-and-tongs.

It was just my luck that I should have halted in the doorway, and that the table was between myself and the row. Before I could get round to them the man from Baker Street had finished the fight.

A smashing punch to the jaw, and another half-armed jab which landed full on Spence's chest, knocked the winded ruffian flat on his back in front of the fire.

"All right, Nantucket," Blake said. "I don't think you will have to interfere this time."

He had dropped his fists and stepped back a pace, nodding to Spence.

"Get up!" he said, in a stern voice.

Spence scrambled slowly to his feet, scowling at us. He dropped into a chair beside the table, then, leaning on his hands, he nodded to me.

"What is the game? What do you want with me, Mr. Nantucket?" he snarled.

I didn't lose my temper. I realised the manner of man I had to deal with, and I was not going to get thirty any more. He had bluffed me—in fact, had double-crossed me to a certain extent—and I was out now to get some of my own back, if I could.

"I've brought this friend of mine to see you," I said, turning and indicating Blake. "Perhaps you've heard of him? His name is Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street, London."

In my few dealings with Blake I have discovered that nearly every criminal in England knows and dreads that name. I was therefore rather anxious to see how it would impress Jem Spence; but

I must admit that, although the hard eyes gave Blake a very searching glance, there was no indication of fear on the heavy face.

"I don't know that I want to meet Mr. Blake," the sturdy rascal returned. "And I can't understand why he should have tried to interfere with me just now, or to visit the humble cottage of a village bumpkin."

Blake came up to the table, and looked at the speaker.

"There's not much of the village bumpkin about you, Spence," he said slowly. "These papers would have been very important, for you would not have fought so hard to prevent me from getting them. You've worked a very clever trick here with your trickery, and you came very near to carrying it off. I suppose you know now, however, that the swag has gone back to where you got it from?"

I saw Spence's eyes scowl, but that was the only sign of emotion that crossed his face.

"I don't understand what you're talking about, Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street," he said. "I know that Colonel Andrews has decided not to prosecute me, because he couldn't find any evidence against me in the way of—of turkeys."

He turned and glanced across at me, and for two pias I could have let him have one straight from the shoulder, for the skunk was actually sneering at me.

"You crook!" I broke out. "Don't you try and carry this bluff off any further! You know darned well what you very nearly landed me in for! What was the game—eh? Come on, out with it!"

Jem Spence seated himself on the edge of the table, and folded his arms across his broad chest.

"I don't follow your Americanisms, Mr. Nantucket," he said. "As you know, it's a good many years since I have been over there. Anyhow, if you'll allow me to say a few words, you'll perhaps understand my position. I gather that you came across from New York in response to the request of an old partner of mine, Peter Keighley, who commissioned you to find me, in order that he might get my permission to sell certain properties that we own together in Oklahoma. Is that correct?"

"That's the story Keighley told me," I said. "How far it's right or wrong I don't know."

I saw his lips twitch.

"Well, in any case, you were coming here, and you were going to take me back with you to New York," he went on. "We would have been very interesting travelling companions, no doubt, but I don't suppose you're anxious to carry out that duty now, Mr. Nantucket?"

Sexton Blake intervened.

"And I don't suppose you are anxious to go with Mr. Nantucket now, Spence?" he said. "For, unfortunately, you've lost a certain wicker-basket which, in all probability, would have formed part of your travelling kit."

It was a very shrewd blow on the part of Blake, and for the first time I saw a dull red glow of anger appear on the rugged face of the villager; then he threw back his head and laughed.

"Quite correct, Mr. Blake!" he agreed. "I have seen quite enough of Mr. Nantucket, and I don't think he's the sort of man I'd like to travel with. He—he makes mistakes."

"You—you darned skunk! What do you mean by that?" I spluttered. "Make mistakes, do I? I reckon the only mistake I made was in believing that low-down blighter, Peter Keighley. There's

nothing to his yarn, and the whole affair was a bluff from start to finish!"

"I think it's very wrong of you to talk about an employer like that, Mr. Nantucket," said the thick-necked rascal. "In any case, you and I agree to differ, and—well, so far as I am concerned, there's the door, and good-day to you, gentlemen!"

"Oh, no, you don't!" I broke out. "You don't get away so easy as all that! You're a housebreaker and a robber! You stole that silver-plate, and stowed it away in the wicker-basket, hiding that basket in the willows, and expecting me to carry it off for you. Then, when you had proved your alibi on the turkey stunt and had got away, you figured it out that you'd hear where I'd hidden that basket, and you'd have got away with the swag."

"You are mixing me up with someone else, Mr. Nantucket," drawled Jem Spence. "I was challenged with stealing turkeys, and, between ourselves, I admit that offence. I asked you to get a cer-

for a moment, and I saw him drawing out a deep basket exactly similar to the one I had found in the willows.

The lid creaked, and he threw it back, then moved a pace or two away and pointed into it.

"There you are, gentlemen!" he said. "There are the six turkeys. Of course, if you like, you can go to. Colonel Andrews and peach on me; but that won't help you any when it comes to the silver-plate."

We could see the dull bronze feathers of the red birds quite clearly from where we stood, and I went up to the basket and examined it for a moment, then turned away.

The man from Baker Street gave Spence a steady, piercing glance, then shrugged his shoulders.

"A very clever piece of fooling, Spence," he said. "But you needn't think that we will fall into the trap. Whether you stole those six turkeys or not doesn't make much difference, although they may prove a very effective

would have sold, we—I mean, the stuff would have been bought years ago."

"Whether Sir William will sell or not is his own business," Blake returned. "In any case, it's just as well for you to know that there's a rival in the field. That's all I've got to say to you for the moment, Jem Spence."

The burly figure started forward as though to speak to us again, but Blake was already in the passage, and I followed him. We passed out of the sitting-room and into the quiet road again, and turned towards the village.

It was not until we were well inside the main street that Blake opened his lips, then turned to me, and gave me a curious smile.

"This is getting quite interesting, Nantucket," he said. "But I don't think we need stay in this part of the world any longer. I'm going to get back to London, and I think you might as well come with me. I want to find out why London is the best place for us to stage the next scene in this little play."

TINKER ARRIVES!

"By Jove!" cried Tinker. "So you were here, then! Where the blazes did you get to?" Nantucket glared!



tain basket containing dead turkeys out of the way. If by some chance you've got a hold of the wrong basket, that's got nothing to do with me."

I saw his move at once, and I had to admit the darned cunning of the rascal. There was little doubt but what he had two baskets, and I felt sure that the second one was stowed away safely somewhere.

Indeed, before I could open my lips, the fellow seemed to make up his mind, for he straightened up, and nodded to Blake.

"If you don't believe my word about the baskets, gentlemen," he said, "I can soon prove to you that I'm right. For, as you know, I was released from the police-station this morning, and as soon as I got out I made my way to where I had hidden those turkeys, just to see if Mr. Nantucket had done what I asked him. Come this way!"

In another moment we followed him to the door, and along a passage into the little scullery. He lighted a lamp, and, going into a cupboard, he fumbled about

alibi. It's the other job that we are interested in, and you can't bluff us out of it."

We turned and walked towards the passage again, and in the doorway Blake halted.

"I don't suppose you are finished yet," he went on, speaking to the thick-set man. "But I have an item of news for you that may be interesting. Have you ever heard of a man named Sven Jarsenn? If so, I can tell you that he's on the job, too."

The mention of the Swede's name had a curious effect on Spence, for he went fliv, and I saw him put his hand against the wall to steady himself.

"Sven Jarsenn!" he said. "Is—is he in this country?"

"Yes," said Blake. "And he's also out to buy Sir William Penter's silver-plate."

"But they told me that Sir William wouldn't sell—that no money will tempt him to sell!" Spence's harsh voice boomed. "If he had been wise, and

"What are you going to do, Blake?" I asked.

He laughed.

"I'll do what you Americans term 'call a bluff,' he commented. "And perhaps both Jarsenn and Spence may rise to it."

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

I Have a Word with Jarsenn—And Get to the Bottom of the Scheme.

WE left the village early in the afternoon, and reached London somewhere about five o'clock.

Tinker had gone up to Sir William Penter's place to collect the baggage, and he told us that Sir William had finally decided to take his valuable collection of silver up to London, and place it in a safe deposit.

"That's what I've been asking him to do for some time," Blake said to me. "I didn't mention it to you before, Nantucket. But Sir William told me that during the past six months he has been

pestered to death with all sorts of offers for the plate, and there has already been one other attempt to steal it."

The man from Baker Street gave me a quizzical glance.

"The strangest part about it is that they are all Americans who wanted to buy the plate."

We were in his chambers in Baker Street now, and he gave me a little sheaf of letters to glance at.

"Curiously enough, my week-end visit to Sir William was really in connection with the plate," he went on; "for, as the top letter there will show, the people who want to purchase it were even beginning to threaten him with personal violence if he did not agree to their request."

The letter was written on ordinary cream-laid, and had no address. The writing was obviously faked. It was a threatening sort of epistle, the kind of stuff I'd read often enough:

"I warn you that your obstinacy in this matter will only recoil on your own head. If you take the advice of a friend, you will sell the silver-plate, which, after all, can only interest you as a collector."

"What do you make of it?" I asked. "I haven't had much time to study it," Blake returned. "But now that Sir William is going to bring the plate to London I think I will meet him and examine the stuff."

He smiled at me. "Until yesterday," he went on, "I was of the opinion that it was some keen American collector who wanted to buy, but that interview we had with your friend Spence—"

"Say, Blake, he's no friend of mine," I broke in, "and I wish you'd cut that out. I've got a big grudge against that fellow, and, by ginger, I'm going to soak him one before I've finished!"

"Well, in any case, it was Spence's attitude this morning that had turned my ideas into another channel. I don't say that Spence is a professional crook; but he has the makings of one, and I am inclined to think that years ago, when he was in America, he was probably associated with some gang, and they haven't forgotten him."

"But I know that Spence has been back in England for a number of years," I put in.

"That may be so," Blake returned. "But that doesn't prove that he's not a crook. What I'm going to do now is to try and find out a few more particulars concerning this man Peter Keighley who employed you, Nantucket. I suppose you didn't think it worth while to inquire if he was straight?"

I shook my head.

"No, I didn't," I admitted. "He produced a lot of papers, which I looked at, and he appeared to be quite straight. Apart from that, his story didn't seem to have any crook work behind it. He simply wanted me to find an old friend of his, to whom he wanted to do a good turn. I had no reason to think that there was anything shady behind his request."

Blake leaned back in his chair, puffing at his briar for a moment, then he nodded his head.

"I don't blame you in the least, old chap," he said; "and I think if Keighley had come with the same yarn to me I'd probably have fallen into the trap. Yet, nevertheless, in the light of what has happened, I am personally convinced that your employer, Peter Keighley, the supposed oil millionaire, was nothing more or less than a crook. He had arranged everything before he went to you, and Spence probably was warned in good

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time about your taking up the task and coming here."

He was silent for a moment.

"You see, the point is this, Nantucket," he went on. "For some reason or other this man Keighley wants that collection of plate brought across to America. I think myself he was prepared to buy it if Sir William would have sold, and I should imagine that some of the offers that Sir William received have come from Keighley and his associates. But there seems also to be another purchaser in the field represented by Jarsenn. In all probabilities, Keighley, afraid that Jarsenn might manage to buy the stuff, decided that Spence should steal it, as a last resource."

"You may be right, Blake," I returned. "But I don't quite see where I figure in the transaction, anyhow."

"I admit that that part of the scheme is perhaps the most interesting of all," Blake returned, glancing at me, "and proves that Keighley is a bold, level-headed sort of rogue. You see, Nantucket, you are pretty well known, not only in this country, but also in America. You must admit yourself that had anyone else been found under the circumstances that you were found in, with that basket filled with silver-plate, he would not have got away so easily."

I nodded my head.

"Yes," I said, "I agree with all that."

"Well," Blake went on, "that is exactly what Keighley was working on. Had it not been that Tinker and I were staying at Sir William's place, I doubt very much if they would have been able to trace the basket and its contents so quickly. Spence's trick in getting locked up and persuading you to go and rescue the basket was probably very carefully thought out. The basket was padlocked, and I don't suppose for a moment you would have troubled to open it, as it was someone else's property. In any case, let us suppose for a moment that Tinker and myself had not traced the whereabouts of the basket. What would have happened then?"

I looked at him and smiled.

"I guess I see your point," I said. "That basket would have been hidden away, and when Spence had been released he would have claimed it again."

"Quite so!" said Blake. "Then I should think his plan was to keep in touch with you, and would have gone back to America with you. Spence, although he is not known in this country as a crook, would probably be spotted as soon as you landed in New York. But, travelling with you, he would have been able to get through the dock police without any trouble. He would also have brought his luggage along with him, and I should be inclined to think that that basket would have travelled with him. My meaning is that you were a very essential part in the plan, for it would have been your presence that would have saved Spence from being bowled over."

I looked at Blake. I felt that he was right, and it dawned on me then just what sort of dub I had been.

"I get you," I said to him. "They were figurin' out on havin' me around when trouble took place. And, by ginger, they were right, too!"

Blake laughed.

"Well, your name is Trouble Nantucket, isn't it?" he said.

I felt pretty sore over the affair, needless to say, for, as far as I could see, that skunk Keighley had been just making use of me, working on my feelings with his sympathetic old partner scheme, and all the time boosting up the darndest trick that ever a man played on another.

I'd have looked pretty well landing in New York with a heap of stolen property in my kit along with Spence. I dare say

I'd have been able to clear myself of any charge that had been brought against me, but I reckon that the police in the States would have had a mighty good laugh at Nantucket. And if there is one thing that gets my goat quicker'n anything else it is for someone to have the laugh over me.

Blake and Tinker left Baker Street about five o'clock, and after having another cigar I came to a sudden decision. I felt that Blake and his young assistant might write me down as a darned fool, and I wanted to do something to prove that I wasn't quite an infant in arms.

I remembered the address that Jarsenn had written in his message to Sir William, and as I pictured the face of that square-headed Swede a quick decision came to me.

Mind you, I didn't think Jarsenn was straight, but I figured it out that he was on the other side, and I thought if I could get in touch with him I might manage to drag some information from him.

I looked up the address, and, finding it was in the telephone-book, I used Blake's 'phone and rung up. It was a chambers of some sort, and, after making a few inquiries, the porter in charge of the place told me that Mr. Jarsenn was out, but had left a message for anyone who might telephone to him.

"He's at Beaulds Buildings, London Wall, sir," the porter said. "He's got a small office there—No. 24A."

I replaced the receiver, and made up my mind to go there and then and have a word with Jarsenn. I got a taxi outside Baker Street, and gave the address in London Wall.

It was pretty dark by that time, and the streets were very slushy, but the taxi-driver managed the distance in good time, and it was about ten minutes past six when I entered Beaulds Buildings.

I found out that No. 24A was on the first floor at the end of a passage, and when I reached the door I found a light shining through the frosted-glass panel.

I didn't stand on any ceremony, but simply turned the knob of the door and entered. I found myself facing Jarsenn across a desk, and he seemed mighty surprised to see me, for he fell back on his chair and stared for a moment.

But he was a quick-witted kind of skunk, and I saw him recover his nerve, then he gave me a bow.

"And how is Mr. Nantucket?" he asked, in his half-American drawl.

I had closed the door behind me, and I came across to the desk and seated myself on the left.

"Mr. Nantucket is very well, Jarsenn," I said, "although it seems to me that you are rather surprised to find him in that condition."

He ran his hand through his crop of bristly hair, and his hard, blue eyes regarded me for a moment.

"Yes, I must admit that I didn't expect to see you quite so—so content, shall we say," he said. "I understand that you've had rather a rotten time of it since we landed in England."

I didn't feel inclined to beat about the bush, and I leaned forward, and went to the point at once.

"Look here, Jarsenn," I said. "I don't know where and how you figure in this affair, but I want to find out. I reckon that I've been double-crossed by Peter Keighley, and, maybe, you know as much about it as anybody else."

He smiled.

"My dear Mr. Nantucket, how should I know anything about Mr. Keighley," he said, "beyond the fact that he's a very well-known and respected oil magnate, and—"

"Jest cut that out!" I broke in.

"Neither you nor Keighly has anything to do with oil. That part of the bluff comes right out."

He didn't seem at all put out. He picked up his cigar from the ash-tray, and puffed at it for a moment.

"Well, you're right there," he said at last. "I have no interest in the Stella Oil Corporation, and Keighly has nothing to do with oil at all. But I tell you right here, Nantucket, Keighly and I are on the opposite sides of the table, and if you're running with him then you can't run with me!"

"I'm runnin' with neither of you!" I broke in angrily. "What I want to know is why you and Keighly are so darned anxious to get a hold of Sir William's silver-plate."

"Oh, that's it, is it? You want to know why we want to get the plate—eh? Well, I'm afraid you won't get any information of that sort out of me!"

He had a real hard face had this fellow Jarsenn, the square type that you often see in his countrymen. I wasn't quite sure whether the fellow was a crook or not, but there were lines about his lips and eyes that indicated he was of the "hard case" type.

"Let's be reasonable, Jarsenn," I said. "You want to get hold of the silver-plate, don't you?"

He nodded. "That's what I've come to England for, Nantucket," he said. "I'm already negotiating with Sir William Penter."

I broke in with a laugh. "I know all about that," I said. "But the negotiations are all on your side. Sir William won't sell that plate, not for all the money you can offer, and the sooner you get that into your head the better."

Then, to clinch matters, I gave him another item of information.

"By to-morrow morning that silver-plate will be down in a safe deposit under lock and key," I said. "Neither you nor Peter Keighley, nor anyone else, will be able to put your hands on it."

Some of the skunk's self-control deserted him then, and he leaned forward and glared at me.

"Is that true?" he asked. "Absolutely!" I returned coldly. "All that you and Keighley have managed to do is to scare Sir William, not into selling the stuff, but into seeing that it's safe. You'll never set hands on that plate, Jarsenn, so you might as well quit it right now!"

I gave him a moment or two longer, then I arose to my feet.

"I'm going to make a start in on you now," I said slowly. "I haven't forgotten the jump you made on me on board the Mauretania. I'm out against both sides—you and Keighley—and as you are the handiest I'll start on you. I'm going to find out just who you are and what you are, Jarsenn, and—well, although I'm not in New York, I've got a pull with the police here, and they'll soon put you through your paces. Do you get me?"

The next thing I knew was that I was looking into a blue-tinted muzzle of an automatic, and behind that automatic was the hard eye of Jarsenn.

"Get back to that wall quick, and put up your hands!"

I hesitated for a moment, and he arose from his chair, steadying the weapon.

I knew that the skunk was in deadly earnest, and I don't believe in taking unnecessary chances. He had the drop on me, and that was the long and short of it. I backed against the wall and put my hands up.

Jarsenn came round the edge of the desk, and seated himself on it, keeping me covered with his weapon.

"I rather expected this would happen,

Nantucket," he said. "Keighly made a mistake when he fixed on you as a dub. Not that you've got much brains, but I figured it out that you'd tumble to Spence before you were through with him, and that you would come for me!"

He laughed shortly. "Mebbe I'll tell you jest why Keighley and I are so darned anxious to get a hold of that plate," he went on; "but it won't be just yet. And meanwhile I've got to see you safe."

He moved away from the desk and opened a drawer, and I saw him produce a couple of leather straps, which he placed on top of the desk.

I thought that the skunk was going to try and tie me up, and I was ready for that; but what did happen came as a complete surprise. He was still covering me with the weapon, and his other hand was slipped into the drawer, fumbling with something.

Then suddenly, with a speed that I hardly believed him capable of, he leaped towards me, and the hand that had been thrust in the drawer came swinging forward, and clapped something moist and soft over my mouth and lips.

If I had been expecting anything of the sort I would have known what to do, but when a man jumps at you it is natural that you should draw a breath. It is the usual human way of registering surprise.

I don't know what that darned drug was that Jarsenn used on me, but that one quick breath that I took just floored me. I saw the room heave round, and tried to punch at the figure, but there was no strength left in my arms, and the next moment everything went black.

I remember feeling a stabbing pain in my head, which I knew later was the thud that it got as I crumpled up on the floor. But when I came to again I found myself in darkness, with my hands and feet tied up, and a gag between my lips.

I was in a half-standing position, wedged tightly in some dark space. I had no idea where I was; but as my brain cleared I realised from the stuffiness of the air that it was probably a cupboard of some sort that I had been thrust into.

Taking the adventure from the very start, I must admit that my share in it was not exactly a spectacular one, and as I leaned there in my stuffy prison I called myself just every sort of fool that I could think of.

I had been double-crossed, then trapped for all the world like a silly jack-rabbit, and it seemed to me that whatever trouble was coming my way I had earned it.

I stood there, propped up like a half-drunken man, until my brain got a bit clear. I felt from my numbed limbs that I must have been in that position for an hour or so, and right here I want to say a word about the fiction-mongers who talk about men in my position.

Very frequently I read statements to the effect that some victim of attempted villainy has lain bound and gagged for a day or two, and yet as soon as the hero comes along again and whips out his bowie and cuts loose the bonds the victim gets up and lets out with both fists.

You take it from me that that's all bunkum. No man can remain bound for longer than a couple of hours without feeling just about tuckered out.

The fact of the matter is, that even without being bound a man cannot hold himself in a stiff, rigid pose for any length of time. His muscles naturally numb up, and his blood gets clogged.

The fact that a thing called, the strait-jacket is not allowed to be used for longer than an hour at a stretch on

a truculent prisoner nowadays, indicates just how a man's body gets after being held in bondage for any length of time.

I felt pretty well sore in every limb, and knowing that there was only one thing to do, I started to do it. No matter how tightly a man is bound he can always use certain muscles of his body, and to do so restores the circulation.

From what I could make out of my position I was jammed into a cupboard, and that cupboard was a fairly narrow one, for, after moving slightly, I managed to turn myself sideways, so that my right shoulder was against the back of the cupboard and my left against the door.

My hands had been fastened up by the straps, but I could move them slightly, and I finally managed to get them pressed against the woodwork of the door.

My greatest trouble was in breathing, for the gag was pretty solid, and was well secured in my mouth, and I had to do all my breathing operations through my nose.

Still, I stuck to my task, and I gradually moved along that cupboard like a mole through his burrow, until I felt my hands touching the lock on the door. I knew then that I was in the weakest part of my prison, so far as the door was concerned.

I moved round once more until my back was against the wall, and I was facing the closed door. Then I began to let myself sink slowly, pressing my knees forward.

I found that I could only sink to a half-crouching position, and my knees were jammed against the door. It was a painful process, but it had to be carried out, and at last, with an extra thrust downward and a full pressure of my knees against that door, the lock gave way with a creak, and the next thing I knew I was sliding out on my back to a linoleum-covered floor.

It was pitch dark, of course, and I had no idea where I was, but I began to wriggle myself forward over the line on my back, and, finally, I came up against the leg of a table.

I worked my way into such a position that I could grip at the leg with my bound hands, which, of course, were behind me. I began to try and raise that leg, for my intention was to upset the table in the hope that the noise would be heard by someone.

I had half a dozen attempts before I succeeded in knocking the table out of its balance, and the thud that it went over with was followed by a metallic crash, which told me that there had been a typewriter on top of it.

It was that noise which really saved me, although I didn't know it at the time. About two minutes later I heard the click of a key in the lock, then the door opened, and there was the sharp snap of an electric-switch.

I was lying on my side close to the fallen table, and as my eyes grew accustomed to the light I saw I was in Jarsenn's office, while immediately in front of me the door had opened, and standing in it was a slim youngster.

I didn't have to look at him twice, and as we exchanged glances I saw his twinkling eyes light up, then he leaped towards me.

"By Jove!" Tinker cried. "So you were here, then. Where the blazes did you get to?"

Now, I admit that Tinker has got plenty of brains, but to fire off questions at a bound man isn't the sort of stunt that pays. However, as he spoke, the

youngster reached my side, and presently he had removed the straps.

I dragged myself rather creakily to my feet and dropped, into a chair which Tinker had placed ready for me. The youngster had gone back to the door and closed it softly, then stood for a moment waiting until I came round.

"I can't make it out," he said at last. "How the dickens did you manage to get in here, in the first place?"

I looked at him.

"I just walked in!" I returned. "There ain't any other means of entering the place, so far as I know."

He looked at me and chuckled.

"Upon my sammy, Nantucket!" he said. "I used to think I was the long-distance champion of Europe for getting into scrapes, but I think this goes to prove that you've got the start on me!"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Maybe you're right, young 'un," I returned. "But these things happen in cycles. I must have started off on this case on the wrong foot, and I haven't been able to change step yet."

I gave him an account then of what had happened, and his eyes widened, then he smiled.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he said. "Well, you must have got here about ten minutes before the guv'nor and I appeared."

"Where is Mr. Blake now?" I asked.

"He's following Jarssenn," Tinker informed me. "And he told me to hang on round here to watch if anyone else came up to see Jarssenn. I have been down this passage twice already, and there's no lights in the place. I was just making another round a moment ago when I heard the table go over. I wondered what on earth had happened, and thought I'd have a look in."

"Well, I'm much obliged to you, Tinker," I said, rising to my feet. "I guess your rescuing me was quite unpremeditated, but it came in mighty handy, and, under the circumstances, maybe it'll work out for the best after all. Have you any idea why Mr. Blake has fastened on Jarssenn?"

Tinker grinned.

"Not exactly," he said. "But I think there will be a message waiting for us when we get back to Baker Street. The guv'nor's been working on this all the evening, and I'm inclined to believe that he has rigged up a very serviceable plan."

We left the offices then, and, believe me, we went right out of that building without anyone stopping us, or asking us a single question, and it's more than any strangers could have done in any of our New York offices.

I was rather surprised to find that it was after nine o'clock when we reached the thoroughfare and chartered a taxi. Half an hour later we were back in Baker Street, and Tinker inquired of the old landlady if there was any message from his master.

I took an opportunity of changing and having a bit of food. Then, just before eleven o'clock, we heard the bell of the front door whirr, and a moment later the old landlady appeared with a letter for Tinker.

We were both in the study at the time, and he opened the envelope in front of me, read the message, then handed it across.

"Here you are, Nantucket!" he said. "This is where we get busy again."

I read the message. It was very short and rather vague:

"Go down to the Chalice Lane Safe Deposit, and present enclosed voucher. When you are taken to the number of U. J.—No. 852.

the deposit mentioned wait till the attendant goes before opening the vault. The combination is A J L T 5741. Under no circumstances must you release contents of the vault until I join you.—SEXTON BLAKE."

Attached to the letter was an official form which, on glancing at, I saw was the receipt that a client had to show at the Safe Deposit before being allowed to enter.

There was no name on the voucher, simply a number, and as Tinker took it from me he shrugged his shoulders.

"This is where the mystery really starts, Nantucket," he said. "I'm hanged if I know what the guv'nor's up to, but I think he's probably arranged some sort of trap for these birds that have been having such a game with you!"

"I'm delighted to hear that you think so, Tinker," said I, "for, believe me, it's about time I began to have some of my own back!"

We got into our heavy coats again, and went out into the street, but I found that getting a taxi at eleven o'clock at night is not such an easy matter under modern London conditions, and we had to look about for a quarter of an hour before we struck one that was prepared to take us to Chalice Lane without demanding a price tall enough to buy his blinkin' vehicle.

We went off Cityward, and presently found ourselves in the well-known, old-fashioned lane behind the Law Courts.

The Safe Deposit proved to be a huge building, and on entering the wide doorway a uniformed porter asked us our business, then led us along a corridor and downstairs into an office that looked something like a charge-room of a police-station.

A man in semi-military uniform came out from behind gridded doors, and gave us a very searching stare. Then Tinker whipped out his voucher, and presented it to the man, who, after another cold glance, finally picked up a bunch of shimmering keys, and we started off down another passage, finally halting at a huge iron door, which was opened, and we entered a narrow corridor, in which an electric-bulb was glimmering faintly.

I've been in safe deposits before, but I must say that this one in the heart of your city was much more like a Tombs or Sing-Sing than anything I have ever struck.

You could feel you were walking between slabs of concrete yards thick, and the air was damp and cold.

Finally we halted in another passage, and a grill doorway was opened, and the warden—I mean, official—pointed down the passage to the left.

"There is No. 435, sir," he said.

Tinker and I went off down that narrow passage, and the official sat down on a chair behind the grill doorway, waiting for us to return.

I figured it out that he felt quite safe, for there was no possible chance of us getting into any of the other vaults unless we had the master-keys.

Tinker had already received a couple of keys from the official, and when we reached the end of the passage we switched on a light which was fixed in the door, and the youngster set to work to manipulate the locks.

"Read out the first letters, Nantucket," he said. And I glanced at the note which Blake had sent, and began to read:

"A J L T."

The first lock was manipulated. Then we tackled the second, and just as we were about to insert the key I heard a tapping sound. Tinker straightened up sharply, and looked at me.

"What the blazes is that?" he said.

We listened again, and quite distinctly there came to our ears muffled taps. It seemed to me that they were coming from behind the door we were standing in front of, and I leaned forward, and put my head against the steel plate.

The taps sounded again, this time more clearly, and I was sure I was right.

"Quick, young 'un!" I said.

"There's someone inside here!"

Tinker reached for the key again.

"Give me the rest of the numbers, Nantucket," he said. "And I took up the count again."

"41."

The lock shot back, and, grabbing at the handle of the heavy door, Tinker began to draw it out. It was evident that there was an electric attachment to that door, for as it swung outward a little bulb sprang into life in that narrow space behind the door, and over Tinker's shoulder I saw the broad-shouldered figure of James Spence, sitting up in the vault.

His feet were close to the door, and it was evident that he had been drumming on the smooth surface with his heels. There was a handkerchief round his lips, and he was gagged, and as his bulging eyes turned on us I don't think I ever saw fear more clearly defined in any man's face.

I stepped through the half-opened door, and Tinker brought up the rear. As soon as his eyes alighted on me, Spence made a movement with his broad shoulders, and I reached out to grab at him.

"Steady on, Nantucket," Tinker said. "Don't forget the governor's orders. You remember what he said—'Under no circumstances must you release contents of vault until I join you.'"

The vault was about six feet deep by about four wide, and it was entirely surrounded by iron shelves, on which were heavy steel boxes. I saw that each box had white-painted letters on them, and one in the centre of the shelf held the full name—Sir William Penter.

"By James!" said the youngster by my side. "We are in Sir William's vault, and I'm beginning to realise what has happened!"

He turned, and looked out through the half-opened doorway again along the passage. He could only see the shadow of the grill-door, and there was no sign of the official.

"Look here, Nantucket!" Tinker said. "Just help me to get this fellow on to his feet, and we'll take the gag out of his mouth."

Together we dragged Spence to his feet, and while he leaned back against the steel shelves I removed the gag.

"Don't forget, my friend," I said, "if you make the slightest noise that gag goes back into your jaw! D'you get me?"

A great change had come over Spence's attitude, for every time I had seen him before he had been a truculent, surly rascal; but now his face had fallen, and his whole appearance was that of a man who had had the shock of his life.

He drew a couple of deep breaths, then leaned his head back against the steel supports, and closed his eyes. I really thought he was going to faint; but presently his eyes opened, and he looked at me, then at Tinker.

"I'm through," he said. "I never want to tackle anything like this again. I thought I—I was a goner!"

"How the mischief did you get here, anyhow?" Tinker asked. And Spence stared at him for a moment.

"It was—it was that skunk Jarssenn, Nantucket," he said, turning to me. "He's gone off with the swag, and he—he left me here to suffocate!"

I saw he was in deadly earnest, and yet I could hardly believe the rascal.

"Jarsenn!" I said. "How did you get in touch with him?"

"He sent me a message," Spence went on. "Offering to come in with us instead of running with the other side. He told me that Sir William Penter was coming to London with the silver-plate, and gave me full instructions. I got up to Sincote Junction, and there, sure enough, I found Sir William was travelling to London with a black japanned box, which I guessed contained the plate. In Jarsenn's message he said he would meet me at Waterloo, and gave me a description of himself."

He halted for a moment, staring at us stupidly.

"I got to Waterloo, and Jarsenn was on the platform," he went on at last. "He told me to watch him and follow him. I saw him go up to Sir William and meet him. He shook hands with him; then Sir William and Jarsenn went off together down the platform carrying the japanned box. I followed them out of the station, and saw them get into a private limousine. Sir William went in first with the box, and Jarsenn gave a signal to me to get up beside the driver, and we started off.

"We came up to this place, and I saw Jarsenn and Sir William go into the doorway, and after they had been gone about ten minutes Jarsenn came out and spoke to me. He told me to wait there until Sir William and the car had gone off, then we were going back together into the vault, and we were going to collar the swag."

"What time would that be?" I put in. Spence licked his dried lips.

"Dunno," he said; "but it was after half-past nine before we reached Waterloo, and I figure it out it must have been ten o'clock when we got here."

"Go on with your story," Tinker said. Spence nodded towards the half-opened door.

"As soon as Sir William had gone off in the car, Jarsenn came to me. He said that he had bluffed Sir William, and, by James, it looked like it, too. Jarsenn told me that Sir William thought he was a representative of the insurance company in which the plate was insured, and they had been checking the plate in the vault. Jarsenn said that while Sir William was opening the safe he had taken note of the combination number, and had managed to get hold of the voucher that Sir William had shown the official. He showed me the voucher, and a few moments later he and I went back into the Safe Deposit, and we were shown right down here."

He held out his hands, which I now noticed were handcuffed.

"That skunk Jarsenn double-crossed me," he said. "As soon as we were in here he tackled me. He pointed to the black japanned box, and as I was stooping to examine it, he got me. I'm a pretty hefty man, but that skunk has got arms of steel. He outed me, and the next thing I knew I found myself sitting in the darkness in this darned vault with my feet against the door."

His fallen lips and frightened eyes indicated just how much scared Spence had been.

"I thought I was a dead man," he said. "I knew I was inside the vault. I could see the edges of the shelves here, and it seemed to me that nothing on earth could save me. I'm through. I've had quite enough of this game!"

I nodded to him now.

"And do you mean to say that this black japanned box, which contains the plate, was here when you came in?"

"It was," said Spence, "and it's gone now. That means that Jarsenn has

taken it. So he's got the pull on Keighley, after all."

I turned to Tinker.

"Look here, young 'un," I said, "it's no good us hanging on here. If Jarsenn has collared the stuff we ought to get on to the police at once, and also let Sir William know what's happened."

I turned, and was about to make for the door, when Tinker held out his hand.

"Can't be done, Nantucket!" he said. "You remember that the guv'nor said we were not to allow anyone to leave the vault until he turned up here. Orders are orders, and I'm going to wait here until the guv'nor comes, no matter how long that may be!"

"That's all very well," I said. "But I figure it out that Mr. Blake didn't know what was going to happen here. We can't allow Jarsenn to get clear away with the swag."

Tinker was leaning against the shelves near to the door, and he folded his arms and shook his head.

"I'm not troubling about Jarsenn, Nantucket," he said. "All I know is that the guv'nor has given me a very

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distinct line to go on, and I'm jolly well going to follow it. Here I am, and here I'm going to stop till he comes, if I've got to wait until to-morrow!"

He pointed to Spence.

"We couldn't go away and leave this fellow locked up in here again," he went on, "so we've just got to wait till the guv'nor turns up."

I felt as though I was between two stools, but, after all, the man from Baker Street's message had been very explicit, and although it seemed as though we were letting that rascal Jarsenn get clean away, I saw that there was really nothing else for it but to wait.

Fortunately, I wasn't kept under the strain very long, for about five minutes later we heard the clang of the grill-door up the passage, and footfalls sounded on the heavy, concrete floor. Then as Tinker stepped aside the door was swung outward, and from Spence's lips there broke an angry snarl.

I had taken the fellow's handcuffs off, for I figured it out that he wouldn't be able to get away, anyhow. But his sudden movement saw him leap past me, and before I could tackle him he had flung himself on the figure that had entered.

"Gotcher, you skunk!" Spence

bawled. "Come on, Nantucket! Here he is! Collar him!"

The two locked figures barged into the narrow passage, and Tinker was dragged into the melee with them. I leaped after the struggling figures, and managed to put one arm round Spence's body, then I gave a tug, and he was drawn back into the vault, foaming at the lips.

"Curse you, don't let him go! Don't let him go! It's Jarsenn. I tell you it's Jarsenn!" His thick voice blared the words, but I gave him a heave that sent him staggering back to the other side of the vault.

Then I turned and glanced at the man who had come into the vault. It was, of course, Sexton Blake, and as his eyes met mine they widened into a smile.

"D'you hear me?" Spence broke out as he clutched at the sides of the vault to support himself. "I tell you that man's Jarsenn, and he's got away with the swag!"

I saw then that Blake was dressed in a different suit, and although, of course, he was not quite like the square-headed Swede, his disguise was certainly a good one. He came into the vault and gave a grim nod to the foaming, glaring Spence.

"Your eyesight is not of the best, Spence," he said. "You've met me before, and I thought perhaps you'd recognise me again."

Jem Spence's jaw dropped, and he stared for a moment, then leaned forward.

"Why, you—you—"

"I am not Sven Jarsenn," said Blake slowly. "Unfortunately for you, Spence, you have never met him, otherwise you would have discovered the difference. But I had to disguise myself, so that you wouldn't know who I really am. But it is not so very long since we met in your own cottage."

The look of absolute amazement that crossed the heavy face of the poucher made me grin. I couldn't make head or tail of what had happened, but I saw now that Blake, in one of his cunning tricks, had certainly got the better of the hulking rascal who stood in front of him.

"Who—who the blazes is it! Is it Mr. Blake?"

"Now you are on the right track, Spence," came the quiet reply. "It is Blake, and I think that this time we meet on more level terms than we did before."

Blake turned to me and smiled.

"I don't know how you managed to turn up here, Nantucket," he said, "but I'm very glad you are here, and I suppose there's some explanation for it. You are just in time to be in at the death."

He nodded to Spence.

"You're going to come along with us now, Spence," he said, "and I won't put the darbies on you unless you require them. There's a little ceremony that we've got to go through, and you'll be one of the chief actors in it. Come!"

In another moment Blake and I and Tinker and Spence had left the vault, and we walked off, led by the official, and finally reached the street.

As soon as we entered the street I saw a limousine standing beside the pavement, and as Spence caught sight of the vehicle he drew a swift breath.

"Why, hang it, it's the very car that picked Sir William up at the station!" he said.

I was walking close to the fellow, and although I didn't exactly think he'd try to get away, I was watching him. Blake was the first to reach the limousine, and he opened the door. Then we all bundled inside, and as the car was

moving off through the dark streets. Blake was busy in his corner altering his disguise.

We came to a halt outside a block of residential chambers, and when we were on the pavement Blake led the way into the wide hall, and the first person I saw inside was Sir William Penter.

He was standing chatting to a figure in the uniform of an inspector of police, and they turned and greeted Blake as he entered.

"Well, here we are, Mr. Blake!" Sir William said. "I don't know what the particular show is that you've arranged for us, but I'm here in time, you see."

We were rather a crowd in that little hall, and, after chatting to the baronet for a moment, Blake turned and beckoned to me.

"I think you had better come up along with me first, Nantucket," he said. "You other gentlemen can follow."

We went up to the second floor, then Blake passed down the little corridor and knocked on a door on the left.

It was opened by Jarsenn, but the Baker Street detective had placed me down the corridor, so that the rascal couldn't see my face.

Jarsenn flung the door wide, looked at his visitor, then gave him a nod.

"Got back, Spence, have you?" he said, moving aside. "Come in!"

"Yes, I've got back, Jarsenn, and I've brought a friend with me."

As he spoke Blake put his foot forward, and gave a quick nod to me. I leaped for that door, and we were only just in the nick of time. For Jarsenn, smelling a rat, flung his heavy figure at it, doing his best to close the door.

There was a bit of tussle, but we managed to get the better of him, and presently, with an extra heave, the door was flung open, and Jarsenn staggered back against the wall.

As he did so I saw him slip his hand down his hip, but I'd had some of that automatic before, and I wasn't taking any chances of that kind.

I reckon that jump I made then was more like the jump of a kangaroo than anything else. I grabbed the skunk by the wrists, and we swayed together into the room, and smashed against a small table, sending it over with a crash. We very nearly pitched headfirst into the fireplace, but I managed to save myself in time, and in another moment I had the belated satisfaction of twisting Jarsenn right on to his face on that carpet, and working his arm up behind his back in a real ju-jitsu lock.

Blake didn't take the slightest part in that little fight, and I reckon he had kept out of it out of regard for my feelings. There were one or two little things I wanted to repay to Jarsenn, and I guess that was the first real chance I'd had.

I pinned him down on the carpet, but the fellow wasn't by any means out, and we had a rare bustling ju-jitsu wrestle there before I finally quietened him. Then, when I had him in a real break-bone lock, he dropped his head on the carpet and gave a grunt.

"All right, curse you, Nantucket, I quit!"

I heard the jangle of handcuffs, and Blake reached out with the darbies between his fingers. I don't think I ever had so much satisfaction in placing cold steel round any wrists as I had then.

I snapped those bright circlets on the stout wrists of the Swede, and felt to some extent happy. When he was handcuffed I arose, and allowed him to stagger into a seat.

After his ten minutes' struggle with me on the floor he was not looking his U. J.—No. 852.

best. His collar was split, and there was a real, healthy bruise over his eyebrow. But his broad face was sullen enough as he glared at Blake and me.

"So you've managed to get that skunk to come in with you, have you, Nantucket?" he said. "Well, I congratulate you. I'm a crook, but Spence is a darned sight worse than me, for I can tell you that he's been here already, and we agreed to share. Half and half was what we bargained for, and if he denies it, he's a liar."

I looked first at Jarsenn, then at Blake, and the humour in the situation came to me, for I leaned against the table and went off into a fit of laughter—laughter that seemed to rile Jarsenn, for he half started to his feet.

"I don't see what you've got to grin about, you dirty 'tec!" he snarled. "You've got me, but you'll have to take him, too. We're both in the same game, both working on the same business, for the same man."

"Oh, you are, are you?" I said. "That's darned strange, but at the same time, I am in with this other gentleman, and so you can't expect me to swallow all you say."

"It isn't a case of swallowing what I say!" Jarsenn snarled. "This man Spence is a double crosser. I tell you he's got the swag, and I can prove it to you!"

He leaned forward, his face working angrily. The door of the room was open, but he couldn't see into the passage from where he sat. I had a better view, however, and could see one or two shadowy figures in the half gloom outside, and knew that the others had arrived and were listening intently.

Jarsenn nodded towards Blake.

"Spence came along to see me this evening in my rooms here," he said.

"He had worked up a darned good wheeze, and he swore to me that if I would share with him he would cut out Keighley and Bryse. I agreed, and he promised to return and show me the swag. If you let him go out of here a free man, then you're a darned fool, Nantucket, and he'll have beat you. Because not so long ago he came back here and showed me a piece of the plate—the very plate we were after."

He turned and looked at the man he thought was Spence.

"Ain't that the truth, you double crosser? Dare you deny it?"

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"It's quite true that I did all you say, Jarsenn," he said. "I met you here first about seven o'clock, then I did return about an hour ago and showed you a piece of plate—part of Sir William's collection."

"There, what did I tell you?" Jarsenn said, wheeling on me. "He's got the stuff, and you'd better get him, for if you let him go now, you'll never see his heels again!"

I was about to speak, when Blake gave me a warning look, and I saw he was still working on this curious game of his.

"Don't you believe him, Nantucket," he said to me. "He's bluffing you. If any man knows where the swag is it's Jarsenn."

The skunk almost choked as he heard this, and after a moment he shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll queer you right now," he said to the man whom he thought was Spence. Then he turned to me and drew a deep breath. "Listen here, Nantucket," he said. "Neither you nor anybody else here in England knows why certain people were so darned anxious to get a hold of that plate; but I can tell you why. A syndicate of wealthy dealers was out to buy that plate.

"Keighley, the skunk, got the story from me and tried to lay hands on the stuff first, although I was, by rights, the one who should have benefited."

He drew a snarling breath.

"The syndicate were going to pay anything up to a half a million dollars, and they weren't too particular how it came along. They meant to split it up and sell it piece by piece, dropping one here and there among their clients. I meant to try and get Sir William to sell, but I knew that Keighley was out for a quick haul, and, by James, he has won! That skunk Spence is an old swell mobman—one of Keighley's gang."

He turned and scowled across the table at the man he thought was Spence.

"You were in that big 'Frisco affair fifteen years ago, Spence, and you got cold feet through it. That's why you came back to settle down nice and quiet in England, thinking the gang'd forget you. But when Keighley heard that it was Sir William Penter who'd got the stuff, and he was living close to where you were, he got on your track again to agree to collar the plate if you could. You had one or two attempts, but you failed, and it was only after Keighley worked up this trick on Nantucket that you had a real chance of nabbing the loot."

The harsh voice of the Swede rang out in a loud tone, and he looked at me again.

"Keighley was boss of Spence's gang, and I was with them, too," he went on. "We used to be partners, but we quarrelled, and I knew if Keighley got a hold of that stuff he would have given me no share, curse him! It was a case of bitter enemy from beginning to end, and as you've got me, I guess you've got to take Spence, too."

Blake moved away from the table, and I saw him give a signal. Presently through the door came the blue-coated figure of the inspector, followed by the thickest one of Spence.

"You're quite right, Jarsenn," Blake said, and now he had changed his voice into his quiet London drawl. "Nantucket must certainly take Spence as well as you, and here is Spence for him to take."

He indicated the broad-shouldered individual, and Spence and Jarsenn exchanged glances.

"Who—who the blazes are you, then?" Jarsenn said, swinging round and speaking to Blake.

The man from Baker Street shrugged his shoulders.

"Spence will tell you who I am," he said, nodding towards the poacher. "To him until very recently, I was Jarsenn; to you, until now, I have been Spence."

The poacher looked across at the manacled man, and his heavy lips curled.

"He's a 'tec," Spence said, "and I guess he's got more brains than either you or I. He queered me all right, and, by ginger, it seems he has queered you, too—if you are Jarsenn!"

They looked at each other across the room—these two skunks that had played such a grim part in my affairs. Then Jarsenn flung back his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, I'm through," he said. "I'd got the beating of Nantucket, and I guess I'd got the beating of you, Spence; but, say, I'm willing to admit that this other man, who really don't seem to have anything to do with the case at all, came along and double-crossed us both at the end."

I saw him glance at Blake, and there was something half-admiring, half-frightened in the look that the Swede cast on the grim figure in front of him.

"May I ask your name?" he said. Blake nodded. "There's no reason why you shouldn't know my name, Jarsenn," he said. "It is Sexton Blake, of Baker Street." The crook hoisted his manacled hands ceilingwards, and rolled his eyes. "So!" he broke out. "Waal, that's darned funny. I have heard of you heaps of times, and, by ginger, coming to think of it, Steve Bryse, jest before I sailed, gave me your name and warned me. He figured it out that you wouldn't know anythin' about this affair, but he said you were death on crooks at any distance, and, gee, it seems he was right!"

He was on his feet now, and he walked towards the door and nodded towards the blue-coated official.

"I don't quite see what charge you're going to bring against me," he went on, "but I've no doubt if you search long enough you'll find something to chalk up. In any case, I quit, and the secret about the silver-plate is out now, and I guess that that dealer syndicate will have to close down."

He looked across at Spence, and scowled.

"Don't forget, there were a couple of murders attached to the collaring of that swag in 'Frisco," he said, "and one of the men that did the killin' was Keighley."

Spence nodded. "I know that," he returned, "and I also know who the other man was. If Keighley goes down on what you have said here, I guess you yourself, Jarsenn, will go down, too."

The whole case was reported in the newspapers, and is ancient history now.

But although, as far as I am concerned, I didn't figure very well in it, yet I was not without having the satisfaction of knowing that, despite Keighley's darned cunning, his trick really worked back on him at last.

And so ended what I always allow to be was one of the most extraordinary cases of my career.

Blake explained to me just how he had worked that performance of his, and, of course, it was simple enough when we heard his scheme.

He had got Sir William to bring the silver-plate along, and it was Blake who had sent that message to Spence arranging for the rascal to travel by the same train as Sir William.

In the interval Blake had gone down to Beould's Buildings, and had left Tinker to watch there while he himself had tracked Jarsenn to his chambers. Then, after hastily disguising himself, Blake had gone to Jarsenn and introduced himself as Spence, hinting that he was prepared to go half shares with Jarsenn in the profits they would get out of the haul of plate.

Jarsenn had agreed to this, then Blake had returned to the station and had worked his trick with Spence, assuming another and more careful disguise, a very clever piece of make-up, for he certainly had looked mighty like that scheming Swede, finally leaving the rascal in the vault while Blake himself had rejoined Sir William in the limousine and had taken one piece of the silver-plate up to Jarsenn to show him in order to convince Jarsenn that he had really carried out his enterprise.

It all sounded mighty simple after we

heard it, but I am inclined to think that there wasn't another man in the world who would have carried off those quick, clever moves so swiftly and well as my friend, Mr. Sexton Blake, of Baker Street.

THE END.

(Next week: "The Case of the Vanished Australian.")

FOOTBALL COMPETITION

No. 9.

Matches played Saturday,
January 3rd.

£300 WON.

In this Competition nine competitors each sent in a coupon correctly forecasting the results of all the matches. The Prize of £300 has therefore been divided among:

R. Bull, 14, Grange Avenue, Harrogate, Yorks.
H. A. Hillier, 103, Westbourne Park Road, Paddington, W.2.
E. Dear, Bury Lane, Horsell, Woking.
T. Cape, Amersham, Spencers Wood, Reading.
L. Sandoz, 25, Underdown Road, Southwick, Sussex.
Wm. White, Lightmoor Row, Ruspidge, Glos.
Frederick L. King, 21, Whitehall Lane, Slade Green, Kent.
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All that the competitors have to do is to strike out, in ink, the names of the teams they think will lose. If, in the opinion of the competitor, any match, or matches, will be drawn, the names of both teams should be left untouched.

Coupons, which must not be enclosed in envelopes containing efforts in other competitions, must be addressed to:

FOOTBALL COMPETITION No. 12,

10, Wine Office Court, Fleet Street,

LONDON, E.C. 4,

and must reach that address not later than THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12th.

This competition is run in conjunction with "Answers," "The Family Journal," "Woman's World," "Boys' Realm," "Marvel," "Cheerio!" "All Sports Weekly," "Answers' Library," and "Home Companion."

RULES WHICH MUST BE STRICTLY ADHERED TO.

1. All forecasts must be made on coupons taken from this journal or from any of the issues of the above journals which contain the announcement of the competition.
2. Any alteration or mutilation of the coupon will disqualify the effort.
3. If any match, or matches, on the coupon should be abandoned or full time is not played for any reason, such match, or matches, will not be taken into consideration in the adjudication.
4. In the event of ties, the prize will be divided.
5. No correspondence may be enclosed with the coupons, and none will be entered into. Neither will interviews be granted.
6. The Editor reserves the right to disqualify any coupon for what, in his opinion, is good and sufficient reason, and it is a distinct condition of entry that the Editor's decision shall be accepted as final and legally binding in all matters concerning his competition.
7. Any entries received after THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12th, will be disqualified.

No responsibility can be undertaken for any effort or efforts lost, mislaid, or delayed. Proof of posting will not be accepted as proof of delivery. Unstamped or insufficiently stamped efforts will be refused.

U.J.

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Date of Matches, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 14th.
Closing date, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12th.

ASTON VILLA	v. EVERTON
CHELSEA	v. BOLTON WANDERERS
OLDHAM ATHLETIC	v. ARSENAL
SHEFFIELD UNITED	v. W. BROMWICH ALBION
CLAPTON ORIENT	v. BRISTOL CITY
STOCKPORT COUNTY	v. LEICESTER CITY
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR	v. BLACKPOOL
HULL CITY	v. FULHAM
BRENTFORD	v. SOUTHEND UNITED
SWANSEA TOWN	v. QUEEN'S P.K. RANGERS
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I enter Football Competition No. 12 in accordance with the Rules and Conditions announced, and agree to accept the published decision as final and legally binding.

Signed

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12

THE FOUR SHADOWS



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PEOPLE IN THE STORY.

RAOUL DE SAINT-DALMAS (nicknamed **PALAS** by the other convicts) is serving a life-sentence for a crime which he did not commit.

CHERI-BIBI, a typical gaol-bird, but a staunch friend.

ARIGONDE, **FRIC-FRAC**, **LE CAID**, and **LE BECHEUR**, all notorious criminals, and the sworn enemies of Palas.

Cherib-Bibi and **Palas** manage to escape from the State prison, which is situated on a lonely and barren island.

EPISODE IV.

THE FIGHT BY DAY AND BY NIGHT.

After the War.

SO you are really going to leave us, Captain d'Haumont?"

The words, which held a wistful note in them, faltered from the lips of the beautiful girl who was looking into the face of the stalwart officer.

The captain gazed into the clear blue eyes for a moment before making reply.

"Yes," he answered at last, in a low voice, "I fear that I must leave you, m'selle, though Heaven knows—"

His voice trailed away, and a spasm of mental agony crossed his strong face.

Captain d'Haumont was none other than Palas—the convict who escaped from the State prison two years before. Changing his name to d'Haumont, he had enlisted in the French Army, and so well had he fought that he had been granted a commission on the field; and had eventually risen to the rank of captain.

He had seen much hard fighting, and a month or so before the Armistice he had sustained a wound which had necessitated his going into hospital. He had soon mended, however, and November 11th, 1918—perhaps the most momentous day in the history of the world—had found him living at the Chateau Boulay, where he was spending his period of convalescence.

And it so happened that the chateau was the home of Francoise, the charming girl whom he had met on the boat when he was making his way from the State prison in French Guiana, to Europe. That meeting, when she had asked him why he was sad, had left an indelible stamp on his memory, and during the two years of warfare he had never lost sight of the sweet face which ever

seemed to be near him—of the gentle voice which never tired of whispering, "Courage, courage! It is for France!"

Of course, it had all been his imagination—the imagination of a man in love.

And when Palas—or d'Haumont, as we will now call him—found himself convalescent in the girl's house, and in constant touch with her, his passion grew until it required an herculean effort of will for him to restrain himself from telling her of his feelings, of the great love that was consuming him.

But the thought of the terrible years he had spent in the State prison was ever present, telling him that he was not a fit person to love the pure girl who had crept into his heart.

And now, when he was about to leave the chateau and return to Paris, he meant to seal his lips—to bid her a formal "Good-bye," and, plunging into commercial life, to try and forget his hopeless passion.

Francoise placed a small white hand upon d'Haumont's arm, and something more than affection shone from her eyes.

"Have you never thought of marriage, Captain d'Haumont?" she asked suddenly.

The man looked away quickly, and a somewhat bitter smile twisted his firm lips.

"No, no, m'selle!" he answered, a trifle hoarsely. "I fear that I am a confirmed bachelor!"

The girl was silent for a moment, whilst a tiny flush spread over her face.

"Captain d'Haumont," she said, her voice trembling ever so slightly, "I want you, before you go, to give me some advice."

D'Haumont looked down at the upturned face.

"Yes, m'selle?"

"Count Gorbie has asked me to become his wife," she said slowly. "What do you think of him?"

A look of perplexity came into the officer's grey eyes as he heard the question.

"Why do you ask me?" he said, almost roughly. "After all, I don't know the count, and even if I did, what I think could not possibly interest you. But I will say this. If Count Gorbie is a good man, and you love him, then marry him!"

It cut d'Haumont to the heart to have to counsel this girl, whom he loved with all his heart and soul, to marry another man, and yet he saw no other course open to him. After all, he was an ex-gaol-bird, a man who had sweated and toiled in the State prison, and he could not expect to win her.

The girl, for her part, gave a little intake of breath when she heard his words, and her hand stole to her bosom as though to check her pounding heart. And her large eyes gave him an almost reproachful look when she gazed at his pale, set features.

"Perhaps," she thought to herself, somewhat wistfully, "he did not care, after all."

Her little chin gave a haughty tilt.

"Thank you, Captain d'Haumont!" she said coolly. And a moment later she had glided away, to leave the soldier gazing after her with pain-laden eyes.

"I have sent her to another man," he murmured bitterly, "but I cannot let her marry Palas—the convict!"

The Mission.

FRANCOISE'S father, M. Boulay, held a high position in State affairs, and it was usual for him to entertain other State Ministers in his palatial chateau, which was situated a hundred miles from Paris.

It so happened that on the day that d'Haumont was to leave, M. Denis, another Minister, called upon M. Boulay.

Seated in the latter's library, they discussed many and important affairs of State, and during the course of the conversation the visitor mentioned that he wanted a particular letter delivered that night.

M. Denis tapped the important-looking envelope with his forefinger.

"It is absolutely imperative that this document should be in the hands of the Ministry to-night, Boulay," he said impressively; "but the trouble is to find a trustworthy messenger to take it. I would go myself, but for the fact that I am up to my eyes in work which I simply must finish!"

M. Boulay nodded his head, and remained in deep thought for a few moments. And then brought his fist down on the table with a thump that made M. Denis jump.

"Why, this is a most wonderful coincidence, my friend!" he cried excitedly. "It so happens that Captain d'Haumont, a very dear friend of mine, and a man with whom I would entrust my life, is going to Paris to-night!"

The other official's eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"That's splendid, Boulay!" he said. "And do you think that the gallant captain will do this thing for me?"

"Without a doubt—without a doubt!" answered M. Boulay. "I'll get him to come along and see you."

Boulay touched the ivory button on his desk, and a second later the door opened and a liveried manservant, whose stolid and impassive expression could not hide the cunning in his small eyes, entered the room noiselessly, with a peculiar feline movement.

"Tell Captain d'Haumont that I would like to see him for a moment," ordered M. Boulay.

The manservant bowed and withdrew, and as he closed the door there was an exultant, crafty light in his eyes.

"So d'Haumont's going to take it!" he muttered. "That is good news indeed!"

He made his way to the captain's room, and, having knocked upon the door, he turned the handle and walked inside.

D'Haumont was sitting in an armchair, and in his hand he held a photograph of Francoise, to which he had obviously set a match, for the flames were licking round his fingers. Inch by inch the photograph was consumed, and when the black ashes fell to his feet the captain gave a hard laugh.

"Ashes of the past!" he muttered. "I love her, but she is not for Convict 3218!"

A discreet cough came to his ears, and he swung round, to find himself looking into the crafty features of the manservant.

"Well?" he asked curtly.

"M. Boulay would like to see you in the library, sir," came the reply.

"Very well."

The man withdrew and closed the door,

whilst d'Haumont, trying to get the vision of Francoise out of his mind, set to work to complete his packing. A matter of five minutes saw his task finished, and it was then that he quitted his room and made his way to the library.

He knocked at the door, and his host bade him enter.

"M. Boulays rose to his feet at once and advanced with outstretched hands.

"Ah, come in, d'Haumont!" he said heartily. "And permit me to introduce you to my friend M. Denis, a State official."

The two men shook hands, and then M. Boulays came to the point.

"As you are going to Paris to-night, d'Haumont," he said, "I was wondering whether you will undertake to deliver a certain very important document to an address in Paris. M. Denis informs me that it is a mission which he would entrust only to a most trustworthy man, and, seeing that you are going to Paris, I wondered whether you would step into the breach."

The captain had some difficulty in repressing a bitter smile.

He, Palas, the convict, a most trustworthy man!

"I shall, of course, be only too willing to oblige you, sir," he said, in a low voice.

M. Denis produced a sealed envelope from his pocket, and handed it to d'Haumont.

"I want you to deliver this letter into the hands of the person for whom it is intended," he said. "And you must do it to-night, without fail. Can I rely upon you, captain?"

D'Haumont nodded his head.

"You can rely upon me, sir," he answered simply. "And now, if you will excuse me, I must be off, for my train starts in twenty minutes."

He shook hands cordially with the two Ministers and strode to the door. And, opening it suddenly, he almost collided with the crafty-faced manservant. D'Haumont paused for a moment, and looked into the immobile features, but not a sign of emotion or guilt did they betray.

"My friend," said d'Haumont quietly, "listeners never hear any good of themselves—especially if they get caught listening!"

With which remark he walked off to his bed-room.

What Happened in the Train.

WITH one final look at the chateau in which he had spent so many pleasant weeks, Captain d'Haumont rounded the bend in the road and strode off towards the station. He had ten minutes in which to catch the Paris express, and he knew that he was in plenty of time.

He reached the station with five minutes to spare, and, having purchased his ticket, he walked along the platform and selected an empty carriage.

He flung a number of periodicals on to a seat, and then settled himself comfortably in the corner. And even as he did so his hand stole into the breast-pocket of his coat to assure himself that the important document he was carrying for M. Denis was still safe.

He glanced at his watch, and saw that the train was almost on the point of starting. Indeed, the guard's whistle shrilled at that very moment, and the express commenced to glide out of the station.

It was gaining speed rapidly, when the door of d'Haumont's carriage was wrenched open, and, to the warning cries of the officials, a man leapt into the compartment.

Breathing heavily, he collapsed into a seat next to d'Haumont, pulling the door to as he did so.

"A near thing, sir," he said, glancing at his fellow-traveller searchingly.

"You're right," answered d'Haumont, who, however, was in no mood for conversation. His mind was a medley of thoughts, in which his prison experiences, Francoise, and the precious document he carried all figured.

"You're going to Paris, sir?" pressed the other man, with a smile that was meant to be friendly on his part.

"Yes," came the sapient reply; and the questioner, who seemed to sense that any further conversational efforts would prove abortive, lapsed into silence, contenting himself with an occasional side-glance at his unscissable fellow-passenger.

D'Haumont, meanwhile, closed his eyes, meaning to sham sleep as a means of stemming the other's unwelcome advances. However, the journey was hardly ten minutes old before he actually did doze, and his

head drooped forward on his chest. The other passenger noted this, and a satisfied look crept into his eyes.

He waited for another ten minutes, by which time d'Haumont was slumbering peacefully, and then, leaning towards the sleeper, he insinuated thin and experienced fingers into the breast-pocket in which reposed the sealed envelope which had been entrusted to d'Haumont.

It seemed that the thief would succeed in gaining possession of the document, when a lurch of the train, as it swept round a curve, proved his undoing.

The captain awoke with a start, and in a moment he realised the true state of affairs.

His garrulous fellow-passenger was trying to rob him of the State document!

This thought roused every drop of his fighting-blood, and, without a word, his face white with passion, he threw himself upon the would-be thief.

The other man was ready for him, however, and managed to land a blow at d'Haumont's face. It did not catch him squarely, though, for d'Haumont jerked his head aside with a lightning movement, and

And then came the culminating blow—a straight left from the shoulder, which, landing full on the throat, sent the thief reeling backwards, to crash against the door. When he had entered the moving train the thief could not have closed the door securely, and this fact proved his undoing, for it swung open, and, with a wild, despairing shriek upon his lips, the man went hurtling backwards and rolled down the embankment at the side of the rails.

The Paris express, meanwhile, rushed on, eating up the miles to the French capital.

D'Haumont, his knuckles bleeding and bruised, his face white as death, his breath coming in quick gasps, stood at the open door of the carriage, hardly realising what had happened; and when the terrible truth did dawn upon his bewildered senses the body of the thief, whether dead or alive, was two or three miles away.

The captain was undecided as to what he should do, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll stop the train, and report the matter. I shall probably be detained," he muttered; "in which case I might be prevented from delivering this document."

He picked up his hat, dusted his clothes as best he could, and then stepped into the corridor, meaning to travel in another compartment.

It was perfectly obvious to him that the sealed envelope he carried must contain something of great State value, otherwise he would not have been attacked by a man who was obviously prepared to kill him to gain possession of it.

And d'Haumont heaved a sigh of relief when the express began to flash through the familiar suburbs of Paris, and it had hardly come to a standstill at the great terminus than he leapt to the platform, and made his way to the barrier.

Having given his ticket up, he hurried from the station-yard and crossed the square, meaning to make for the address on the sealed envelope without waste of time, for he knew he would not be safe until he had completed his mission.

Yet scarcely had he turned off the main thoroughfare than three figures sprang at him, and almost before he knew what was happening he found himself fighting for his life. Full of pluck, and with the science of boxing and hard-hitting at his finger-tips, the ex-convict shot out a left and right, which sent two of his assailants sprawling to the cobbles. But they were by no means put out of the running, as d'Haumont was quick to see; and it was at this moment that he decided that in a case such as this discretion was certainly the better part of valour.

So, with one last swing at the man who rushed at him, he turned on his heel and sped down the street like the wind.

Easily outpacing his pursuers, he dodged round this street and turned up that, and at last came to a halt, and listened for the sound of running footsteps.

But he could hear nothing, for the neighbourhood in which he now found himself, and which was unfamiliar to him, appeared to be deserted.

He glanced round quickly, hoping to catch sight of some sign that might help him to locate himself, when his eyes suddenly rested upon a name over a shop.

And as he read the panel, the words which Cheri-Bibi had impressed upon him came back to him with almost stunning force.

"I have a friend in Paris," Cheri-Bibi had said, "who will, for my sake, do anything for you. He keeps a grocer's shop in the Rue St. Rock, under the name of Hilaire. All you have to do is to go to him, and say the one word 'Fate.'"

"Rue St. Rock!" muttered d'Haumont excitedly, looking round for the name.

He paced up the narrow street for twenty yards, and there, sure enough, he saw the identical name on the wall of a house.

"Hilaire!"

The name upon his lips, d'Haumont retraced his steps until he stood outside the shop, which was now closed, its shutters being up.

He hesitated for a fraction of a second, and then tapped on the door.

He had not long to wait, for a voice answered his summons almost immediately.

"Hullo? Who is there?"

And Captain d'Haumont, ex-convict, said the one word:

"Fate!"

End of Fourth Episode.

(Next week: "THE JUDGMENT.")

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