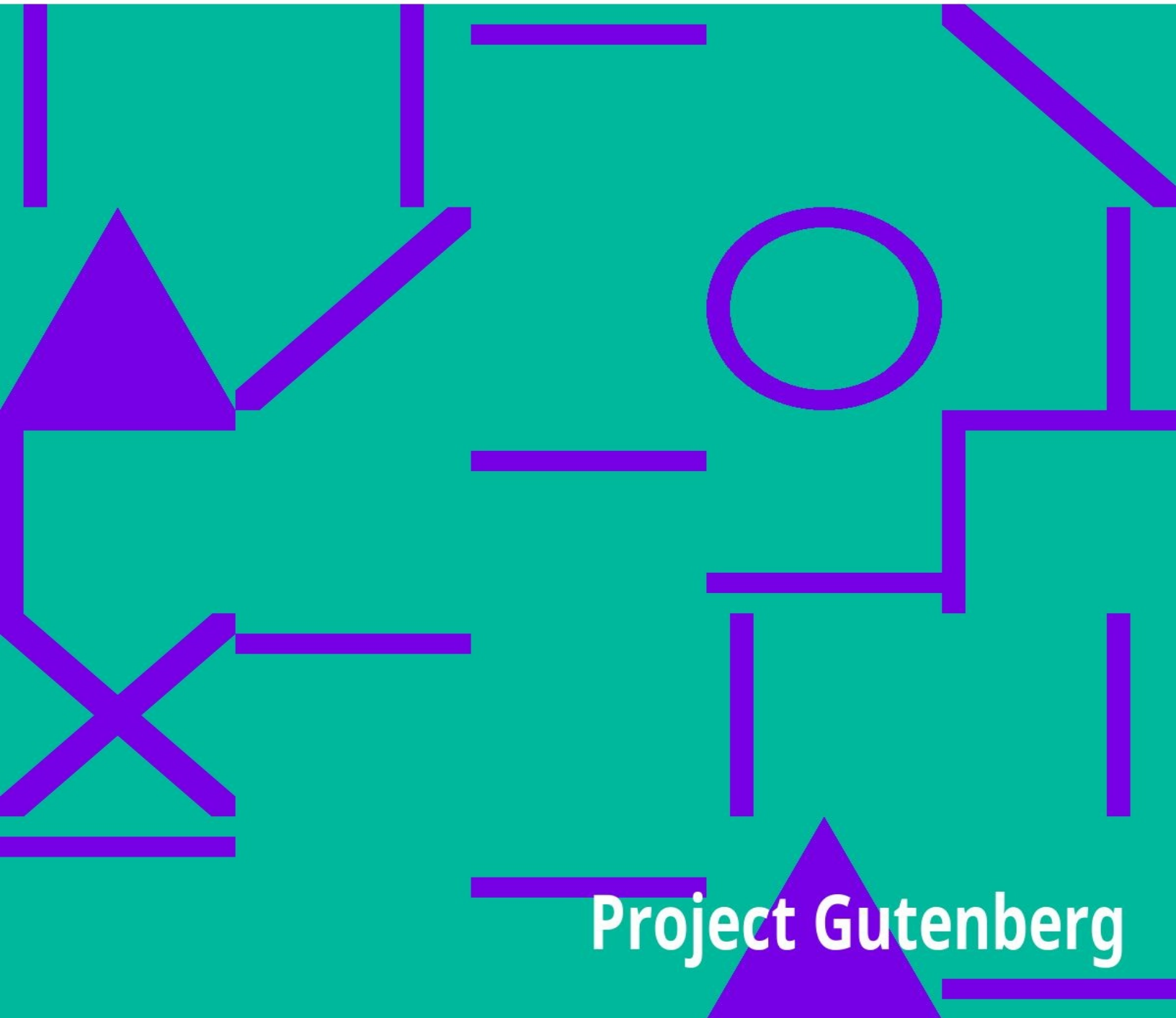
The Man Who Drove the Car

Max Pemberton



Title: The Man Who Drove the Car

Author: Max Pemberton

Release Date: April 23, 2009 [EBook #28595]

Language: English

Produced by Al Haines

Cover art

THE MAN WHO DROVE THE CAR

BY

MAX PEMBERTON

AUTHOR OF
"THE GIRL WITH THE RED HAIR"
"THE IRON PIRATE" ETC.

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH
FAWSIDE HOUSE
1910

Printed by BALLANTYNE & Co. LIMITED
Tavistock Street, Coven Garden, London

CONTENTS

I. THE ROOM IN BLACK
II. THE SILVER WEDDING
III. IN ACCOUNT WITH DOLLY ST. JOHN
IV. THE LADY WHO LOOKED ON
V. THE BASKET IN THE BOUNDARY ROAD
VI. THE COUNTESS

I

THE ROOM IN BLACK

They say that every man should have a master, but, for my part, I prefer a mistress. Give me a nice young woman with plenty of money in her pocket, and a bit of taste for seeing life, and I'll leave you all the prying "amatoors" that ever sniffed about a gear-box without knowing what was inside that same.

I have driven plenty of pretty girls in my life; but I don't know that the prettiest wasn't Fauny Dartel, of the Apollo. This story isn't about her—except in a way—so it doesn't much matter; but when I first knew Fauny she was getting thirty bob a week in "The Boys of Boulogne," and, as she paid me three pound ten every Saturday, and the car cost her some four hundred per annum to run, she must have been of a saving disposition. Certainly a better mistress no man wants—not Lal Britten, which is yours truly. I drove her for five months, and never had a word with her. Then a man, who said he was a bailiff, came and took her car away, and there was no money for me on the Saturday. So I suppose she married into the peerage.

My story isn't about Fauny Dartel, though it's got to do with her. It's about a man who didn't know who he was—at least, he said so—and couldn't tell you

why he did it. We picked him up outside the Carlton Hotel, Fauny and me,[1] three nights before "The Boys of Boulogne" went into the country, and "The Girls" from some other shop took their place. She was going to sup with her brother, I remember—astonishing how many brothers she had, too—and I was to return to the mews off Lancaster Gate, when, just as I had set her down and was about to drive away, up comes a jolly-looking man in a fine fur coat and an opera hat, and asks me if I was a taxi. Lord, how I stared at him!

"Taxi yourself," says I, "and what asylum have you escaped out of?"

"Oh, come, come," says he, "don't be huffy. I only wanted to go as far as Portman Square."

"Then call a furniture van," says I, "and perhaps they'll get you aboard."

My dander was up, I tell you, for I was on the box of as pretty a Daimler landaulette as ever came out of Coventry, and if there's anything I never want to be, it's the driver of a pillar-box with a flag in his left ear. No doubt I should have said much more to the gentleman, when what do you think happens—why, Fauny herself comes up and tells me to take him.

"I'm sure we should like some one to do the same for us if no taxis were about," says she very sweetly; "please take the gentleman, Britten, and then you can go home."

Well, I sat there as amazed a man as any in the Haymarket. It's true there weren't any taxis on the rank at the minute; but he could have got one by walking a hundred yards along Trafalgar Square, and she must have known it as well as he did. All the same, she smiled sweetly at him and he at her—and then, with a tremendous sweep of his hat, he makes a gallant speech to her.

"I am under a thousand obligations," says he; "really, I couldn't intrude."

"Oh, get in and go off," says she, almost pushing him. "I shall lose my supper if you don't."

He obeyed her immediately, and away we went. You will remember that his talk had been of a house in Portman Square; but no sooner had I turned the corner by the Criterion than he began speaking through the tube, and telling me to go to Playford's in Berkeley Square. There he stopped, notwithstanding that it

was getting on for twelve o'clock; and when he had rung the bell and entered the house, I had to wait a good fifteen minutes before he was ready for the second stage.

"Is it Portman Square now?" I asked him. He laughed and slipped a sovereign into my hand.

"I can see you're one of the right sort," he said. "Would you mind running round to the King's Road, Chelsea, for ten minutes? Perhaps there'll be another sovereign before we get to bed to-night."

I pocketed the money—you don't find many drivers who are long off the fourth speed in that line, and Lal Britten is no exception. As for the gentleman, he did seem a merry fellow, and his air was that of a Duke all over—the kind of man who says "Do it," and finds you there every time. We were round at the King's Road, Chelsea, perhaps a quarter of an hour after he had spoken, and there we stopped at the door of a lot of studios, which I have been told since are where some of the great painters of the country keep their pictures. Here my friend was gone perhaps twenty minutes, and when next I saw him he had three flash-up ladies with him, and every one as classy as he was.

"Relations of mine," says he, as he pushes 'em into the landaulette, and closes the door himself. "Now you may drive to Portman Square just as fast as you please, for I'm an early bird myself, and don't approve of late hours."

Well, I stared, be sure of it, though staring didn't fit that riddle, not by a long way. My mistress had lent her landaulette to a stranger; but I felt sure that she wouldn't have liked this sort of thing—and yet, remember, the gentleman had told me to drive to Portman Square, so there could not be much the matter, after all.

As for the ladies, it wasn't for me to quarrel with them. They were all very well dressed, and behaved themselves perfectly. I came to the conclusion that I was dealing with some rich man who had a bee in his bonnet, and, my curiosity getting the better of me, I drove away to Portman Square without as much as a word.

Now, this would have been some time after twelve o'clock. It was, I think, a quarter to one when we turned into Portman Square, and he began to work the signal on the driver's seat which tells you whether you are to go to the right or

the left, slow or easy, out or home again. All sorts of contradictory orders baffling me, we drew up at last before a big house on the Oxford Street side, and this, to my astonishment, had a "To Let" board in the window, and another at the pillar of the front door. What was even more astonishing was the fact that this empty house—for I saw at a glance it was that—was just lighted up from cellar to attic, while there was as many as three furniture vans drawn up against the pavement, and sending in their contents as fast as a dozen men could carry them. All this, mind you, I took in at a glance. No time was given me to think about it, for the stranger was out of the car in a jiffy and had given me my instructions in two.

"Here's your sovereign," says he; "if you want to earn ten times as many come back for me at four o'clock—or, better still, stay and give 'em a hand inside. We want all the help we can get to-night, and no mistake about it. You can get your supper here, and bring that car round when I'm ready."

Well, I didn't know what to do. My mistress had said nothing about stopping up until four o'clock—but for that matter she hadn't mentioned ten pounds sterling either—and here was this merry gentleman talking about it glibly enough.

For my part the fun of the whole thing began to take hold of me, and I determined to see it through whatever the cost. There were goings on in Portman Square, and no mistake about it—and why should Lal Britten be left out in the cold? Not much, I can tell you. And I had the car away in the garage off the Edgware Road, and was back at the old gentleman's house just about as quick as any driver could have made the journey.

There I found the square half full of people. Three policemen stood at the door of the house, and a pretty crowd of loafers, such as a party in London can always bring together, watched the fun, although they couldn't make much of it. Asking what the hullabaloo was about, a fellow told me that Lord Crossborough had come up from the country suddenly, and was "a-keeping of his jubilee" at No. 20B.

"Half the Gaiety's there, to say nothing of the Merry Widow," says he, as I pushed past him, "and don't you be in a hurry, guv'nor, 'cause you've forgotten yer diamond collar. They won't say nothink up there, not if you was to go in a billycock 'at and a duster, s'welp me, they wouldn't——" But I didn't listen to

him, and going up the front door steps by the policemen, I told them I was Lord Crossborough's driver, and passed right in.

Now I have been through many funny scenes in my life, seen many funny gentlemen, to say nothing of funny ladies, and have had many a good time on many a good car. But this I shall say at once, that I never got a greater surprise than when I got back to 20B, and found myself in the empty hall among twenty or thirty pairs of yellow breeches and as many cooks in white aprons, all pushing and shouting, and swearing that the area gate was locked and bolted, and the kitchen in no fit state to serve supper to a dog.

Upstairs on the landings men in white aprons were carrying plants in pots, and building up banks of roses; while higher up still stood Lord Crossborough himself—the gentleman I had driven from the Carlton—shouting to them to do this and to do that, smoking a cigar as long as your arm, and all the time as merry as a two-year-old at a morning gallop.

As for the young ladies, they had taken off their cloaks, and all wore pretty gowns, same as they would wear for any party in that part of the world, and they were standing by his lordship's side, apparently just as much amused as he was. What astonished me in particular was this nobleman's affability towards me, for he cried out directly he saw me, and implored me for heaven's sake to get the padlock off the area gate, or, says he, "I'm d—d if they won't be cooking the ducks in the drawing-room."

I was only too ready to oblige him, that goes without saying, though I had to run round to the garage for a file and a chisel, and when I got back for the second time, it took me twenty minutes to get off the padlock, after which they sent me upstairs, as they said, "to help with the flats." Then I discovered that a play, or something, was to be given in the drawing-room, the back part of which was full of scenery, showing a castle on the top of a precipice and a view of the Thames Embankment just below it, while away in the small library on the other side of the staircase stood twenty or thirty ballet girls, just come from one of the West End theatres.

Immediately after they had arrived, a number of fiddlers came tumbling up the stairs, and the fun began in earnest. A proper gentleman, who seemed to know what he was talking about, though, to be sure, he did call all the ladies his "darlings," started to put 'em through their paces. I saw one of our leading

musical ladies coming down the stairs from the rooms above, and presently a lot of guests arrived from the hall below, and went into the great drawing-room, where the audience was to sit. "After all," says I, "this is just his lordship's bit of fun—he's giving one of those impromptu parties we've heard so much about, and this play-acting is the surprise of it." You shall see presently how very wrong I was.

Well, the play went merry enough, as it should have done, seeing it was performed by people who have to make their living by plays. When it was over, his lordship gets up and says something about their having supper, not in the English way but the French, same as they do at the Catsare[2] in Paris. This pleased them all very much, and I could see that the most part of them were not real ladies and gentlemen at all, but riff-raff Bohemian stuff out for a spree, and determined to have one. The supper itself was the most amusing affair you ever saw; for what must they do but flop down on the floor just where they stood, not minding the bare boards at all, and eat cold chicken and twist rolls from paper bags the footman threw to them. As for the liquor, you would have thought they never could have enough of it—but it's not for me to say anything about that, seeing I had a bottle of the best to myself down in the corner by the conservatory, and more than one paper bag when the first was empty.

Now, this supper occupied them until nearly three in the morning. I make out —as I had to do to the police—that it was just a quarter past three when the real business began, and a pretty frightening business, as my sequel will show. First it began with the sweepers, who swept up the wreck of the vittals with long brooms, and sprinkled scented water afterwards to lay the dust. Then the musicians played a mournful sort of tune, and after that, what do you think?— why, in came a number of stage carpenters, who began to hang the whole place with black.

I have told you already that it was an empty house and not a stick of furniture in it, save what we carried there—so you will see that all this affair must have been arranged a long time before, for the black hangings were all made to fit the room, and upon them they hung black candlesticks with yellow candles in them —as melancholy as those used for a funeral, and just the same kind, so far as I could see. This interested the company very much. I could hear all sorts of remarks from the riff-raff who were making love on the stairs; and presently they all crowded into the room and listened to Lord Crossborough while he made them a speech.

Let me confess that what I know about this speech I learned chiefly from the newspapers. His lordship spoke of his family affairs, and spoke of them in a way that might very well astonish the company.

To begin with, he mentioned his own eccentricities during the last five months, when, as he reminded them, he had retired from public life and gone down to Hertfordshire to found an academy where, with a few convivials, he might study Latin and Greek and forget the high old time he had had in London formerly.

This, he said, had been a pretty slow business, and quite given him the jumps. He began to find himself sighing for the old days. Plato and Socrates were fine old boys, but he preferred "The Boys of Boulogne" at the Apollo, and no mistake about it. So he had given up keeping house with Plato and the other gentleman, and was going over to France, when he discovered Captain Blackham's adventure with Jenny Frobisher of the Opera House, and wanted to know more about it. Did they think he would put up with that? Not for a minute, and, seeing that you can't get law in such affairs in this country, he meant to do his own law-making. That very night he had asked Captain Blackham to come to this house that they might meet and have it out like gentlemen should do. One of them would not return—he left it to the company to bear witness that all was done squarely as between men of honour, and he begged them to keep his confidence. It was then half-past three. They might expect the Captain in ten minutes, during which time he would make his preparations. He was sure they would never betray him.

You may imagine the excitement this speech gave rise to. I was at the bottom of the stairs at the time, and I could hear the women crying out to each other, and the men asking what it all meant. Such a confusion and babel I shall never listen to again in any house. What with some running downstairs and calling for their carriages, the band playing, his lordship bawling for his servants—and, upon all this, the sudden arrival of the Captain, who carried a pair of swords in his hand—why, no madhouse could have matched it.

Well enough, I say, for Lord Crossborough to ask people not to betray him; but what woman could hold her tongue under such circumstances, and how did he think that such a game could be played and the police hear nothing of it? Why, I tell you that half a dozen girls were bawling "Murder!" before five minutes were past, and as many more imploring the police outside to step up and

stop it. For myself I made no bones about the matter; and, not wishing to appear in a police court next day, and thinking certainly that Lord Crossborough was as mad as any first-floor tenant of Hanwell, I pushed my way through the press and went off to the garage. Ten pound or no ten pound, I was for bed. Will you ask me if I was surprised when, going up to the car, the very first person I met was his lordship, with a cigar about seven inches long in his mouth, and as pretty a smile above his long black beard as I have seen this many a day.

"Well, my boy," says he, opening the door quite calmly and stepping inside with no more concern than if I had just driven him from the Carlton to Hyde Park Corner, "well, now I think we shall soon have earned that extra ten-pound note. The next house is in Hertfordshire—three miles from Potter's Bar, on the road to Five Corners. Do you happen to know it, by the way?"

I could hardly answer him for amazement.

"But what about the Captain, sir," cried I.

"Oh," says he, "the Captain will never trouble me again. Now get up and make haste. Is your back lamp all right? That's good—I particularly wish all the policemen to get our number. Go right ahead and stop for no one. It's a big house, I am told, and we cannot miss it."

"But," cried I, "isn't it your lordship's house?"

He laughed, the merriest laugh in all the world.

"I was never there in my life," says he; "now get on, for heaven's sake, or you'll have the morning here."

I hadn't a word for this, and, wondering whether I had gone dotty or he, I let the Daimler out and drove straight up Baker Street, through the Park and out on to the Finchley Road. The police have eyes all round their heads for this track as a rule, but never a policeman do I remember seeing that night, and we travelled forty-five an hour after Barnet if we travelled a mile.

My directions, you will remember, had been to go straight through Potter's Bar, and then on to a place called Five Corners—a locality I had never heard of, well as I know Hertfordshire and the roads round about. This I told his lordship as we slowed up in the village, and his answer was surprising, for he told me to

go to the police station and to ask there. So I slowed up in Potter's Bar, and, seeing a policeman, I asked him to direct me.

"Keep to the right and turn to the right again," says he, staring hard at his lordship and at me. "That's Lord Crossborough's house, isn't it?"

"Why, yes," says I, naturally enough, "and it's his lordship I am driving."

He nodded pleasantly at this, and his lordship putting his head out of the window at the moment, he spoke to him direct.

"Rather late to-night, my lord."

"Yes, yes, very late, and a driver who doesn't know the road. I am much obliged to you, constable. Tell him how to go, and here's a sovereign for you."

A policeman doesn't like a sovereign, of course, and this fellow was just as nasty about it as the others. I suppose he spent the next quarter of an hour directing me how to go, and when that was done he saluted his lordship in fine military fashion. To be truthful, I may say that we went out of Potter's Bar with flying colours, and for the next ten minutes I drove slowly down dark lanes with corners sharp enough for copybooks, and hedges so high that a man couldn't feel himself for the darkness. When we got out of this we came to five cross-roads, and a big sign-post; and here, I remembered, the policeman had told me to take the middle road to the left, and that I should find Five Corners a quarter of a mile further down. So I was just swinging the big car round when what should happen but that the signal told me to stop, and, bringing to in a jiffy, I waited for his lordship to speak.

"Britten," says he, for I had told him my name half a dozen times already, "Britten, this is very important to me. I'll make it fifteen pounds if you do the job well. Just drive up to the lodge, and when the man opens, you say 'His lordship is very late to-night.' After that, you'll keep to the lower of two roads and come to another lodge. There, when you wake them up, you will say, 'His lordship is very early this morning,' and after that, drive away just as hard as the old car can take you. I'm in the mood to have some fun to-night, and whatever I do is no responsibility of yours, so don't you be troubled about it, my lad. I shall exonerate you if there's any tale; but there can't be one, for surely a man may drive through his own park when he has the mind to."

I said "Of course he had," for what else could I say? The further I got into this job the madder it appeared to be. Perhaps just because of its madness, I determined to see the end of it. After all, I had been ordered by my mistress to drive this gentleman, and whatever he might choose to do was no concern of mine. If I tell the whole truth, and say I thought him a lunatic with whom it would be dangerous to quarrel, well, there's no harm in that; for how many would have done different, and where's the blame? Lords go mad like other people, for all their coronets; and fine times they appear to have in that condition. I said Lord Crossborough was either daft or had some deep game going; and, with that to keep me up, I drove straight to the lodge gates, and bawled for them to let me in.

There was a long wait here, fifteen good minutes or more before a tousled-haired girl opened the little window of the cottage, and asked me what I wanted. When I told her to look sharp and not keep his lordship waiting, I do believe she laughed in my face.

"Why, he's not left the house for a month!" cries she. "Now don't tell me!"

"Oh, but I'm going to tell you—that and a lot more, if you don't hurry up. Don't you see that I've brought his lordship home?"

"Oh, dear me," says she, all flustered; "I'm sure I beg his lordship's pardon ——" and with that she came down like a shot and opened the gate. For my part I had nothing more to say to her, except the remark which Lord Crossborough had ordered me to make, and exclaiming, "His lordship is late to-night," I let the clutch in and started the car. A glance behind me showed me my passenger fast asleep, with the girl staring at him with all her eyes. But she said no more, and I drove on, and hadn't gone fifty yards before the signal was working again.

"Oh," says I, "then we've got no sort of dormouse up to be sure. Asleep and awake again all in five minutes"; but I slowed up the car as he directed, and immediately afterwards he called my attention to another party who shared the road with us, and was as curious as the girl. He was a policeman, and he had passed through the lodge gates right on our heels.

I don't know how it is, but if you are doing anything you have any doubt about at all, the sight of a policeman always gives you the creeps. I never see one, but I wonder if he has been timing me, or quarrelling with my number-

plates, or doing one or other of those things which policemen do, and we poor devils pay for.

This time I was right down afraid, and made no bones about it. The scene in Portman Square, the women's screams, the empty house, the black hangings, the talk concerning the duel, and his lordship's mysterious words about Captain Blackham never troubling him any more: they came upon me in a flash, and almost drove me silly. Not so my lord himself—I had never seen him calmer.

"Good-morning, constable," says he, "and what can I do for you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," says the man, dismounting as he spoke, "but there's a telegram from London about your house in Portman Square, and I came up to see if you know anything about it."

"Of course I do, constable—very good of you, though. Tell them it's all right, just a little party to some of my old friends. And here's a sovereign for you; call again later on if you have anything to say. I'm half asleep and dead tired."

He threw a sovereign out on to the grass, and the police sergeant picked it up sharp enough. I thought there was a kind of hesitation in his manner, but couldn't make much of it. Whatever he thought or wished to say, however, that he kept to himself, and after remarking that the morning would break fine, and that he was much obliged to his lordship, he mounted and rode away. This was the moment Lord Crossborough ceased to work the signal, and, opening the front window, spoke to me direct.

"Stop your engine," he says in a low voice, "and see you don't start it until that fellow is out of the park."

I thought it a strange order, but did as he wished. It was plain to me, as it would have been plain to any one, that he didn't wish the constable to see us take the lower road, and had thought out this trick to work his will. I am a pretty good hand myself at stopping my engine, and being unable to start her, especially when my master or mistress wants to get there in a hurry and doesn't consult my convenience. So I was down in a jiffy when his lordship spoke, and there I stood, pretending to swing the handle and to poke about inside the bonnet until the sergeant had turned the corner of the drive, and it was safe to go ahead again.

The second lodge lay perhaps the third of a mile from the place where we had

halted, and we must pass within a hundred yards of the house itself to get to it. I didn't need to be told not to sound my horn as we went by, and we were creeping along nicely when—and this was something which seemed to hit me in the very face—we came upon a man walking under the trees by the lake side, and he—believe me or not as you like—was the very living image of my passenger. "Good God!" says I, "then there are two of 'em," and in a very twinkling the whole nature of this night's business seemed clear to me.

A man just like his lordship, dressed in a tweed suit and with a thick stick in his hand—a man with a bushy black beard, a full round forehead, and the very walk and movement of the man I carried. What was I to make of him, what to think of it? Well, I can hardly tell you that, for, no sooner did we catch sight of the man than my passenger roared to me to go straight on, and, ducking down inside the landaulette, he hid himself as completely from sight as though he had been in the tool-box. For my part, remembering the old adage about "In for a penny in for a pound," I just let the Daimler fly, and we went down the drive and up to the lodge as fast as car ever travelled that particular road or will travel it whatever the circumstances.

"Gate," I roared, "gate, gate!" for the padlock was plain enough and a good stout chain about it. No one answered me for more than five minutes, I suppose, and no sooner did an old man appear, than I saw the stranger with his bushy black beard, his lordship's double, running down the drive for all he was worth, and bawling to the gate-keeper not to open.

A critical moment this, upon my word, and one to bring a man's heart into his mouth—the doddering old man tottering to the gate; the stranger running like a prize-winner; Lord Crossborough himself, doubled up in the bottom of the landaulette, and me sitting there with my foot on the clutch, my hand on the throttle, and my pulse going like one o'clock. Should we do it or should we not? Would it be shut or open? The question answered itself a moment later, when the lodge-keeper, not seeing the other fellow, half opened the iron gates and let my bonnet in between them. The car almost knocked him down as we raced through—I could hear him bawling "Stop!" even above the hum of the engine.

You will not have forgotten that his lordship had told me to go, hell for leather, directly I was through the gate, and right well I obeyed him. The lanes were narrow and twisty; there were morning mists blowing up from the fields; we passed more than one market cart, and nearly lost our wings. But I was out to

earn fifteen of the best, and right well I worked for them. Slap bang into Potter's Bar, slap bang out of it and round the bend towards Prickly Hill. I couldn't have driven faster if I had had the whole county police at my heels—and the Lord knows whether I had or not.

This brought us to Barnet in next to no time. We were still doing forty as we entered the town, and would have run out of it at twenty-five after we'd passed the church and the police station—would have, I say, but for one little fact, and that was a fat sergeant of police right in the middle of the road, with his hand held up like a leg of mutton, and a voice that might have been hailing a burglar.

"Here, you," he cried, as I drew up, "who have you got in that car?"

"Why," says I, "who should I have but somebody who has a right to be there? Ask his lordship for himself."

"His lordship—do you mean Lord Crossborough?"

I went to say "Yes," just as he opened the door. You shall judge what I thought of it when a glance behind me showed that the landaulette was empty.

"Now, who are you making game of?" cried the sergeant, throwing the door wide open. "There ain't no lordship in here. What do you mean by saying there was?"

"Well, he was there when I left Five Corners——"

"What! you've come from his house?"

"Straight away," says I, "and no calls. Ask him for yourself."

He could see that I was flabbergasted and telling him the truth. There was the landaulette as empty as a box of chocolates when the parlourmaid has done with them. How Lord Crossborough got out or where he had gone to when he did get out, I knew no more than the dead. One thing was plain—I was as clean sold as any greenhorn at any country fair. And I made no bones about telling the sergeant as much.

"He asked me to drive him down from town to his house at Five Corners. My mistress told me to take him, and I did. I was to have fifteen of the best for the

job—and here you see what I get. Oh, you bet I'm happy."

I spoke with some feeling, and you may be sure I felt pretty kind towards Lord Crossborough just then. To be kept up all night and run about like a "yellow breeches," to have my ears crammed with promises and my skin drenched with the mists, to find myself stranded in Barnet at the end. It was more than any man's temper could stand, and that I told the sergeant.

"Well," says I, "next time I meet him, I shall have something pretty strong to say to that same Lord Crossborough, and you may tell him so when you see him."

"See him—I wish we could see him. There's half the county police looking for him this minute. Oh, we'd like to see him all right, and a few others as well. Now, you come down to the station and tell us all about it. There'll be a cup of hot coffee there, and I daresay you won't mind that."

I said that I wouldn't, and went along with him. An inspector at the station took my story down from the time I set off from the Carlton to the moment I quitted Five Corners. What he wanted it for, what Lord Crossborough had done, or what he was going to do, they didn't tell me, nor did I care. But they gave me a jolly good breakfast before they sent me off, and that was about the best thing I had had for twelve long hours. It was eleven o'clock when I got back to town at last. And at three o'clock precisely I saw my mistress again.

You will readily imagine that I was glad of this interview, and had been looking forward to it anxiously from the time I drove the car into the stable until the moment it came off. Miss Dartel had a flat in Bayswater just then; but she didn't send for me there, and it was at the theatre I saw her, in her own dressing-room between the acts of a rehearsal. A clean-shaven gentleman was talking to her when I went in, and for a little while I didn't recognise him; but presently he turned round, and something in his manner and tone of voice caused me to look up sharp enough.

"Why," says I, "his lordship!"

They both laughed at this, and Miss Dartel held up her finger.

"Whatever are you saying, Britten?" cried she. "That's Mr. Jermyn, of the Hicks Theatre."

"Jermyn or French," says I, my temper getting up, "he's the man I drove to Five Corners last night—and fifteen pounds he owes me, neither more nor less."

Well, they both laughed again, and the gentleman, he took a pocket-book from the inside pocket of his coat and laid three five-pound notes on the table. While they were there, Miss Dartel puts her pretty fingers upon them, and begins to speak quite confidentially—

"Britten," says she, "there's fifteen pounds. I daresay it would be fifty if you had a very bad memory, Britten, and couldn't recognise the gentleman you picked up last night. Now, do you think you have such a bad memory as all that?"

I twigged it in a minute, and answered them quite honestly.

"I must know more or less, madame," says I. "Remember my interests are not this gentleman's interests."

"Oh, that's quite fair, Britten, though naturally, we know nothing. But they do say that poor Lord Crossborough has gone quite silly about the rural life. He's been reading Tolstoy's books, and wants to live upon a shilling a day; while poor Lady Crossborough, who knows my cousin, Captain Blackham, very well, she's bored to death, and it will kill her if it goes on. So, you see, she persuaded his lordship to give that funny party at his old house in Portman Square last night, and all the papers are laughing at it to-day, and he'll be chaffed out of his life. I'm sure Lady Crossborough will get her way now, Britten; and when the police hear it was only an eccentricity upon his lordship's part, they won't say anything. Now, do you think that you would be able to swear that the man you drove last night was very like Lord Crossborough? If so, it would be lucky, and I'm sure her ladyship will give you fifty pounds."

I thought about it a minute, rolling up the notes and putting them into my pocket. Of course I could swear as she wanted me to. And fifty of the best. Good Lord, what a temptation!

But I'll tell you straight that I got the fifty, and never swore nothing at all. The party was a job put up by Lady Crossborough. The man I drove was Mr. Jermyn, of the Hicks Theatre, and the world and the newspapers laughed so loud at his lordship, who never convinced anybody he hadn't done it, that he went off to India in a hurry, and never came back for twelve months. Which proves to me

that honesty is the best policy, as I shall always declare.

And one thing more—where did Mr. Jermyn get out of my car? Why, just as I slowed up for the corner by the church at Barnet—not a hundred yards from where the constable stopped me. A clever actor—why, yes, he is that.

[1] The Editor has left Mr. Britten to speak for himself in his own manner when that seems characteristic of his employment.

[2]] Mr. Britten's spelling of Quat'z-Arts is eccentric.

II

THE SILVER WEDDING

Yes, I shall never forget "Benny," and I shall never forget his beautiful red hair. Gentlemen, I have driven for many ... and the other sort, but "Benny" was neither the one nor the other—not a man, but a tribe ... not a Jew nor yet a Christian, but just something you meet every day and all days—a big, blundering heap of good-nature, which quarrels with one half the world and takes Bass's beer with the other. That was Benjamin Colmacher—"Benny" for short—that was the master I want to tell you about.

I was out of a job at the time, and had picked up an endorsement at Hayward's Heath and left a matter of six pounds there for the justices to get busy with. Time is money, they say, and I have found it to be so ... generally five pounds and costs, though more if you take a quantity. It isn't easy for a good man with a road mechanic's knowledge and five years' experience, racing and otherwise, to place himself nowadays, when any groom can get made a slap-bang "shuffer" for five pounds at a murder-shop, and any old coachman is young enough to put his guv'nor in the ditch. My knowledge and my experience had gone begging for exactly three months when I heard of Benny, and hurried round to his flat off Russell Square, "just the chap for you," they said at the garage. I

thought so, too, when I saw him.

It was a fine flat, upon my word, and filled up with enough fal-de-lals to please a duchess from the Gaiety. Benny himself, his red hair combed flat on his head and oiled like a missing commutator, wore a Japanese silk dressing-gown which would have fired a steam car. His breakfast, I observed, consisted of one brandy-and-soda and a bunch of grapes; but the cigar he offered me was as long as a policeman's boot, and the fellow to it stuck out of a mouth as full of fine white teeth as a pod of peas.

"Good-morning," says he, nodding affably enough; and then, "You are Lionel Britten, I suppose?"

"Yes," says I—for no road mechanic who respects himself is going to "sir" such as Benny Colmacher to begin with—"that's my name, though my friends call me Lal for short. You're wanting a driver, I hear."

He sat himself in a great armchair and looked me up and down as a vet looks at a horse.

"I do want a driver," says he, "though how you got to know it, the Lord knows."

"Why," says I, "that's funny, isn't it? We're both wanting the same thing, for I can see you're just the gentleman I would like to take on with."

He smiled at this, and seemed to be thinking about it. Presently he asked a plain question. I answered him as shortly.

"Where did you hear of me?" he asked.

"At Blundell's garage," I answered.

"And I was buying a car?"

"Yes, a fifty-seven Daimler ... that was the talk."

"Could you drive a car like that?"

"Could I—oh, my godfathers——"

"Then you have handled fast cars?"

"I drove with Fournier in the Paris-Bordeaux, was through the Florio for the Fiat people, and have driven the big Delahaye just upon a hundred and three miles an hour. Read my papers, sir ... they'll show you what I've done."

I put a bundle into his hand, and he read a few words of them. When next he looked at me, there was something in his eyes which surprised me considerably. Some would have called it cunning, some curiosity; I didn't know what to make of it.

"Why would you like to drive for me?" he asked presently.

"Because," said I, quickly enough, "it's plain that you're a gentleman anybody would like to drive for."

"But you don't know anything at all about me."

"That's just it, sir. The nicest people are those we don't know anything at all about."

He laughed loudly at this, and helped himself to the brandy-and-soda, but didn't drink over-much of it. I could see that he was much relieved, and he spoke afterwards with more freedom.

"You're one that knows how to hold his tongue?" he suggested. I rejoined that, so far as tongues went, I had mine in a four-inch vice.

"Especially where the ladies are concerned?"

"I'd sooner talk to them than about them, sir."

"That's right, that's right. Don't take the maid when you can get the mistress, eh?"

"Take 'em both for choice, that's my motto."

"You're not married, Britten?"

"No such misfortune has overtaken me, sir."

"Ha!"—here he leered just like an actor at the Vic—"and you don't mind driving at night?"

"I much prefer it, sir."

He leered again, and seemed mightily pleased. A few more questions put and answered found me with that job right enough ... and a right good job, too, as things are nowadays. I was to have four pounds a week and liveries. Such a mug as "Benny" Colmacher would not be the man to ask about tyres and petrol, and if he did, I knew how to fill up his tanks for him. Be sure I went away on my top speed and ate a better lunch than had come my way for six months or more. Who the man was, or what he was, I didn't care a dump. I had got the job, and to-morrow I would get up in the driver's seat of a car again. You can't wonder I was pleased.

I slept well that night, and was round at Benny's early on the following morning. If I had been surprised at my good luck yesterday, surprise was no word for what I felt when the valet opened the door to me and told me that Mr. Colmacher was in the country and wouldn't be back for a month. Not a word had been said about this, mind you—not a hint at it; and yet the stiff and starched gentleman could tell me the news just as coolly as though he had said, "My master has gone across the street to see a friend." When I asked him if there was no message for me, he answered simply, "None."

"He didn't give no instructions about the car?"

"The car is at the yard being repaired."

"But I was engaged to drive her——"

"You will drive Mr. Colmacher when he returns."

"And my wages——?"

"Oh, those will be paid. This is a place where they know what is due to us."

"And I am to do nothing meanwhile?"

"If you have nothing to do, by all means."

It was an odd thing to hear, to be sure, and you can well understand my hesitation as I stood there on the landing and watched that stiff and starched valet, who might have just come out of a tailor's shop. Gentlemen are not usually reserved between themselves, but this fellow beat me altogether, and I liked him but little. Such a "don't-touch-me-or-I-shall-vanish" manner you don't come across often even in Park Lane, and I soon saw that whatever else happened, Joseph, the valet, as they called him, and Lal Britten, the "shuffer," were never going to the North Pole together.

"If it's doing nothing," said I at last, "Mr. Colmacher won't have cause to complain of his driver. Am I to call again, or will he send for me?"

"He will send for you, unless you like to see Mr. Walter in the meantime?"

I looked up at this. There had been no "Mr. Walter" in the business before.

"Mr. Walter—and who may Mr. Walter be?"

"He is Mr. Colmacher's son."

"Then I will see him just as soon as you like."

He nodded his head and invited me in. Presently I found myself in a fine bedroom on the far side of the flat, and what was my astonishment to discover Mr. Walter himself in bed with a big cut across his forehead and his right arm in a sling. He was a lean, pale youth, but with as cadaverous a face as I have ever looked upon; and when he spoke his voice appeared to come from the back of his head.

"You are the new driver my father has engaged?"

"Yes, sir, I am the same."

"I hope you understand powerful cars. Did my father tell you that ours is a steam car?"

"He talked about a fifty-seven Daimler, sir."

"But you have had experience with steam cars——"

"How did you know that, sir?"

He smiled softly.

"We have made inquiries—naturally, we should do so."

"Then you have not been misinformed. I drove a thirty-horse White three months last year."

"Ah, the same car that we drive. Unfortunately, I cannot help my father just now, for I have met with an accident—in the hunting field."

I jibbed at this. Motor-men don't know much about the hunting field, as a rule, but I wasn't such a ninny that I supposed men hunted in July.

"Hunting, did you say, sir?"

"That is, trying a horse for the hunting season. Well, you may go now. Leave your address with Joseph. My father will send for you when he returns, and meanwhile you are at liberty."

I thanked him and went off. Oddly enough, this fellow pleased me no more than the valet. His smile was ugly, his scowl uglier still—especially when I made that remark about the hunting field. "Better have held your tongue, Lal, my boy," said I to myself; and resolving to hold it for the future, I went to my own diggings and heard no more of the Colmachers, father or son, for exactly twenty-one days. The morning of the twenty-second found me at the flat again. "Benny" Colmacher had returned, and remembered that he had paid me three weeks' wages.

Now this was the middle of the month of August, and "Benny" certainly was dressed for country wear. A dot-and-go-one suit of dittoes went for best, so to speak, with his curly red hair, and got the better of it by a long way. He had a white rose in his button-hole, and his manner was as smooth as Vacuum B from a nice clean can. He had just breakfasted off his usual brandy-and-soda and dry toast when I came in; and the big cigar did sentry-go across his mouth all the time he talked to me.

"Come in, come in, Britten," he cried pompously, when I appeared. "You like your place, I hope—you don't find the work too hard?"

"That's so—sir—a very nice sort of place this for a delicate young man like myself."

"Ah, but we are going to be a little busier. Has Mr. Walter shown you the car?"

"No, sir, not yet. I hear she is a White steamer, though."

"Yes, yes; I like steam cars; they don't shake me up. When a man weighs fifteen stun, he doesn't like to be shaken up, Britten—not good for his digestion, eh? Well, you go down to the Bedford Mews, No. 23B, and tell me if you can get the thing going by ten o'clock to-morrow—as far as Watford, Britten. That's the place, Watford. I've something on down there—something very important. Upon my soul, I don't know why I shouldn't tell you. It's about a lady, Britten—ha, ha! —about a lady."

Well, he grinned all over his face just like the laughing gorilla at the Zoo, and went on grinning for a matter of two minutes or more. Such a laugh caught you whether you would or no; and while I didn't care two-pence about his business, and less about the lady, yet here I was laughing as loudly as he, and seemingly just as pleased.

"Is it a young lady?" I ventured to ask presently. But he stopped laughing at that, and looked mighty serious.

"You mustn't question me, my lad," he said, a bit proudly. "I like my servants to be in my confidence, but they must not beg it. We are going down to Watford —that is enough for you. Get the car ready as soon as possible, and let me know at once if there is anything the matter with her."

I promised to do so, and went round to the mews immediately. "Benny" seemed to me just a good-natured lovesick old fool, who had got hold of some new girl in the country and was going off to spoon her. The car I found to be one of the latest forty White's in tip-top trim. She steamed at once, and when I had put a new heater in, there was nothing more to be done to her, except to wash her down, a thing no self-respecting mechanic will ever do if he can get another to take the job on for him. So I hired a loafer who was hanging about the mews, and set him to the work while I read the papers and smoked a cigarette.

He was a playful little cuss to be sure, one of those "ne'er-grow-ups" you

meet about stables, and ready enough to gossip when I gave him the chance.

"He's a wonder, is Colmacher," he remarked as he splashed and hissed about the wheels. "Takes his car out half a dozen times in as many hours, and then never rides in her for three months. You would be engaged in place of Mr. Walter, I suppose. They say he's gone to America, though I don't rightly know whether that's true or not."

I answered him without looking up from my paper.

"Who says he's in America?"

"Why, the servants say it. Ellen the housemaid and me—but that ain't for the newspapers. So Mr. Walter's home, is he? Well, he do walk about, to be sure, and him not left for New York ten days ago."

"You seem to be angry about it, my boy."

"Well no, it ain't nothing to me, to be sure, though I must say as Benny's one after my own heart. The girls he do know, and mostly after 'em when the sun's gone down. Would it be the young lady at Bristol this time, or another? He wus took right bad down in Wiltshire larst time I heard of 'im, but perhaps he's cured hisself drinking of the waters. Anyway, it ain't nothing to me, for I'm off to Margate to-morrow."

He waited for me to speak, but seeing that I was bent on reading my paper, made no further remark until his job was done. When next I saw him it was at eleven o'clock on the following day, just as I was driving the car round to "Benny's" to take the old boy down to Watford as he wished. Jumping on the step, the lad put a funny question:

"You're a good sort," he said. "Will you forward this bit of a telegram to me from any place you chance to stop at to-night?"

"Why, what's up now?" I asked.

"Nothing much, but my old uncle won't let me go, and I want to take Ellen to Margate for the day. This telegram says mother's ill and wants me. Will you send it through and put in the name of the place where you stop to-night?"

I said that I would, and sticking the sixpence inside my glove and the form into my pocket, I thought no more about it, and drove straight away to Benny's. The old boy was dressed fit to marry the whole Gaiety ballet, white frock suit, white hat, and a rose as big as a full-blown tomato in his button-hole. To the valet he gave his directions in a voice that could have been heard half down the street. He was going to Watford, and would return in a week.

"Mind," he cried, "I'm staying at the King's Arms, and you can send my letters down there." Then he waved his hand to me, and we set off. The road to Watford via Edgware is traps from end to end, and, well as the White was going, I did not dare to let her out. It was just after half-past eleven when we left town, and about a quarter to one when we dropped down the hill into Watford town. Here "Benny" leant over and spoke to me.

"Shan't lunch here," he cried, as though the idea had come to him suddenly; "get on to St. Albans or to Hatfield if you like. The Red Lion will do me—drive on there and don't hurry."

I made no answer, but drove quietly through the town, and so by the old high road to St. Albans and thence to Hatfield. Truth to tell, the car interested me far more than old Benny or his plans. She was steaming beautifully, and I had six hundred pounds' pressure all the time. While that was so I didn't care the turn of a nut whether old Benny lunched at Watford or at Edinburgh, and as for his adventure with the girl—well, you couldn't expect me to go talking about another man's good luck. In fact, I had forgotten all about it long before we were at Hatfield, and when we had lunched and the old chap suddenly remembered that he would like to spend the night at Newmarket, I was not so surprised—for this is the motorist's habit all the world over, and there's the wonder of the motor-car, that, whether you wish to sleep where you are or a hundred miles distant, she'll do the business for you and make no complaint about it.

Perhaps you will say that I ought to have been surprised, ought to have guessed that this man was up to no good and turned back to the nearest police station. It's easy to be a prophet after the event; and between what a man ought to do and what he does do on any given occasion, there is often a pretty considerable margin when it comes to the facts. I drove Benny willingly, not thinking anything at all about the matter. When he stopped in the town of Royston and said he would take a cup of tea with a cork to it, I thought it just the sort of thing such a man would do. And I was ready myself for a cigarette and a

stroll round—for sitting all that time in the car makes a man's legs stiff, and no mistake about it. But I wasn't away more than ten minutes, and when I got back to the hotel "Benny" was already fuming at the door.

"Where have you been to?" he asked in a voice unlike his own—the voice of a man who knows "what's what" and will see that he gets it. "Why weren't you with the car?"

"Been to the telegraph office," said I quietly, for no bluster is going to unship me—not much.

"Telegraph office!" and here his face went white as a sheet, "what the devil did you go there for?"

"What people usually go for, sir—to send a telegram."

We looked each other full in the face for a moment, and I could see he was sorry he had spoken.

"I suppose you wanted to let your friends know," he put it to me. I said it was just that—for such was the shortest way out of it.

"Then get the car out at once and keep to the Newmarket Road. I shall sleep at the Randolph Arms to-night."

I made no answer and we got away again. But, for all that, I thought a lot, and all the time the White was flying along that fine bit of road, I was asking myself why Benny turned pale when he heard I had sent a telegram. Was this business with the girl, then, something which might bring trouble on us both? Was he the man he represented himself to be? Those were the questions I could not answer, and they were still in my head when we reached the village of Whittlesford and Benny suddenly ordered me to stop.

"This looks a likely inn," he said, pointing to a pretty little house on the right-hand side of the road; "I think we might stop the night here, lad. They'll give us a good bed and a good glass of whisky, anyway, and what does a man want more? Run the car into the yard and wait while I talk to them. You won't die if we don't get to Newmarket to-night, I suppose?"

I said that it was all one to me, and put the car into the yard. The inn was a

beauty, and I liked the look of it. Perhaps Benny's new manner disarmed me; he was as mild as milk just then, and as affable as a commercial with a sample in his bag. When he appeared again he had the landlord with him, and he told me he was going to stop.

"Get a good dinner into you, lad, and then come and talk to me," he said, putting a great paw on my shoulder, and leering apishly. "We mayn't go to bed to-night, after all, for, to tell you the truth, I don't like the colour of their sheets. You wouldn't mind sitting up, I daresay, not supposing—well, that there was a ten-pound note hanging to it?"

I opened my eyes at this.

"A ten-pound note, sir?"

"Yes, for robbing you of your bed. Didn't you tell me you were a wonder at night driving. Well, I want to see what stuff you're made of."

I did not answer him, and, after talking a lot about my cleverness and the way the car had run, he went in and had his dinner. What to make of him or his proposal I knew no more than the dead. Certainly he had done nothing which gave me any title to judge him, and a man with a job to serve isn't over-ready to be nice about his masters, whatever their doings. I came to the conclusion that he was just a dotty old boy who had gone crazy over some girl, and that he was driving out by night to see her. All the talk about Watford and his letters was so much jibarree and not meant for home consumption; but, in any case, it was no affair of mine, nor could I be held responsible for what he did or what he left undone.

This was the wisest view to take, and it helped me out afterwards. He made a good dinner, they told me, and drank a fine bottle of port, kept in the cellars of the house from the old days when gentlemen drove themselves to Newmarket, and didn't spare the liquor by the way. It was half-past ten when I saw him again, and then he had one of the roly-poly cigars in his mouth and the ten-pound note in his hand.

"Britten," he said quite plain, "you know why I've come down here?"

"I think so, sir."

"*Chercher les femmes*, as they say in Boolong—I'm down here to meet the girl I'm going to marry."

"Hope you'll find her well, sir."

"Ah, that's just it. I shan't find her well if her old father can help it. Damn him, he's nearly killed her with his oaths and swearing these last two months. But it's going to stop, Britten, and stop to-night. She's waiting for this car over at Fawley Hill, which isn't half a mile from this very door."

He came a step nearer and thrust the ten-pound note under my very nose. "It's Lord Hailsham's place—straight up the hill to the right and on to the high road from Bishop's Stortford. There's a party for a silver wedding, and Miss Davenport is staying there with her father and mother. Bring her to this house and I'll give you fifty pounds. There's ten as earnest money. She's over age and can do what she likes—and it's no responsibility of yours, anyway."

I took the note in my hand and put a question.

"Do I drive to the front door—I'm thinking not?"

"You drive to the edge of the spinney which you'll find directly you turn the corner. Wait there until Miss Davenport comes. Then drive her straight here and your money is earned. I'll answer for the rest and she shall answer for herself."

I nodded my head, and, folding up the note, I put it in my pocket. The night was clear when I drove away from the inn, but there was some mist in the fields and a goodish bit about the spinney they had pointed out to me. A child could have found the road, however, for it was just the highway to Newmarket; and when I had cruised along it a couple of hundred yards, to the very gates of Lord Hailsham's house, I turned about and stood off at the spinney's edge, perhaps three hundred yards away. Then I just lighted a cigarette and waited, as I had been told to do.

It was a funny job, upon my word. Sometimes I laughed when I thought about it; sometimes I had a bit of a shiver down my back, the sort of thing which comes to a man who's engaged in a rum affair, and may not come well out of it. As for the party Lord Hailsham was giving, there could be no doubt about that. I had seen the whole house lighted up from attic to kitchen, and some of the lights were still glistening between the pollards in the spinny; while the stables

themselves seemed alive with coachmen, carriages, and motor-cars. The road itself was the only secluded spot you could have pointed out for the third of a mile about—but that was without a living thing upon it, and nothing but a postman's cart passed me for an hour or more.

I should have told you that I had turned the car and that she now stood with her headlights towards home. The mists made the night very cold, and I was glad to wrap myself up in one of the guvnor's rugs and smoke a packet of cigarettes while I waited. From time to time I could hear the music of fiddles, and they came with an odd echo, just as though some merry tune of long ago chided me for being there all alone. When they ceased I must have dropped asleep, for the next thing I knew was that some one was busy about the car and that my head-lamps had both gone out. Be sure I jumped up like a shot at this, and "Hallo," cried I, "what the devil do you think you are doing?" Then I saw my mistake. The new-comer was a girl, one of the maids of the house, it appeared, and she was stowing luggage into the car.

"Oh," says I, "then Miss Davenport is coming, is she?"

The girl went on with her work, hardly looking at me. When she did speak I thought her voice sounded very odd; and instead of answering me she asked a question:

"Do you know the road to Colchester?"

"To Colchester?"

"You take the first to the left when we leave here—then go right ahead until I tell you to stop. Understand, whatever happens you are to get ahead as fast as you can. The rest is with——"

He came to an abrupt halt, and no wonder. If you had given me ten thousand pounds to have kept my tongue still, I would have lost the money that instant. For who do you think the maid was? Why, no other than the starchy valet, Joseph, I had seen at Mr. Colmacher's flat.

"Up you get, my boy," he cried, throwing all disguise to the winds, "Don't you hear that noise? They have discovered Miss Davenport is going and the job's off. We'll tell Benny in the morning—the thing to do to-night is to show them our heels and sharp about it."

He bade me listen, and I heard the ringing of an alarm bell, the barking of hounds, and then the sound of many voices. Some suspicion, ay, more than that, a pretty shrewd guess at the truth was possible then, and I would have laid any man ten pounds to nothing that "love" was not much in this business, whatever the real nature of it might be. For that matter, the fellow had hardly got the words out of his mouth when the glitter of something bright he had dropped on the ground, caused me to stoop and to pick up a gold watch bracelet set in diamonds. The same instant I heard a man running on the road behind me, and who should come up but the very "ne'er-do-well" who helped me to wash down my car but yesterday morning.

"Hold that man!" he cried, throwing himself at the valet. "He's Marchant, the Yankee hotel robber—hold him in the King's name—I'm a police officer, and I have a warrant."

Now, this was something if you like, and I don't think any one is going to wonder either at my surprise, or at the hesitation which overtook me. To find myself, in this way, confronted by two men who had seemed so different from what they were, and that not twenty-four hours ago; to discover one of them disguised as a woman and the other saying he was a police officer—well, do you blame me for standing there with my mouth wide open, and my eyes staring with the surprise of it? Pity I did so, all the same, for the "ne'er-do-well" was on the floor next moment, and it didn't need a second look to tell me that it would be a long time before he got up again.

I shall never forget if I live a hundred years (which would be pretty lucky for a man who thinks less than nothing of speed limits and is known to all the justices in Sussex), I shall never forget the way that valet turned on poor Kennaway (for that was the detective's name) and laid him flat on the grass. Such a snarl of rage I never heard. The man seemed transformed in an instant from a silent, reserved, taciturn servant to a very maniac, fighting with teeth and claw, cursing and swearing horribly, and as strong as a gorilla.

Again and again he struck at his victim, the heavy blows sounding like the thud of iron upon a carpet; and long before I got my wits back and leaped to Kennaway's assistance, that poor fellow was insensible and moaning upon the grass at the roadside. The next thing that I knew about it was that I had a revolver as close to my forehead as a revolver will ever be, and that the man Joseph was pushing me toward the car, the while he said something to which I

must listen if I would save my life.

"Get up, you fool," he cried. "Do you want me to treat you as I've treated him? Get up, or by the Lord I'll blow your brains out!"

Well, judge me for it how you will, but I obeyed him as any child. What I had tried to do for poor Kennaway was shown by the cut across my forehead, which I shall carry to my dying day. Such strength and such temper I have never known in any man, and they frightened me beyond all words to tell you. There are human beings and human animals, and this fellow was of the latter sort. No raving maniac could have done worse to any fellow creature; and when I got up to the driver's seat and started the engine, my hands trembled so that I could hardly keep them on the wheel.

We jumped away, a roar of voices behind us and the alarm bell of the house still ringing. What was in my head was chiefly this, that I was going out upon the road with this madman for a companion, and that sooner or later he would make an end of me. Judge of my position, knowing, as I did, that a murderer sat in the tonneau behind, and that he held a revolver at full cock in his hand. My God! it was an awful journey, the most awful I shall ever make.

He would kill me when it suited him to do it. I was as sure of it as of my own existence. In one mile or twenty, here in the lanes of Cambridgeshire, or over yonder when we drew near to the sea, this madman would do the business. More fearful than any danger a man can face was this peril at the back of me. I listened for a word or sound from him; I tried to look behind me and see what he was doing. He never made a movement, and for miles we roared along that silent road, through the mists and the darkness to the unknown goal—a murderer and his victim, as I surely believed myself to be.

There is many a man who has the nerve for a sudden call, but few who can stand a trial long sustained. All that I can tell you of what fear is like, the fear of swift death, and of the pain and torture of it, would convey nothing to you of my sensations during that mad drive. Sometimes I could almost have wished that he would make an end of it then and there, shooting me in mercy where I sat, and sparing me the agony of uncertainty. But mile after mile we went without a sound from him; and when, in sheer despair, I slowed down and asked him a direction, he was on me like a tiger, and I must race again for very life. Through Haverhill, thence to Sibil Ingham and Halstead—ay, until the very spires of

Colchester stood out in the dawn light, that race went on. And I began to say that he might spare me after all, that I was necessary to him, and that his destination was Harwich and the morning steamer to Holland. Fool! it was then he fired at me, then that the end came.

I thought that I heard him move; some instinct—for there is an instinct in these things, let others say what they please—caused me to turn half about, and detect him standing in the tonneau. No time for prudence then, no time for resolution or anything but that fear of death which paralyses the limbs and seems to still the very heart. With a cry that was awful to hear, he fired his pistol, and I heard the report of it as thunder in my ear, the while the powder burned my face as the touch of red-hot iron. But a second shot he never fired. A sudden lurch, as I let go the wheel, sent the car bounding on to the grass at the road-side, threw the murderer off his balance and hurled him backwards. There was a tremendous crash, I found myself beneath the tonneau, and then, as it seemed, on the top of it again. At last I went rolling over and over on to the grass, and lay there, God knows how long, in very awe and terror of all that had overtaken me.

But the valet himself was stone dead, caught by the neck as the car went over and crushed almost beyond recognition. And that was the judgment upon him, as I shall believe to my life's end.

They never caught old "Benny," not for that job, at any rate. He turned out to be the head of a swindling crew, known in America and Paris as the "Red Poll" gang, because of his beautiful sandy hair. He must have been wanted for fifty jobs in Europe, and as many on the other side. As for his supposed son, Mr. Walter, and the valet Marchant, they were but two of the company. And why they came to engage me was because of a motor accident to the man Walter, which put him out of the running when the burglary job at Lord Hailsham's was to be undertaken.

Kennaway, the detective, was three months in hospital after his little lot. It was clever of him to make me post a telegram on the road, for, directly he got it, he wired to the Chief Constable at Cambridge, and came on himself by train. The local police furnished a list of all the house-parties being held about Royston that week-end, and, of course, as Lord Hailsham was celebrating his silver wedding, it didn't need much wit to send Kennaway there; the valet, meanwhile, being already in the house, disguised as a maid.

We were to have had a bit of a silver wedding ourselves, it appears, for I doubt not "Benny" would have led all the silver, to say nothing of the gold and precious stones, to the altar as soon as possible. But the best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley, as do motor-cars when the man who's driving them has a pistol at his head.

III

IN ACCOUNT WITH DOLLY ST. JOHN

My old father used to say that "woman's looks were his only books and folly was all they taught him," which shows, I suppose, that what he knew about the sex he learned from a circulating library.

Anyway, he never drove a motor-car, or he would have written in another strain. Sometimes I pick up a piece in the newspapers about women and then I laugh to myself, thinking how many mugs there are in the world and how they were born for the other sex to make game of. Let 'em get on the driver's seat and take madam round an afternoon or two. There won't be much talk about gentle shepherdesses after that, I'll wager—though if a crook or two don't get into the story I'm Dutchman.

Well, you must know that this is about Dolly St. John—a little American girl, who hired a car from the Empire Company when I was one of its drivers, and had a pretty little game with us. I used to go for her every afternoon to some hotel or the other, and always a different one, she not being domesticated, so to speak, and never caring to overstay her welcome.

A daintier little body was never fitted upon a chassis. There are some who like them fair, and some who like them dark—but Dolly St. John was betwixt and between, neither the one nor the other, but a type that gets there every time, and turns twenty heads when a policeman stops you at a crossing.

It's very natural that young women should like to talk to their drivers; and, if

the truth were told, some of them will tell us things they would never speak of, no, not to their own husbands, if they've got any. Dolly was one of these, and a more talkative little body never existed. I knew her history the very first afternoon I took her round; and by the third, I could have told you that she had met the Hon. John Sarand, and meant to marry him, even if his old father, Lord Badington, had to go on the halls in consequence.

I had driven Dolly about three weeks, if I remember rightly, when our people first began to get uneasy. It was all very well for her to talk about her uncle, Nathaniel St. John, of New York City, who made a hundred thousand dollars a day by blowing bubbles through a telephone; but her bill for seventy-five sixteen and four remained unpaid, and when Hook-Nosed Moss, our manager, asked her for it, all he got was a cigarette out of a bon-bon box, and an intimation that if he came on a similar errand again, she'd write to the papers about it. Had she not been a born little actress, who could have earned twenty a week on any stage in London, the man would have closed the deal on the spot, and left it to the lawyers. But she just tickled him like a carburettor, and he went home to say that the money was better than Consols, and the firm making a fool of itself.

I drove her for another week after this, chiefly to the theatre with the Honorary John, and to supper afterwards. She had a wonderful mania for shopping, and used to spend hours in Regent Street, while I read the *Auto-Car* outside, and fell to asking myself how long it would last. You don't deceive the man who drives the car—be sure of it. Either she led the Honorary John to the financial altar, or her poor uncle would be on the Rocky Mountains—I hadn't a doubt of it.

I liked her, that goes without saying. A man's a fool who tells you that a pretty woman's charm is less because her bankers are wondering how they shall get the cheque-book back, and the tradesman round the corner is blotting his ledger with tears. In a way I was in love with Miss Dolly, and would have married her myself upon any provocation; but before I could make up my mind to it either way, she'd gone like a flash, and half the bill collectors in London after her. This I learned during the week following the disappearance. She sent for me one day to pick her up at Joran's Hotel, and when I got there, and the hotel porter had handed out two rugs and a Pomeranian, down comes the chambermaid to say madam had not returned since eleven o'clock. And then I knew by some good instinct that the game was up—and, handing the Pomeranian back, I said, "Be good to him, for he's an orphan."

This was a surmise—a surmise and nothing more; and yet how true it proved! I had a 'tec with me on the following afternoon, and a pretty tale he had to tell. Not, mind you, as he himself declared, that Dolly was really dishonest. She had left a few bills behind her; but where is the woman who does not do that, and who would think the better of her if she didn't? Dolly wasn't a thief by a long way—but her shopping mania was wild enough to be written about, and she bought thousands of pounds' worth of goods in London, just for the mere pleasure of ordering them and nothing more.

I often laugh when I think how she fooled the tradesmen in Bond Street and the West End. Just imagine them bowing and scraping when she told 'em to send home a thousand-pound tiara, or a two-hundred-guinea white fox, and promised they should be paid on delivery. Why, they strewed her path with bows and smiles—and when they sent home the goods to a flat by Regent's Park—an address she always gave—they found it empty and no one there to take delivery. No more bows and smiles after that; but what could they do, and what offence had she committed? That was just what the 'tec asked me, and I could not answer.

"We know most of 'em," he said, "but she's a right-down finger-print from the backwoods. Nathaniel St. John cables from New York that he doesn't know her, but will be pleased to make her acquaintance, if we'll frank her over. I tell these people they can sue her—but, man, you might as well sue the statue of Oliver Cromwell——"

"He being stony-broke likewise," said I. "Well, she had a run for her money, and here's good luck to her. I hope that I haven't seen her for the last time."

"If you have," says he, "put me in Madame Tussaud's. When next you hear of Dolly St. John it will be in something big. Remember that when the day comes."

I told him I would not forget it, and we parted upon it. Dolly was a pretty bit of goods for a tea-party, but a driver sees too many faces to keep one over-long in his memory, and I will say straight out, that I had forgotten her very name when next I saw her, and was just about the most astonished man inside the four-mile radius when I picked her up one fine afternoon at a West End hotel, and she told me we were going to drive into the country together.

"But," says I, "this car has been hired by Miss Phyllis More——"

"Oh, you stupid man!" cried she. "Don't you see that I am Miss Phyllis More? I thought you were clever enough to understand that ladies change their names sometimes, Britten. Now, why shouldn't I be Phyllis More if I wish to? Are you going to be unkind enough to tell people about it? I'm sure you are not, for you were so very good to me when last I was in England."

Now all this took place in her private room, to which I had been sent up by the porter. Three months had passed since I drove Dolly and the Honorary John, but not a whit had she changed; and I found her just the same seductive little witch with the dimples and the curly brown hair, who had played the deuce with the West End tradesmen last Christmas-time. Beautifully dressed in green, with a pretty motor veil, she was a picture I must say; and when I looked at her and remembered Hook-Nosed Moss, our traffic manager at the Empire Company, and how he docked me four and nine last Saturday, I swore I'd take her; yes, if she ordered me to drive through to San Francisco.

"I don't suppose I ought to do it, miss," I said, "unless your uncle in New York has left you anything——"

"Oh," she burst out, laughing as she said it, "he's dead, Britten; besides, I don't want any uncles now, for I shall marry Mr. Sarand directly Lord Badington gives his consent—and that won't be long, for we are going down to his house to-night to get it."

I told her frankly that I was glad to hear it, and that I thought Mr. Sarand a very lucky gentleman. What's more, I believed her story, and I knew that if this marriage came off, there would not be much trouble about my firm's seventy-five, and that half the tradesmen in London would be running after Dolly again inside a week. So I made up my mind to do it, and, sending a wire back to the yard, telling them that the lady wanted the car for two or three days, and explaining to her that I must buy myself some luggage as she went—for I do like a clean collar of evenings—I was ready for Miss Phyllis More, and not at all displeased with the venture.

"She'd been hard put to it to keep going in London, while John did the courting," said I to myself, "and that's what caused her to change her name. If she doesn't catch him, we're another twenty-five down, and Moss will have to turn Jew. Well, I can get plenty of jobs as good as his, and there aren't many Dolly St. Johns in the world, all said and done. I'll risk it, and take my gruelling

afterwards. What's more, if Mr. John's papa don't come up to the scratch, I'll put a word in for myself. It would make a line in the newspapers anyway, and who knows but what we mightn't both get engaged at the halls?"

Of course, this was only my way of putting it; but I really was pleased to be driving such a pretty girl again; and when her old cane trunk came down, and we fixed it on to the grid behind, and half a dozen hat-boxes littered up the back seats, I felt that old times had come again, and that I was one of the luckiest drivers in the country.

"How far are we going, miss?" I asked her when all was ready.

"To Lord Badington's house—near Sandwich in Kent."

"It's a longish run, and we shan't get there before dark."

"Oh," says she, "they don't expect me until quite late; indeed, I don't think Lord Badington himself returns before the last train from town."

I noticed that she laid a lot of stress upon the words, "Lord Badington," for the benefit of the hotel porters, no doubt; but I wasn't angry with her for that, remembering that she was a single woman, and perhaps unprotected; and without any more words we set out across Westminster Bridge, and were very soon picking our way down the Old Kent Road. A couple of hours later we came to Maidstone, where we had tea; it was a quarter past five precisely when we made a new start for Canterbury, and a good hour and a half later when we entered that musty old town.

I shall never forget that journey, the country just showing the buds of spring, the roads white and beautiful, the twenty Renault running as smooth as a beautiful clock. Three months had passed since I had driven Miss Dolly, and this was the month of May. Yet here she was, just the same wicked little witch as ever, trotting round on a wild errand, and about to come out best, I could swear. As for me, I had the sack before me for a certainty; but little I cared for that. Who would have done, with Dolly St. John for his passenger?

We drove through Canterbury, I say, and set the car going her best on the fair road after Sturry is passed. I know the country hereabouts pretty well, being accustomed to visit fashionable watering-places from time to time, and well acquainted with Ramsgate and Margate, to say nothing of Deal and Dover. My

road lay by Monkton, down toward Pegwell Bay, and it was just at the entrance to Minster that Dolly made me stop without much warning, and took me into her confidence for the first time.

"Britten," says she, "there is something I didn't tell you, but which I think I ought to tell you now. I'm not asked to Lord Badington's house at all."

"Not asked," said I, with a mouth wide enough open to swallow a pint of gear-box "B." "Then what's the good of going there, if you're not invited?"

"Oh," says she, more sweetly than ever, "I think they'll be glad to have me if I do get inside, Britten; but we shall have to act our parts very well."

I laughed at this.

"Seeing that neither of us is in the theatrical line, I don't suppose that anybody is going to take me for Sir Beerbohm Tree, or you for the Merry Widow," says I, "but, anyway, I'll do my best."

This pleased her, and she looked at me out of her pretty eyes, just sweet enough to make a man think himself a beauty.

"You see, Britten," says she, "if the car broke down just outside Lord Badington's house, perhaps they would give me shelter for the night; at least, I hope they would, and if they would not, well, it doesn't really matter, and we can go and stop at the hotel at Sandwich. It would have to be a real breakdown, for Lord Badington keeps motor-cars of his own, and his drivers would be sure to be clever at putting anything right——"

"Oh," says I, quickly enough, "if they can get this car right when I have done with it, I'll put up statues to 'em in the British Museum. You say no more, miss. We'll break down right enough, and if you are not breakfasting with his lordship to-morrow morning, don't blame me."

She nodded her head; and I could swear the excitement of it set her eyes on fire. Lord Badington's house, you must know, stands overlooking Pegwell Bay, not very far from the golf links, while the Ramsgate Road runs right before its doors. There is nothing but a bit of an inn near by, and not a cottage in sight. I saw that the place could not have been better chosen, and fifty yards from the big iron gates I got off my seat and prepared for business.

"You're really sure that you mean this, miss?" I asked her, knowing what women are. "You won't change your mind afterwards, and blame me because the car isn't going?"

"How can you ask such a thing?" was her answer. "Doesn't my whole future depend on our success, Britten?"

"Then you won't have long to wait," I rejoined, and, opening the bonnet, I set to work upon the magneto, and in twenty minutes had done the job as surely as it could have been done by the makers themselves.

"If this car is going on to-night," said I, "some one will have to push it. Now will you please tell me what is the next move, miss, for I'm beginning to think I should like my supper?"

She was down on the road herself by this time, and pretty enough she looked in her motor veil, and the beautiful sables which Mr. Sarand had given her last winter. When she told me to go on to the house, and to say that a lady's motor-car had broken down at the gates, I would have laid twenty to one on the success of her scheme, always provided that we weren't left to the menials who bark incivilities at a nobleman's door. Here luck stood by Miss Dolly, for hardly had I pulled the great bell at Lord Badington's gate when his own car came flying up the drive, with his lordship himself sitting in the back of it.

"What do you want, my man?" he asked, in a quick, sharp tone—he's a wonder for fifty-two, and there has been no smarter man in the Guards since he left them. "Where do you come from?"

"Begging your pardon, sir," said I, for I didn't want to pretend that I knew him for a lord, "but my mistress's car has come by a bit of trouble, and she sent me to ask if any one could help her."

"What, you're broken down——"

"It's just that, sir; magneto gone absolutely wrong. I shall have to be towed if I go any further to-night."

He stood on the steps beside me, and seemed to hesitate an instant. A word and he would have told his own chauffeur to drive us on to Sandwich; but it was never spoken, and I'll tell you why. Miss Dolly herself had followed me up the

drive, and she arrived upon the scene at that very instant.

"Oh, I am so sorry to trouble you," she cried in her sweetest voice, "but my car's gone all wrong, and I'm so tired and hungry, I don't know what to do. Will you let me rest here just a little while?"

Talk about actresses; there isn't one of 'em in the West End would have done half so well. There she was, looking the picture of distress, and there was his lordship, twisting his moustache, and eyeing her as one who was at his wits' end to know what to do. If he didn't take long to come to a resolution, put it down to Dolly's blue eyes—he couldn't see the colour of them at that time of night, but he could feel them, I'll be bound; and, jumping, as it were, to a conclusion he turned to his man and gave him an order.

"This lady will stay here to-night," he said. "Go and help her driver to get the car in, and see that he is looked after," and without another word he waited for Miss Dolly to enter the house. Believe me, I never thought Mr. John's stock stood higher—and "Britten, my boy," says I to myself, "if this isn't worth a cool fifty when the right time comes, don't you never drive a pretty girl no more."

I had a rare lark that night, partly with Biggs, his lordship's chauffeur, and partly with a motor expert who came along on a bicycle, and said he'd have my Renault going in twenty minutes. I'm not one that can stand a billet in servants' quarters, and I chose rather to put up at the little inn down by the bay and take my luck there. It was here that Biggs came after supper, and he and the motor expert got going on my high-tension magneto.

Bless the pair of them, they might have been a month there, and no better off —for, you must know that I had taken out the armature, and if you take out an armature and don't slip a bit of soft iron in after it, your magnets are done for, and will never be worth anything again until they are re-magnetised. This baffled the pair of them, and they were there until after eleven o'clock, drinking enough beer to float a barge, and confessing that it was a mystery.

"Never see such a thing in ten years' experience," said the motor expert.

"I'm blowed if I don't think the devil has got inside the magneto," said Biggs; and there I agreed with him. For wasn't it Miss Dolly who had done it, and isn't she—but there, that wouldn't be polite to the sex, so I won't write it down.

I learned from Biggs that Lord Badington's daughter and stepson were staying in the house with him, and a couple of old gentlemen, who, when they weren't making laws at Westminster, were making fools of themselves on the links at Sandwich. It was a golfing party, in fact, and next morning early, Biggs took them on to Prince's—and, will you believe me?—the car came back for the ladies by-and-by, and off went Miss Dolly, as calmly as though she had known them all her life. Not a word to me, not a word about going on, or getting the car ready, but just a nod and a laugh as she went by, and a something in her eyes which seemed to say, "Britten, I'm doing famously, and I haven't forgotten you."

The same afternoon about tea-time she sent for me, and had a word with me in the hall. I learned then that she had promised to stop until the following morning, and she asked, in a voice which nobody could mistake, if the car would be ready. When I told her that I was waiting for a new magneto from London I thought she would kiss me on the spot.

"Oh, Britten," she said in a whisper, "suppose we couldn't get on for three or four days."

"In that case," said I, "I should consider that we were really unfortunate, miss, but I'll do my best."

"Are you comfortable at the inn, Britten?"

"Putting on flesh rapidly, miss. I never knew there were so many red herrings in the world."

"And your room?"

"They built it when they thought the King was coming to Sandwich."

She laughed and looked at me, and, just as I was leaving, she whispered, "Do make it three or four days, Britten," and I promised her with a glance she could not mistake. And why not? What was against us? Was it not all plain sailing? Truly so, but for one little fact. I'll tell you in a word—Hook-Nosed Moss and the old bill he carried about like a love-letter—a bill against Dolly St. John for seventy-five pounds sixteen shillings and fourpence.

Well, Moss came down from town suddenly on the second afternoon, and while he carried a new magneto under his arm, the bill was in his pocket right

enough. I was standing at the inn door as he drove up in a fly, and when I recognised the face, you might have knocked me down with a cotton umbrella. Not, mind you, that I lost my presence of mind, or said anything foolish, but just that I felt sorry enough for Dolly St. John to risk all I'd got in the world to save her from this land shark. That Moss had found her out, I did not doubt for an instant, and his first words told me I was right.

"Do you know who you've been trotting about the country?" he asked, as he stepped down. I replied that I did not, but that I believed the lady to be a relative of Lord Badington's. Then he was fair angry.

"Lord Badington be d——d," he said, speaking through his nose as he always did, "her dabe's Dolly Sid John, and she's the sabe who did us id de winter. I wonder you were such a precious fool as not to recognise her. Do you mean to dell me you didn't dow her?"

"What!" I cried, opening my eyes wide, "she Dolly St. John! Well, you do surprise me; and she gone to Dover this very afternoon—leastwise, if it isn't to Dover, it's to Folkestone—but Biggs would tell us. Are you quite sure about it, sir?"

He swore he was sure, and went on to tell me that if I hadn't been the greatest chump in Europe I would have known it from the start.

"Where are your eyes?" he kept asking me; "do you mean to say you can drive a woman for ted days in London and not dow her again three months afterwards? A fine sort of chap you are. You deserve a statue in the Fools' Museum, upod my word you do. Now take me to the car, and let's see what's the matter. I'll have more to say to you whed we're in London, you mark that, my man."

I didn't give him any cheek, much as I would have liked to. My game was to protect Miss Dolly as far as I was able, and to hold my tongue for her sake.

Clearly her position was perilous. If this dun of a Jew went up to the house, and told them her name was not More, but St. John, the fat would be in the fire with a vengeance, and her chance of marrying John Sarand about equal to mine of mating with the crowned heads of Europe. What to do I knew no more than the dead. I had no messenger to send up to the house; I dare not leave Moss to get talking to the people of the inn; and there I was, helping him to fit and time

the new magneto, and just feeling I'd pay ten pounds for the privilege of knocking him down with his own spanner.

We finished the job in about half an hour, and the Renault started up at once. Moss hadn't spoken of Miss Dolly while we were at work; but directly the engine started he remembered his business, and turned on me like a fury.

"Whed did you say she started off?" he asked.

"About two this afternoon, I think."

"In whose car?"

"Why, his lordship's, of course."

"She seems pretty thick with the dobility. Perhaps I'd better give her a chadce of paying?"

I smiled.

"There's boats to France at Dover," said I. "What if she's going over by the night mail?"

He looked at me most shrewdly.

"I can't make you out, Britten," says he; "either you are the greatest fool or the greatest rogue id my ebployment. Subtimes you seeb clever enough, too. Suppose we rud the car over to Dover and see what's doing there."

"Yes," said I, "and you can telephone to the pier at Folkestone to have her stopped if she's sailing from there."

He snapped his fingers and smiled all over his face.

"That's it!" he cried. "If she's leaving the coudtry I'll arrest her. I wish you'd been half as sharp when you picked her up id London."

"It's these motor veils," said I. "You can't expect a man to see through three thicknesses of shuffon—now can you, Mr. Moss?"

It was a lucky shot, and, upon my word, I really do believe that I began to

wheedle him, Whether I did, or whether I did not, we had the car upon the road in ten minutes, and were off for Dover before a quarter of an hour had passed. Previous to that I had slipped into the inn on the pretence of leaving my coat, and had left a letter for Miss Dolly to be taken up by Biggs, when he came there to meet me for our evening walk. "Moss is here," I wrote, "look out for yourself."

I laugh now when I think of that journey to Dover, and old Shekels Moss sitting like a hawk on the seat beside me. What lies I had to tell him—what starts I gave him, when I pointed out that she might have gone by the afternoon boat, or perhaps motored right on to Southampton. My own idea was to stop the night at Dover, whatever happened, and no sooner had we drawn up at the "Lord Warden," than I had a penknife into the off front tyre, and turned my back when the wind fizzed out. This stopped the run to Folkestone straight away, and, by the time I'd done the job, Moss said he thought he would telephone the police, as I suggested, describing Miss Dolly, but saying nothing about his lordship.

"He might do pusiness with us, Britten," he remarked. "I won't have his dabe in it—but I'll tell him about her directly I get the chadce, and she won't be long in his house, dow will she?"

"Perhaps not," said I; "but if she marries his lordship's son, the boot will be on the other leg. You'd better think of that, Mr. Moss."

"What I want is my modey," he rejoined. "If she don't pay, she goes to prison —I dow too much about the peerage to be stuffed with promises. Either the modey or the writ. I'll feed here, Britten, and go back to Sadwich, if she's not on the boats. Perhaps we were a couple of fools to come at all."

I said nothing, but was pretty sure that one fool had come along in the car, anyway. My business was to keep Moss at Dover as long as might be, and in that I succeeded well enough. Nothing could save Miss Dolly if he went blundering up to Lord Badington's house with his story of what she'd done in London, and how fond certain West End tradesmen had become of her. Given time enough, I believed the pretty little lady would wheedle his lordship to consent to her marriage with Mr. Sarand. But time she must have, and if she did not get it, well, then, time of another kind might await her. It would have broken my heart to see misfortune overtake pretty Dolly St. John, and I swore that it should not, if any wit of mine could prevent it.

Moss took about an hour and a half over his dinner, and when he came out he was picking his teeth with a great steel prong, and looking as pleased as though he had done the hotel waiters out of fourpence. I saw that he had come to some resolution, and that it was a satisfactory one. There was a twinkle in his little eyes you could not mistake, and he shook his head while he talked to me, just as though I were buying old clothes of him at twice their value.

"Britten," he asked, "are you all ready?"

"Quite ready, sir," said I—for I'd just that minute shoved my knife into another tyre. "Are you going back to Sandwich?"

"I'm going to Lord Badington's," says he, with a roar of laughter, "why not? I'm going to ask for Miss Phyllis More, and say she's an ode fred of the family. Ha, ha! what do you think of that, Britten? Will I get the modey or won't I? Well, we'll see, my boy—so start her up, and be quick about it."

I said "Yes, sir," and went round to the front of the car. My cry of astonishment when I saw the burst tyre would have done credit to Mr. Henry Irving himself. Perhaps I said some things I shouldn't have said—Moss did, anyway, and he raved so loud that the ostler had to tell him his wife and children were upstairs.

"Another tyre gone—what do I pay you wages for? Adser me that! Who the —— is going to pay the bill? Don't you see I must get to Sadwich to-night? A pretty sort of a dam fool you must be. Now you get that car going in twedy minutes, or I'll leave you in the street—so help me heaven I will——" And so on and so on, until I could have dropped for laughing where I stood.

It was touching to hear him, upon my word it was; but I held my tongue for Miss Dolly's sake, and went to work quietly to take off the cover and examine the tube for the cut I didn't mean to find. When I told him presently that this was the last tube we had, and he'd better give me two pound eight to go and buy a new one, I thought his language would blow the ships out of the harbour; but he never gave me the money, and then I knew that he meant to stay at Dover all night, and that Miss Dolly had until the morning, anyway. "And by that time," said I to myself, "she'll be off to London if she's clever enough, and perhaps find Mr. Sarand at the station to meet her."

I slept upon this—for you will understand that Moss had no real intention of

going on that night, after he heard about the tubes—and at nine o'clock next morning I had my car ready, and drove her round to the "Lord Warden." The run to Sandwich is not over-exciting in an ordinary way, but I found it quite lively enough on that particular occasion, when there were all sorts of doubts and fears in my head about Miss Dolly, and the sure and certain knowledge that I should get the sack whatever happened. Indeed, I might properly have been more anxious about myself than the lady, for I never doubted that she would have made a bolt for London by the time we arrived, and there was no more disappointed man in Thanet when, on reaching the inn, Biggs told me that she was still at the house. An inquiry whether he had delivered my letter met with the amazing response that they had given him no letter, and when I rushed into the house to ask what had become of it, there it was, on the mantelshelf of the bar-parlour, just where I had left it. Never did a man meet with a worse blow. I knew then that Miss Dolly was done for, and I did not believe that the day could pass and keep the police from Lord Badington's doorstep.

I should tell you that Moss had called at the police station at Sandwich as we drove through, and that a sergeant and a constable came over to the inn on bicycles about midday. Their questioning me helped them a mighty lot, for I contrived to look as foolish as a yokel when you ask him the way to Nowhere; and all I could tell them was that the lady had come down upon Lord Badington's invitation, and, when she was tired of it, I supposed she would go away again. All of which they took down in pocket-books about as large as a family Bible, and then set out for the house, while I watched them with my heart in my very boots, and the sort of feeling that might overtake a man if the police set out to arrest his own sweetheart.

Biggs, I should tell you, was with me when this happened, and mighty curious he was about it all. Of course, I told him that Moss was making a fool of himself, and that there would be a pretty action afterwards if he didn't behave properly to Miss Dolly. None the less, he was just as curious as I was, and directly the other party had left, we followed on their heels, and were through the lodge gates almost as soon as they were. As for Lal Britten, his heart went pat-a-pat, like a girl's at a wedding. I could have knocked Moss down cheerful, and paid forty bob for doing it with the greatest pleasure in my life. But that wouldn't have helped Miss Dolly, you see, so I just trudged up the drive after Moss, and said nothing whatever to anybody.

Bless us all—how the chap did walk. There he was, head bent down,

shoulders sagging, his step shuffling as though he wore slippers, and in his eyes that money fever which, to me, is one of the most awful things in all the world. Even the police were rather disgusted with him, I think, and the sergeant told me afterwards that he would have paid fifty pounds to have got out of the job. For that matter, neither he nor his underling said a word to Moss when they rang at the front door bell, and they didn't seem to think it at all wonderful that Biggs and I should be upon the doorstep with them. So all together we waited quite a long time before old Hill, the butler, came jauntily along the great corridor, and opened to us very deliberately. And now for it, I thought—and oh, my poor Dolly, whatever is going to happen to you!

"Party of the dabe of Miss More—is she sdaying in this house?" asks Moss, half pushing his way in, and trying to look impudent. You should have seen the butler's face when he answered him.

"Who the devil are you?" he asked, "and what do you mean by coming here like this? Outside, my man, or I'll put you there pretty quick."

He took Moss by the collar, and, turning him about as though he were a babe, shoved him on the wrong side of the door before you could have said "knife." Then he turned to the sergeant.

"What's all this, Sergeant Joyce?" he asked. "Why do you bring this person here?"

"Oh," stammered the sergeant, "he says that a certain Miss More——"

"I beg you pardon," cried the butler quickly, "I think you should speak of Lady Badington—my master left for Paris at eight o'clock this morning."

"What!" roared Moss—and you could have heard him on the Goodwin Sands —"Lord Badington's married her?"

"I believe those are the facts," says Hill, very quietly—and then—well, and then I sat down on the doorstep and I laughed until the tears ran down my face. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!—and Moss's face! But you will understand all that, and how the sergeant looked, and the smile on the butler's face, without me saying a single word about it.

"Take a week's notice, and be d——d to you!" cried I, turning upon my

master all of a sudden. "Do you think I'll serve with a man who sent policemen after his best customers? You go to hell, Moss—where you ought to have been long ago," and with that I just walked off down the drive, and Biggs with me. Lord, what an afternoon we had! And the night we spent afterwards in Ramsgate!

For, you see, it was quite true. Old Lord Badington, who never could look at a pretty woman twice without falling in love with her, found himself mostly alone with Mistress Dolly at Sandwich, and, by all that is true and wonderful, he married her.

Not that she was Dolly St. John at all, you must know, but Dolly Hamilton in reality; and connected, I am told, with the old American family, the Hamiltons of Philadelphia. What she did in London was done, I do believe, for the sheer excitement of doing it. And if folks have called her an adventuress, set that down to the rogues of trustees, who played ducks and drakes with her fortune, and left her in Europe to shift as best she might.

I got a hundred pounds for that job, sent by Miss Dolly herself from Venice. Moss got his car back, and three or four punctured tubes. Some day, I suppose, they'll pay him that seventy-five pounds sixteen shillings and four-pence. But I hope it won't be yet.

The Honorary John, they tell me, is very angry with his papa. But I'll back an old boy every time—notwithstanding what is written in the papers.

IV

THE LADY WHO LOOKED ON

I wonder how many nowadays remember that pretty bit of goods, Maisa Hubbard, who used to drive the racing cars in France, and was the particular fancy of half the motormen who drive on the other side of the blue water.

I first met her at the Gordon Bennett of 1901, and I must say I thought her

"sample goods." It's true that many would have it she was over-well-known in America, and more than one young man got on the rocks because of her; but the world rather likes a bit of scandal about a pretty woman, and there's no shorter road to the masculine favour.

Anyway, Maisa Hubbard was popular enough down at Bordeaux, and you might still have called her the belle of the ball on June 26 in the year 1902, when we started from Champigny for the great race across the Arlberg Mountains. That was the occasion, you will remember, when two of our little company did something by way of a record in smashing up their cars—but the story of one of these, Max, who drove for a French company, has so often been told that I shall certainly not re-tell it here. The other is a different story, and since it is the story of a good man, a good car, and a pretty woman, there's no reason why Lal Britten should not put his pen to it.

Well, I was driving for an English company at that time, the Vezey they called themselves, though Wheezy would have been the better name. Such a box of tricks I do believe was never put upon a chassis before or since. It took two of us to start the engine in the morning, and the same number to persuade her to leave off firing at night. The works manager, Mr. Nathan, whose Christian name was Abraham, said that she'd done eighty miles an hour with him easily; but the only time I got her over fifty she broke her differential by way of an argument, and nothing but a soft place in a hayfield saved me from the hospital. All of which, of course, was good advertisement for the firm—and, truly, if it came to making a noise in the world, why, you could hear their car a good quarter of a mile away.

This was the flier I took over to France and tried to break in upon the fine roads we all know so well. As I finished the race almost before I began it, the less said about the affair the better—but I shall never forget that Paris to Vienna meeting, and I shall never forget it because of my friend Ferdinand,[1] one of the best and bravest who ever turned a wheel, and the right winner of that great prize, but for the woman who said "No," and said it so queerly and to such effect that a magician out of the story-books couldn't have done it better.

I liked Ferdinand, liked him from the start. A better figure of a man I shall never see; six feet to an inch, square set and wonderfully muscular. His hair was dark and ridiculously curly, so much so that talk of the "irons and brown paper" was the standing joke amongst the racing men in Paris, who knew no more of

him than that he was an Italian by birth and had spent half his life in America. For the rest, he spoke English as well as I did, and I never knew whether Ferdinand was his real name, or one he took for the racecourse—nor did I care.

They say that there is no cloud without a silver lining—a poor consolation in a thunderstorm when your hood is at home and the nearest tree is three miles away. There had been a thunderstorm, I remember, on the morning I met poor Ferdinand, and my batteries had refused to hand out another volt, notwithstanding the plainest kind of speech in which I could address them. Just in the middle of it, when the rain was running in at the neck and out at the ankles, and I was asking myself why I wasn't a footman in yellow plush breeches, what should happen but that a great red car came loping up on the horizon, like some mad thing answering to the lightning's call—and no sooner was it a mile distant than it was by me, so to speak, and I was listening to my friend Ferdinand for the first time.

"Halloa, and what's taken your fancy in these parts?" he asked in a cheery voice. I told him as plainly.

"This musical box don't like the thunder," said I; "she's turned sour."

"Are you stopping here for the lady, or do you want to get back to Paris?"

"Oh," says I, "I haven't taken a lease of this particular furlong, if that's what you mean."

"Then I'll give you a tow," says he, and without another word, he got down from his seat and began to make a job of it. We were at Vendreux half an hour afterwards, and there we breakfasted together in the French fashion. That meal, I always say, was the luckiest friend Ferdinand ever ate.

He told me a lot about himself and a lot about his car; how he had been everything in America, from log-roller in the backwoods to cook in the Fifth Avenue palaces; how he met Herr Jornek, the designer of the Modena car, on a trip to St. John's to explore Grand River, and how he had come back to Europe to drive it in the big race. His luck, he said, had been out in New York because of a woman; to get far away from that particular lady was the inducement which carried him to Europe.

Here was something to awaken my curiosity, as you may well imagine, and I

asked him all sorts of questions about the girl; but to no good purpose. His interest was in the car, one of the first made by the famous Herr Jornek, and called the Modena after the factory in that town. He told me it was unlike any car on the market, and that new features of gearbox, ignition, and engine design would certainly stamp it a winner if no bad luck overtook him. This persistent talk about misfortune set me wondering, and I fell to questioning him a little more closely about his story, and especially that part of it which concerned the woman.

"Who is the lady, and how did she interfere with you?" I asked. He would say no more than that he had known her by half a dozen names over in America, and that she was formerly a dancer at the old Casino Theatre in New York.

"She's done everything," he said: "gone up in balloons, ridden horses astride at Maddison Square Gardens, played the cowboys' show with Buffalo Bill, and sailed an iceboat on the Great Lakes. Whenever she's out to win I'm out to lose. Make what you like of it, it's Gospel truth. As certain as I'm up for one of the big prizes of my life, the girl's there to thwart me. If I were what my schoolmaster used to call a fatalist, I'd say she was the evil prophetess who used to play ducks and drakes with the soldier boys at Athens. But I don't believe anything of the sort—I say it's just sheer bad luck, and that woman stands for the figure of it."

I was troubled to hear him, and put many more questions. How did the girl thwart him? Was it just an idea, or had he something better to go upon? He did not know what to say; I could see it troubled him very much to speak of it.

"She puts it into my head that I shall lose, and lose I do," he said; "it's always been the same, and always will be. When I rode that great leaping horse, Desmond, and put him over the fences, she was in the arena with a bronco, and she just looked up to me as sweetly as a child, and said, "Ferdy, your horse is going to fall next time," and fall, sure enough, he did, and laid me on my bed for more than a month. After that I rode the bicycle match against the Frenchman, Devereux, and there she was, dressed like a picture amongst the crowd, and smiling like an angel in the Spanish churches. When I nodded to her she called me back a moment, and just put in her pretty word.

"Ferdy," she said, "that Frenchman can't ride straight; he's going to run into you, Ferdy." Will you believe it, we cannoned together at the last corner, and I was thrown so badly that although he walked his machine in I couldn't beat

him."

He was serious enough about it all, and I must say that his talk put some queer ideas into my head. I've never been a believer over-much in luck myself, holding that we make it or mar it for ourselves, and that what some call misfortune is nothing more or less than misdoing; but here was a tale to make a man think, and think I did while he ate his breakfast and went on to speak of his car almost as lovingly as a man speaks of the new girl he met for the first time yesterday. Just as we were leaving the hotel and he was getting back to his doleful manner a bit, I put in my word and I could see that he took it well enough.

"All said and done," said I, "there's a little matter of three thousand miles between you and the lady just at present. Whatever may have happened over yonder is hardly likely to happen in La Belle France, look at it how you like. You should think no more about it, Ferdinand. You're to win this great race, and win it you certainly will if I'm a judge. Why, then, think about a woman at all?"

"Because," he replied, and he was as grave as a judge at the moment, "because I must; I've been thinking of her ever since I picked you up. It's queer, Britten, but I do believe you're going to bring me luck, and that's as true as Gospel."

"And true it shall be," said I, "if good wishes can do it, my boy. Let's go and get the cars. My box of tricks will be melted down if I leave it in the sun any longer. Let's get back to Paris and have some fun; I'm sure that's what you're wanting."

He did not object; and the storm having passed, and my coil behaving itself properly now that the damp was off the contacts, we jogged along the road to Paris in company with many who were returning from their morning practice, and just a few amateurs out to see the fun. We had gone a mile, I suppose, when we met a girl driving one of the De Dion motor tricycles, and no sooner had I seen her than she went by with a flash and a nod; and I knew her for little Maisa Hubbard, of whom the town had been talking for three days past. Then I ran my car alongside Ferdinand's just to make a remark about it—but, will you believe me?—he was as pale as a sheet, and his eyes were staring right into vacancy, as though a ghost stood in his path, and he didn't know how to get by it.

"Why," cried I, "and what's up now?"

He brought himself to with an effort, closed his hand about the wheel, and then answered me:

"That's the girl, right enough," he said; "you saw her for yourself."

"Oh, look here, I can't take that. Don't you know Maisa Hubbard, who drove the big Panhard last autumn?"

"I know Maisa Hubbard who used to dance at the Casino Theatre in New York, and she's the same. Didn't I tell you she'd follow me to France?"

"You told me a lot of things," I retorted; "perhaps you dreamed some of them."

"Perhaps I did," he answered, and then I was sorry I had spoken, for his face was as sad as a woman's in sorrow, and just as pitiful.

"You want cheering up, my boy," said I; "wait till we get back to Paris, and I'll take you in hand myself. It's over-driving that's done it; I've known the kind of thing, and can understand what you feel; but you wait a bit, and then we'll see. Didn't you say I was going to bring you luck?"

"I did, but not while Maisa Hubbard's in France. There's no man born could do it."

He was down enough about it, I must say, and a more melancholy driver never steered a car into Champigny—the place where the great race was to start from, and our destination for the time being. When we had done the necessary tuning up and had cleaned ourselves, I took Ferdinand back to Paris, and gave him a bit of dinner at a little restaurant near the Faubourg St.-Honoré.

When we had eaten five shillings' worth for three-and-sixpence, and drunk a good bottle of sour red wine apiece, I took him round to "Olympia," and there we saw the famous show they called the "Man in the Moon." This didn't cheer him up at all, and once during the evening he told me that he thought he'd soon be in the moon himself, or any place where they have a job for damaged racing drivers. This made me laugh at him, but laughing wasn't any good, and I had it in my mind to take him off to supper at a little place I knew on the Boulevards,

when what should happen but that Maisa Hubbard appeared suddenly in the promenade where we stood, and immediately came up to him with such a smile as might have brought a saint out of a picture to say "Good evening" to her.

"Why, it's Ferdy!" she cried, "and he's trying to turn his back on me. Oh, my dear boy, whatever do you look like that for?"

He shook hands with her quite civilly, and made some excuse about the show and his not feeling very funny about it. She had another girl with her, and her brother, Jerome Hubbard, the "whip" who used to drive with Mr. Fownes. When I had been introduced, she asked me to come to supper at a place I'd never heard of, and declared that her brother would have a fit if we didn't disburse some of his savings immediately. The little girl who was with her (I shan't write her name down) was a lively bit of goods, and I was ready enough to go if only to cheer up "Ferdy," who, to be sure, had become a different man already, and was talking and laughing with Maisa just as though they had been first "cousins" for a twelvemonth or more. In the end we ate Mr. Jerome's supper, and got back to our little beds at two in the morning: not an over-good preparation for a great race, as any driver will admit; but my friend seemed himself again, and I would have eaten half a dozen suppers to bring that about.

This was two days before the meeting, I should tell you, and I saw little of Ferdinand until that memorable June morning, when, at half-past three precisely, Girardot got away on his C.G.V., and was followed two minutes later by Fournier on his Mors. I have taken part in many a big race since, but never one which excited me more than that famous dash from Paris to Vienna, which was to make the fortune of more than one English house, and to bring the Gordon Bennett Cup to England for the first time in the motor story.

I firmly believed my friend Ferdinand was to win the race, and presentiment goes farther in this world than many folks think. Such a dashing, daring driver I never saw. His car was a wonder. I took several trips with him before the race, and I do believe that we made eighty or ninety miles an hour upon her—a miracle for those days, though not thought so much of in this year 1909. What was more, he seemed to have forgotten all about that little devil of a Maisa Hubbard and her prophecies, and when we breakfasted together upon the morning of the start I would have said that he was fit to race for his life.

And what a start it was, notwithstanding the hour! What a roaring and racing

of engines, cars tearing here and tearing there, gendarmes everywhere, men with silver on their heads and silver on their toes; jabbering officials telling you to do twenty things at once, and quarrelling because you did them. The enclosure itself was like the meat-market at Smithfield on a busy morning. I never heard so much noise in any one place before; and if there was a man, woman, or child who slept through it in the peaceful village of Champigny, well, he, she, or it ought to go into a museum.

Of course, all this was exciting enough, and I caught something of the fever when twenty soldiers pushed my old rattle-trap into the roadway, and a very fine gentleman gave the signal to "Go." Upon my word, I do believe there was just a moment when I thought I could get to Vienna before the others; and, letting my clutch in gently, and telling Billy, my mechanician, to make himself fast, I soon had her upon third speed, and was racing as fast as the bad road would let me towards Provins. This was a bumpy bit, to be sure, and if I had put her on the "fourth," some one would have had to sweep up the pieces quickly. But I kept her steady, though the great cars began to go by like roaring locomotives on a down incline, and really she was doing very well when the offside front tyre asked for a change of air, and we knew that it was No. 1, so far as punctures were concerned.

Well, this was twenty miles from Provins, upon a long and desolate stretch of a poor road, with a distant view of the hills and a couple of sleepy peasants out among the hay. We had been lucky with our draw, and started early in the list, and you can imagine my surprise when a car flashed into view and I recognised Ferdinand, who was almost the last to get off, and must have passed any number of cars to overtake us as he did. My word, and he was driving, too! His great machine frightened you to watch it, leaping over the bumps as it did, and threatening every moment to be flung sheer off the road into the hayfield on the other side of the dyke. But there was a master at the wheel, and with a cheery wave of the hand to us Ferdinand went by, and was lost immediately in a mighty cloud of dust which rose clear above the poplars.

I need hardly tell you how glad I was to see him doing so well, and how I laughed at all his foolish ideas about Maisa Hubbard. Win I felt he would, though all the ladies of the Casino ballet came out to tell him not to; and when old Dobbin, my own particular turn-out, condescended to move again, I pushed on for Belfort, no longer deluding myself that I was to be within a hundred miles of the winner, but hoping that I should get to Vienna in time to shake "Ferdy" by

the hand and to tell him what a fool he had been.

If I didn't say this at Belfort, where Herr Jornek, the designer of the car, stood in between us and took Ferdy away for the evening to talk to him, it was well enough said at Brigenz. There a second halt was made; and although we turned in at an early hour, I had plenty of time to put the idea of winning into his head, and the idea of Maisa Hubbard out of it. All the world knows that we had to go through France, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria for that big race, and the Swiss part was slow enough, since no racing was allowed by the timid old gentlemen at the capital. Indeed, if there is one country in Europe a motorist does well to keep out of at any time, it is Switzerland. We simply rolled through the place on that particular journey, and at Brigenz my friend Ferdinand was high up in the list, none but De Knyff, Jarrott, and the Farmans being ahead of him. I told him that if he got over the Arlberg Mountains as his car ought to get, he was winner for a certainty. And that was the point we stuck to until it was time to turn into our little beds and dream about to-morrow.

"I hear that the devil himself might be frightened to drive across that pass at any speed," said I, "and there's your chance, Ferdy. You say it will be the making of you to win this race. Well, you give your mind to it, and don't shirk the risks, and you're as good as a winner already. There isn't a car in the bunch can hold you on the mountains, and you know it."

"You're right," said he, "and I wish I could say the same to you. But Lal, my boy, it isn't exactly a war-horse that you've got under you, and I can't say it is. I'm not frightened of the mountains, and can break my neck as well as most; don't think otherwise. If my luck holds, Lal Britten has fixed it up, and I shan't forget him when the shekels are paid out. You may think me a bit dotty, but this I will say, that I never felt so sure of myself or of the car as I do this night, and if confidence and a good engine won't win across the Arlberg, then we'll give it up, Lal, and take to perambulators."

"Not meaning any reference to the lady," said I; but his face clouded, and I wished I hadn't spoken.

"She's in Paris, and thank God for it," he exclaimed, rising to go up to bed; "if she were here in Brigenz to-night, I wouldn't give sixpence for my chances, and that's the whole truth. Now, let's go to by-by; if we don't, I'll be dreaming of her, and dreams won't win laurel-wreaths, as even you will admit."

I let him go, and followed some ten minutes later to my own room. It was just cussedness, I suppose, which kept me back, for, as I went across the corridor of the first floor of our hotel I heard a woman with a laugh which struck sparks off you; and turning round, there was Maisa Hubbard herself in a fine Paris gown and a great straw hat, with a pink feather in it large enough to decorate the Shah. She just gave a pleasant nod to me and then went downstairs, while I made for my bedroom, wondering what Ferdy would have said if he had seen her, and what real bad luck brought her to Brigenz at such a time.

Of course, she had come on by train. Lots of people did, to follow the racing; and here she was with a merry party, just as simple-looking and as guileless as a shepherdess at the Vic, and looking no older than a school-girl. When I got up at four next morning I was full of curiosity to know if Ferdy had seen her. But he was out at his car in the "control," cheerful enough as far as he himself was concerned, but mighty anxious about his mechanician, Down, who had broken his arm trying to start up the engine, and had already been taken to the hospital. A minute later I heard that our old wheezer wouldn't start at all, and there it was, as though a special Providence had ordered it.

"You can't move your own char-à-banc—the crank-shaft's broken," Ferdinand said to me, as he asked me for the tenth time to get up beside him; "I've got no one, and I'm going to win this race. If you could conjure up a new crankshaft out of nothing, you would still be three behind the last in, and all the town out to laugh at you. Get up, Lal, and have done with it. I tell you I knew it from the first."

Well, I stared at this: and having just a word with my mechanician Billy, and being quite sure that the Vezey, however good she was at going back on me, wouldn't go forward that day or for some days to come, I left instructions for telegrams to be sent to England, and was up beside Ferdinand without further ado.

I have told you that he stood already high in the list, and so you will understand that we hadn't long to wait for the word "Go!" Before that could be given, however, and while the car was still in the "control," who should come up to us but Maisa Hubbard herself; and, will you believe it, I felt all my confidence, both in man and car, oozing out of my finger-tips, just like water running out of a tap. How or why that should have been I am not the man to say; but there was the fact, that this pretty woman could work this magic upon me

just by a look out of her sly eyes, and could do worse to my friend Ferdinand, as I plainly perceived. As for that poor chap, he turned as white as a ghost directly he saw her, and I really thought he would never be able to start the car at all.

"Oh, my dear boy, I have been looking for you everywhere," cried she, offering him a little bunch of red roses, just as though she loved him dearly. "Now, won't you take these for luck? I'm sure you'll want luck to-day, Ferdy. Do you know, I dreamed about you last night?"

He said "Yes," and laid the flowers on the seat beside him. I could see him licking his lips as though his mouth were dry, and presently he asked her a question.

"What did you dream, Maisa?"

She shook her head and began the play-actress style.

"Oh, I guess I wouldn't tell you, anyway."

"But I want to know, Maisa?"

"It was only a dream, of course—aren't they real sometimes, Ferdy? Why, I saw you drive your car over the side of the mountain, just as plainly as ever I saw anything in my life."

He laughed quietly, looking at me with a look I shall never forget.

"You're quite a wonder at dreaming, Maisa. Suppose I disappoint you this time?"

"Don't be foolish, Ferdy—you shouldn't have asked me to tell you. Why, you're too clever to be such a silly, and you know it. Good-bye and good luck. I shall see you in Vienna."

He just nodded his head and let in his clutch with such a bang that he nearly threw me over the dash. I could see that his nerve had gone to the winds with the woman's words, and if wishes could have repaid her, she'd have got something for her pains, I do assure you. As it was, I could do nothing but pretend to laugh at it, and that I did to the best of my ability.

"Dreams go by contraries," said I; "any child knows that."

"She didn't dream it at all," was his answer; "she said it out of spite."

"Why should she be spiteful——?"

"You ask the man and his master. She's out for another car to win, and will spoil my chances if she can."

"More fool you, then, to listen to her. Make up your mind to forget it. You can do it if you try."

"Ah," he said, and upon my word I was sorry for him, "that girl's going to be my ruin, Lal, as sure as we're on this car."

"You speak like a coward, Ferdy—didn't you say I brought you luck——"

"And you shall—I'll try to believe, Lal—I've thought it from the start. If it wasn't for her——"

"Oh, be d——d to her," said I; and that I really meant.

We were on the starting line as these words were spoken, and in two minutes we got the word to go, and the great Modena car rushed away like some giant bird upon the wing. This was the crucial stage of that famous race, when we had to climb the Arlberg Mountains and drop down to Innsbruck. It was the day which saw Edge the proud winner of the Gordon Bennett Cup, and the morning upon which Jarrott broke up his bedroom furniture to stiffen the frame of his 70-h.p. Panhard. Our car was not in for the Gordon Bennett, and our race did not finish at Innsbruck, but at far Vienna—that is, if we crossed the terrible Arlberg Mountains safely, and got down the other side with our heads still upon our shoulders. This depended upon my friend Ferdinand, the greatest driver that ever lived upon an ordinary day, but a mad devil that morning if ever there was one.

Oh! you could see it from the start. That woman's words had entered into his very soul, and he did not deny that he believed his hour had come. We were early away, and the two big cars ahead of us we caught almost in the first hour. When we came to the mountain we began to climb as though a magic wind was lifting us. Grand as the scene was, with the mighty mountains towering above us and the valley full of wonders spreading out below, I had eyes for nothing but

the winding road, nor thoughts of any goal but that of distant Innsbruck, where the danger would be passed. Sometimes I wished that Ferdinand would change seats with me and let me drive. No woman that ever was born would frighten me, I thought, and yet I could not be sure even about that. The words that were spoken in the "control" went echoing in my head. "We were going over the mountain-side." Good God, if it were true!

The climb up the Arlberg Mountains is a wonderful thing, but I would have you know that it is child's play to the drop down on the other side. Imagine a series of fearful zigzags with a sheer wall of rock on one side, and on the other a precipice just as sheer, and so open and undefended that some fellows in this race were driven almost mad with terror at the bare sight of it. Luckily for me, I sat upon the left-hand side of the car and could see very little of what was going on; but I knew that our off-side front wheel was within two inches of the edge more than once as we went up; and when we passed over the top and began the descent I could have sworn that even Ferdinand himself had lost all hope of getting down safely.

Once, I remember, he gave a great cry, and shot the car over to the inside with such a twist that our wheels scraped the very rock; there were moments when he came to a stand altogether, and passed his hand over his eyes as though he could not see clearly. By here and there I thought he drove like a madman, swooping round a fearful corner with our wheels over the very chasm, or dashing down a straight as though nothing could save him at the bottom. If I called out at this and implored him not to be a fool, he answered back that "What was to be, would be"; and then he mentioned Maisa's name, and I knew he had not forgotten.

Well, as many know, the end came at that great dome of rock which looks for all the world like St. Paul's Cathedral. I confess that I should have been no wiser here than Ferdinand. We seemed to be following a gentle curve round the dome, with the rock upon our left hand, and the valley three thousand feet down upon our right. There was nothing to tell us of the danger trap; and, thinking he had a clear road, Ferdinand opened his throttle and we shot ahead like a shell from a gun. Less than a second afterwards I had made a wild leap from my seat—and Ferdinand, without a cry or a sound, had gone headlong to the valley below.

I suppose five good minutes must have passed before I knew anything at all, either of the nature of this awful accident or of the good luck which attended my

leap. Lying there on my back, I became conscious presently that I was in a thick scrub of gorse, which lined the road hereabouts. It had caught me just as a spider's web catches a fly. I ached intolerably, that is true—my whole body seemed numbed, as though it had been hit with irons, while my leather clothes were torn to rags. But, by-and-by, it came to me that I could get up if I chose, and when I looked below me and saw the sheer precipice, and that nothing but a bush stood between me and it, you may be sure I scrambled back to the road quicker than a man counts two. And there I lay, trying to remember what had happened, and what my duty called upon me to do.

Ferdy and the car! Good God, what had happened to them? The sweat poured off me like rain when the truth came back. Ferdy was over there, down that awful precipice. Quaking in every limb, I dragged myself to the edge and looked over. Yes, I could see the car, looking like a little toy thing, far down in the valley. It lay wheels upwards, in what appeared to be a little brook or river; but of my comrade not a sign anywhere. In vain I shouted his name again and again. The cars began to pass me, and, warned by my presence, they took that awful corner safely; but not a man of their drivers guessed that a good fellow had gone over, and that I was half mad because of it. Away they went, with a nod and a shout, leaving that cold silence of the mountains behind them, and Lal Britten crying like a woman because they didn't stay. In the end I ceased to think of them at all, and, going to the brink again, I shouted "Ferdinand" until the hills rang.

He answered me—as I am a living man—Ferdinand answered me at last. At first I could believe so little in the truth of what I heard that I almost thought the mountains were mocking me and sending my voice back in echoes. Then I understood that it was not so at all, but that my friend really called to me from a place thirty or forty yards down the road, where the scrub was thicker. It was the spot where our tank and tool-box, cast ahead as the car swerved and went over, lay shattered on the rocks. These I hardly noticed at the moment; but, dashing to the place, I threw myself flat on my face and hung right over the precipice to answer my comrade. And then, in an instant I knew what had happened—then I understood.

The car, I say, had swerved away to the right as she took the precipice. The tremendous force of it not only sent all our loose impedimenta flying down the road, which turned to the left, but it threw Ferdinand sideways; and, although he

had gone over, he fell, as the newspapers have told you, just where the sheer wall bulged; and here, holding for dear life to the shrubs, he waited for me to save him. Such a torture I have never known, or shall know again. The sight of my friend, not ten feet away from me, the precipice forbidding me to go down, for it was quite sheer at the top; his white face, his desperate hold at the scrappy shrubs—oh, you can't imagine or think of the truth of it as I had to upon that awful morning.

"How long can you hold on?" I asked him, clenching my teeth when I had spoken.

"Perhaps a minute, perhaps two. If you could get a rope, Lal——"

"I'll stop a car," said I—a madder thing was never said, but I had to say something—"I'll stop a car and make them help me. Perhaps my shirt will do it, Ferdy."

"Good-bye if it doesn't," he said quite quietly; and I knew then that he was prepared for death, and had expected it; but I was already busy with my shirt, tearing it up with twitching fingers, when he spoke again.

"Pity we haven't got the rope I towed you with the other day," he said suddenly; and at that I started up as though he had hit me.

"The rope—where did you carry it?"

"It was in the tool-box," he answered, still quite calm.

I think I shouted out at that—I know I was crying like a woman a minute afterwards. The tool-box! Why, it lay there, against the rock, before my very nose, the d——d fool! And the very rope which had first brought our friendship about: was it accident or destiny which put it into my hands, and did Ferdinand do right or wrong to say I brought him luck?

I shan't answer these questions—for he was sitting beside me less than two minutes afterwards, and we were hugging each other like brothers.

Maisa Hubbard's friend didn't get first to Vienna, and pleased enough I was. Whether Ferdy just imagined that she had an evil influence over him, or whether

it is true that some women are the mistresses of men's destiny, I don't pretend to say. The story is there to speak for itself.

And Maisa, I may add, is in the halfpenny papers. Do you remember that famous case of Lord—but perhaps it isn't my place to speak about that?

[1] The names of the driver, Ferdinand, and the car, the Modena, have been substituted by the Editor for those in Mr. Britten's own narrative. The reasons for this will be obvious to the reader.

V

THE BASKET IN THE BOUNDARY ROAD

The doctors will tell you sometimes that motoring is good for the nerves; and since so many of them now buy cars, and there's no man like a doctor for looking after his own flesh and blood, I suppose they mean what they say. All the same, I wish I'd had a doctor with me the night I picked up Mabel Bellamy; for if his nerves had stood that and he hadn't given himself quinine and iron for the next two months, why, I'd have paid his fee myself.

You see, it was a rum job from the very beginning of it. I was working for Hook-Nosed Moss at the time, and, being Lent, and half the theatrical ladies of position doing penance down at Monte Carlo, we weren't exactly knocking a hole in the Bank of England—nor, for that matter, even earning our fares to Jerusalem. Moss came down to the garage in the West End gloomier and gloomier every day; and one morning when I saw that he'd pawned his diamond shirt-stud (the same that we called "The Bleriot"), why then, says I, Lal Britten, keep off the Stock Exchange and don't put your last thirty bob in Consols, wherever else you place it.

Now this was the state of things when one morning, early in the month of March last year, we were rung up from a public telephone call in Bayswater, and the covered Napier was ordered for a house in the Richmond Road, Bayswater—a locality with which I was unfamiliar, but which Moss declared must be all right, since the gentleman who lived there knew that we had a Napier car and therefore was in a manner introduced to us. Half an hour later he discovered that Richmond Road was nothing better than a mean street of lodging-houses, and, my word, didn't he reel off his instructions to me like texts out of a copy-book.

"Dot's a shame, Britten," he said, coming round by the bonnet of the car, which I was tuning up for the trip—"I was deceived by the dabe of the street. We must have our modey before they have the goods. Mind that now, you dote drive a mile unless they pay the shinies. Three guideas id your pocket and then you drive 'em. Are you listening, Britten?"

I managed to give him a squirt of oil out of my can—for we do love Moss, and then I told him that Nelson on the quarter-deck of the *Victory* wasn't more alive to his duties.

"Three guineas cash down and then I drive 'em. Is this a round trip to see the beauties of Surrey, Mr. Moss, or do I return to my little cot after the ball is over? I'd like to know on account of taking my Court suit, if you don't mind."

"Oh," says he, "you're ordered for ded o'clock, so I suppose id's the light fadastic toe, Britten. But mide you get your modey—or I'll stop your salary, sure. Three guideas and what you cad hook for yourself—I shan't touch that, Britten—I dow how to treat my servants well."

I laughed at this, but didn't say too much for fear he should find out that he'd got a patch of oil as big as a football on the back of his beautiful new spring suit, and when he had told me that the party's name was Faulkland Jones and had given me the number of the house, I got on with my work again and soon had the three-year-old Napier running as well as ever she did in all her life. Nor did anything else happen until ten o'clock that night, at which hour precisely I drove her up to the house in the Richmond Road, Bayswater, and sent a small boy to knock at the door.

It was a twopenny-ha'penny shop, and no doubt about it; a two-storied day-before-yesterday lodging-house, with a bow window like a Métallurgique bonnet and a door about as big as the top of your gear-box.

So far as I could see from the road there was only one lamp showing in the place, and that was on the off-side, so to speak, in a little window of a bedroom —but the boy said afterwards that there was a glim in the hall, and he was old enough to have known. Taken altogether, you wouldn't have offered them thirty pounds a year for the lot unless you had been a Rothschild with a cook to pension off—and what such people wanted with a Napier limousine at three guineas the job I really could not have said. This, however, was no business of mine; so I just gave the lad a penny and settled myself down in my seat until the Duchess in the apron should appear.

It wasn't a long time I had to wait, perhaps five minutes, perhaps ten. I told the police, when they questioned me afterwards, to split the difference, for none but a policeman could have told you what it had got to do with my story. When the door did open at last, a couple of men carrying a basket came down the bit of a garden, and the first of them wished me "Good evening" very civilly. Then they let the basket down softly on to the pavement and began to talk to me about it.

"How strong's your roof?" asked the first, speaking with a nasal twang I couldn't quite place. "Will it take this bit of a basket all right?"

"Why," says I, "it might depend on what you've got inside that same. Have I come for the washing, or do I drive your plate to the Bank of England?"

The second, the taller man of the two, laughed at this; but the first seemed very uneasy, and it was not lost upon me that he glanced to the right and the left of him as though afraid that someone would come up and hear what his friend had to say next.

"I guess it's neither one nor the other," the first speaker went on. "We're playing theatricals at the Hampstead Town Hall to-morrow night, and these are the dresses. We want you to take them up to the Boundary Road, St. John's Wood—I'll show you the house when we get there; but it's called Bredfield, and you'll know it by a square-toed lamp up against the side-track. Perhaps you can give us a hand with the baggage—and say, have you any objection to gold when you can't get silver?"

He passed up a sovereign and I put it inside my glove. Moss had told me to collect the shekels before I drove them a mile, and so I told the pair of them as I was getting down the luggage ladder, which fortunately I had brought, not knowing the job. A bit to my surprise they paid up immediately, but I made no remark about that; and when I had signed the receipt by the light of my near-side lamp, I helped them up with the basket and soon had it strapped to the rails in a way that satisfied even the nervous little man with the saucer eyes.

Many have asked me if I had no suspicions about that basket, was not curious as to its contents, and remarked nothing as we hoisted it up. To these I say that the men themselves were the chief actors in the business; that they lifted the baggage from the pavement, and that my task was chiefly to guide it to the rails and to make it fast when I had got it there. Otherwise, this basket was no different from any dress-basket you may see upon half a dozen four-wheelers the first time you look in at a railway station; and I should be telling an untruth if I said that I thought about it at all. Indeed, it was not until we got to the Boundary Road, and I stopped at the house called Bredfield, that so much as a notion of anything wrong entered my head. There, however, I did get a shock, and no mistake; for no sooner had I pulled up than I discovered that I had come on alone, and that neither the big man with the Yankee accent nor the little man with

the saucer eyes had deigned to accompany me.

Well, I got down from the driver's seat, opened and shut the door as though to be sure that neither the one nor the other was hiding under the seat, and then I rang loudly at the front door bell and waited to see what fortune had got in her lucky-bag.

Had the men told me plainly that I was to go alone, I should never have given the matter a second thought; but I could have sworn that the pair of them were inside the limousine when I started away from the Richmond Road, and how or where they got down I knew no more than the Lord Chancellor. It remained to be seen if the people in the house were any wiser; and you may be sure that I was curious enough by this time, and, if the truth must be told, not a little frightened.

Boundary Road, as many will know, is a quiet thoroughfare in St. John's Wood, most of the houses being detached, and many of them having twenty feet of garden back and front. This particular house was larger than ordinary, and owned an odd iron lamp fixed above the garden gate and conspicuous a hundred yards away. Unlike the shanty in the Richmond Road, nearly every window showed a bright light; and I don't suppose I had waited twenty seconds, though they seemed like a quarter of an hour, when the front door flew open and one of the prettiest parlourmaids I have ever clapped eyes upon came running down the path, and asked, even before she had opened the gate, if the lady had arrived.

"Why," says I, quickly enough, "that she certainly has not, being took to dine with the Grand Duke Isaac at the Metropolitan Music Hall. But her dresses are here, miss, and if you like to try on any of 'em before she arrives, why, you're welcome so far as I am concerned."

She laughed at this and came out on to the pavement. I have said she was pretty, but that's hardly the word for it. If she went on the Gaiety stage to-morrow, she'd be the talk of the town in a fortnight—and as for her manners, well, it isn't my place to remark on those. Affability appeals to me wherever I find it, and if Betsy Chambers isn't affable, then I don't know the meaning of the term.

"Where have you come from?" she asked me as we stood there; "have you come from Scotland?"

"More like from Scotland Yard in these times," says I; "why should you ask

me that?"

"Because the gentleman said that his wife would be arriving from Scotland to-night, but that he would not be here until to-morrow. I wouldn't have stopped in the house for anything if he had not said she was coming!"

"Then you're alone, my dear?"

She tossed her head.

"Yes, I am, and that's why all the lamps are lighted."

"Why, to be sure," cried I, "there might have been a man under the bed;" but she was too polite to notice this, and I could see she was very much afraid of sleeping alone in that strange house, and I don't wonder at it.

"I can walk up and down the front garden all night, if you like," said I, "or maybe I could sleep on the drawing-room sofa, if you prefer it. Is this the first time they have left you alone here?"

She looked at me in surprise.

"I was only engaged yesterday from the registry office in Marylebone. This is a furnished house, and they have taken it for three months certain. The gentleman comes from Edinburgh and the lady is an American. They haven't got a cook yet, but hope to have one by to-morrow. Whatever shall I do if they never come at all?"

"Oh," says I, "try on her dresses and see how they suit you. Suppose we get the basket in to begin with. Here's a chap coming who looks as though he could lay out sixpence if he hadn't got a shilling; we'll enlist him and then talk about supper afterwards. Is your name Susan, by the way? The last nice girl I met was called Susan, and so I thought——"

"Oh, don't be silly," says she; "my name's Betsy, and if you squeeze my hand like that, some one will see you."

I told her it must have been done in a moment of abstraction, and then I hailed the "cab runner" who was loafing down the road; and, what with him and a messenger boy in a hurry, we got the basket down and lifted it into a big square

hall and laid it almost at the foot of the staircase, up which we should have to carry it presently.

Somehow or other it seemed to me over-heavy for a clothes' basket; but I said nothing about it at the time, and, telling Betsy I would return in a minute, I went back to my car to turn off the petrol and see that all was shipshape. When I entered the house again, and almost as soon as I had shut the door, the queerest thing I can remember happened to me. It was nothing less than this—that the girl, Betsy, came toward me with her face as white as a sheet; and, before I could utter a single word or ask her the ghost of a question, she just slipped headlong through my arms and lay like a dead thing.

Now, this was a nice position to be in and no mistake about it. The girl limp and helpless in my arms, not a soul in the house, me not knowing where to lay hands on a drop of brandy, to say nothing of a glass of water, and, above all, the peculiar feeling that something not over-pleasant must have frightened Betsy, and that it might frighten me before many minutes had passed. Listening intently, I could not at first hear a sound in all the house—but just when I was telling myself not to be a fool, I heard, as plainly as ever I heard anything in my life, a sigh as of some one groaning in pain; and at that I do believe I dropped the girl clean on to the floor and made a dash into the nearest room in a state of mind I should have been ashamed to confess even to my own brother.

What did it mean, who was playing tricks with us, and what was the mystery? I looked round the apartment and made it out to be the dining-room, plainly furnished, well lighted, but as empty of people as Westminster Abbey at twelve o'clock of a Sunday night. A smaller room to the right lay in darkness, but I found the switch and satisfied myself in a moment that no one was hidden there; nor did a search in every nook and cranny near by enlighten me further. What was even worse was the fact that I could now hear the groaning very plainly; and when I had stood a minute, with my heart beating like a steam pump and my eyes half blinded with the shadows and the light, I discovered, just in a flash, that whoever groaned was not in any room of the house, neither in the hall nor upon the staircase, but in the very basket I had just laid down and should have carried to the floor above before many minutes had passed.

I am not going to state here precisely what I thought or did when I made that astonishing discovery, or just what I felt at the moment when I tried to understand its significance. Perhaps I could not remember half that happened

even if I tried to do so. My clearest memory is of a dark, silent street, and of me standing there, bare-headed, with a fainting girl in my arms, and a civil old chap with white whiskers asking again and again, "My good fellow, whatever is the matter and what on earth are you doing here?" When I answered him it was to beg him for God's sake to tell me the name of the nearest doctor—and at that I remember he simply pointed to the house opposite and to a brass plate upon its door.

"I am Mr. Harrison, the surgeon," he said quickly; "I am just buying a motor, and so I crossed the road to look at yours. Tell me what has happened and what is the matter with the woman."

I told him as quietly as I could.

"God knows what it is—perhaps murder. The girl heard it and fainted. She'll be all right in a minute if I can lay her down. I never thought any woman weighed half as much. Anyway, she's coming to and that's something—if you could call a policeman, sir."

He was a self-possessed gentleman, I must say, and, looking up and down the street, while I set the girl down on the footboard of the car, he espied the little messenger boy who had helped us to carry the basket into the house and sent him for a policeman. Betsy had opened her eyes by this time, but all she could say had no meaning for me, nor was it any clearer to him. When we had got her across to his surgery and left her there, we returned to the house together, and as we went I tried to tell him just what had happened and how I came to be mixed up in such a strange affair. The story was still half told when we mounted the steps of Bredfield and walked straight up to the basket which had scared the girl out of her wits and left me wondering whether I was awake or dreaming. Now, however, I had no doubt at all about the matter, for whoever was under that lid was struggling pretty wildly to get free, and would have broken the cords in another minute if the doctor had not cut them.

A couple of slashes with a lancet severed the stout rope with which my "bundle" had been tied, and a third cut the bit of string which bound the hasp to the wickerwork. I stepped back instinctively as the gentleman raised the lid, and so, to be honest, did he—the same thought, I am sure, being in both our heads and the belief that our own lives might be in danger. When the truth was revealed, my first impulse was to laugh aloud, my second to set off in my car

without a moment's loss of time, and try to lay by the heels the pair of villains who had done this thing.

In a word, I may tell you that the basket contained a young girl, apparently not more than fifteen years of age; that she was dressed in rags, though apparently a lady of condition, and that when we lifted her out it appeared that her reason had gone and that her young life might shortly follow it.

I've been through some strange times in my life; had many a peep into the next world, so to speak; seen men die quick and die slow—but for real right-down astonishment and pity I shall never better that scene in the Boundary Road, St. John's Wood, if I live as long as the patriarchs.

Just picture the brightly lighted hall and the open basket, and this pretty little thing with yellow hair streaming over her shoulders and her bare arms extended as though in entreaty toward the doctor and me, and such cries upon her lips as though we, and not the men who had sent her here, had been her would-be murderers. I tell you that I would have sold my home to save her, and that's no idle word. Unhappily, I could do nothing, and what I would have done the police forbade me to do, for there were three of them in the room before five minutes had passed; and I might be forgiven for saying that half the local force was present inside half an hour.

Well, you know what a policeman is when anything big turns up; how there's a mighty fine note-book about two foot long to be produced, and perhaps a drop of whisky and soda to whet his pencil, and then the questions and the answers and what not—all the time the thief is running hard down the back street and the gold watch is sticking out of his boot.

I answered perhaps a hundred and fifty questions that night, and nobody any the wiser for them. Notes were taken of everything: the time I set out, where my father was born, what they paid me for the job, the address of the garage, Christian name and surname of Abraham Moss—whether I'd had my licence endorsed or kept it clean—until at last, able to stand it no longer, I told the inspector plainly that this wasn't Colney Hatch, and the sooner he understood as much the better.

"Here's my car and there's the street," said I; "will you drive to Richmond Road and see the house for yourself or will you not? I tell you there were two of

them, and one may be there now. You can prove it for yourself or let it go, as you like. But don't say it wasn't talked about or I shall know how to contradict you."

He came down to ground at this and consented to go with me. We were back again in the Richmond Road inside a quarter of an hour and knocking at the door of the house where I had picked the basket up about two minutes later. A very old woman opened to us this time, and answered very civilly that the two strange gentlemen had left for the Continent by the evening train, and she had no idea if they would return or no. They had always paid her regularly, she said, though not often at home; while as for their room, we could examine that with pleasure. The more amazing confession came after, for when she was pressed to tell us something about the young lady, she declared stoutly that she had never seen one, and that the Messrs. Picton—for so she called her lodgers—kept no female company, and very rarely had asked even a gentleman to their rooms.

The inspector listened to all she had to say and then made a formal search of the house. It would be waste of time to insist that he found nothing—not so much as a scrap of paper or an empty collar-box to enlighten him; but he gave strict orders that no one was to enter the men's room upon any pretext whatsoever; and when he had locked it and pocketed the key, he made me drive him back to the Boundary Road and then up to the hospital at Hampstead, to which the little girl had been carried and where she was then lying. Naturally I had the *entrêe* as well as he—for there were three or four swagger men from Scotland Yard on the carpet by this time, and all of them mighty anxious to make my acquaintance. From these I learned that the child was still incoherent in her talk, and utterly unable to remember who she was or whence she had come. Fright had paralysed her faculties. She might have been born yesterday for all she knew about it.

For my part, I had a strong desire to talk to the girl myself and put a few questions which had come into my head while we were waiting; but the police would have none of this, and the most they would permit me to do was to look at her from the far end of the ward, which I did for a long time, watching her face very closely, and wondering how beautiful it was.

When they sent me away at last I returned to the garage down West, and so to my bed, but not to sleep. It must have been three o'clock of the morning by this time, and I lay until I heard some noisy church-clock striking seven, when I determined to stop there tossing about no longer, but to get up and read the

morning papers. Few of them, however, had more than a brief paragraph announcing the fact, and we had to wait for the "evenings" to discover the real sensation. My word, how thick they laid it on—and what a hero they made of me. I must have been interviewed a dozen times that day, and when the following morning's papers came, I read for the first time that a reward of five hundred pounds had been offered for the capture of the perpetrators of this outrage, and that it would be paid by the Editor of the *Daily Herald* on the day that the mystery was solved.

Of course, there were many theories. Some believed it to be a case of abduction pure and simple, some of revenge; a few recommended the doctors to follow the poison clue and to ascertain if the child had been drugged before she was put into the basket.

Speaking for myself, I had an idea in my head, which I didn't mention even to Betsy Chambers, whom it was necessary for me to see pretty often about that time, and generally of evenings. This idea, I suppose, would have knocked the Scotland Yard braves silly with laughing; but I had no fancy to share five hundred with them—more especially since they took seven fifteen off me at Kingston last Petty Sessions—so I just kept a quiet tongue in my head and mentioned the matter to nobody. Perhaps it was unfortunate I did not; I can't tell you more than this, that the next ten days found me walking about Soho as though I had a fancy to buy up the neighbourhood, and that on the eleventh day precisely I found what I wanted—found it by what I might have called a turn of Providence if I didn't know now it was something very different.

I should remind you hereabouts that the case was still the rage of the town, though hope of bringing the would-be assassins to justice had almost been abandoned.

The little girl now began to remember her past in a dim sort of way, and had told the police that she lived in a foreign country by the sea—which was not the same as saying Southend-on-the-Mud by a long way. Her father she recollected distinctly, and cried out for him very often in her sleep. She did not seem to think she had a mother, and of what happened in the Richmond Road her mind recalled nothing. I had seen her twice; but she was so frightened when I went near her that the police forbade me to go at all—and I do believe, upon my solemn word, that if it hadn't been for the witnesses they would have said I had something to do with the job myself.

This, be sure, didn't trouble me at all. What was in my mind was the five hundred sterling offered by the *Daily Herald* for the solution of the mystery; and that sum I did not lose sight of night or day. To win it I must discover the Yankee with the voice like a saw-mill, and the little cove with the saucer eyes, and for these, upon an instinct which I can hardly account for even to myself (save to say it was connected with three days I spent in Paris eight months ago) I hunted Soho for eleven days as other men hunt big game in Africa. And, will you believe it, when I discovered one of them at last, it was not by my eyes, but by his, for he spotted me at the very top of Wardour Street, and, coming across the road, he slapped me on the shoulder, just as though I had been his only brother let loose on society for the especial purpose of shaking him by the hand.

"Why," says he, "I guess it's the coachman."

"Coachman be d——d," says I; "hasn't Pentonville taught you no better manners than that? You be careful," says I, "or they'll be cancelling your ticket-of-leave——"

He wasn't to be affronted, for he continued to treat me as though he loved me and life had been a misery since we lost each other.

"Say," cried he, "you got through with the basket all right. Well, see here, now; do you want to get that five hundred, Britten, or do you not? I'll play the White Man with you—do you want to get it?"

"Oh," cried I, "if it's a matter of five hundred being put in the cloak-room because there isn't a label on it——"

"Then come along," he rejoined, and, taking me by the arm, he led me along the street, turned sharp round to the right into a place that looked like a disused coach-house; and before I could wink my eye, he dragged me through a door into a room beyond, and then burst out laughing fit to split.

"Britten," says he, "you're fairly done down. I've got the cinch on you, Britten. Don't you perceive that same?"

Well, of all the fools! My head spun with the thought; not at first the thought of fear, mind you, though fear followed right enough, but just with the irony of it all, and the rightdown lunacy which sent me into this trap as a fly goes into a spider's web. And this man would suck me dry; I hadn't a doubt of it; a word

might cost me my life.

"Well," I rejoined, knowing that my safety depended upon my wits, "and what if I am? Do you suppose I came here without letting Inspector Melton know where I was coming? You'd better think it out, old chap. There may be two at the corner and both on the wrong side. Don't you make no mistake."

He laughed very quietly, and as though to make his own words good he put up the shutters on the only window the miserable den of a place possessed. We were in a kind of twilight now, in a miserably furnished shanty, with the paper peeling off the walls and the fire-grate all rusted and the very boards broken beneath our feet. And I believed he had a pistol in his pocket, and that he would use it if I so much as lifted my hand.

"Oh," says he presently, and in a mocking tone which ran down my back like cold water from a spout. "Oh, you're a brave boy, Britten, and when you spread yourself about the tecs, I like you. Now, see here, did I try to murder that girl or did I not? Fair question and fair answer. Am I the man the police are looking for, or is it another?"

I answered him straight out.

"The pair of you are in it. You know that well enough—and the reward is five hundred, to say nothing of what the police are offering."

"You mean to have that reward, Britten."

"If I can get it fairly, yes."

"As good as to say you'll walk straight out of here and give me up?"

"Unless you can tell me you didn't do it."

He swung round on his heel and looked at me as savage as a devil out of hell.

"I did it, Britten—Barney, my mate, had nothing to do with it. Didn't you see him sweat the night you picked us up? Barney's a tender-foot at this game; he'll never cut a figure in the 'Calendar,' why, not if he lives to be a chimpanzee in the human menagerie. Barney ought to be holding forth in the tabernacle round the corner. Him do it—why, he couldn't kill a calf."

Well, I think I sat back and shuddered at this; anyway, an awful feeling of horror came upon me, both at the man's word and at the thought of my lonely situation, and of what must come afterwards. All the calculations seemed against me. I am a strong man, and would have stood up to this Yankee, fist to fist, for any sum you care to name; but the pistol in his pocket, and the certainty that he would use it upon any provocation, held me to my seat as though I were glued there. And thus for five whole minutes, an eternity of time to me, I watched him pace up and down the room, gloating upon his horrid work, and wondering when my turn would come.

"Britten," he said presently—and his voice had changed, I thought—"Britten, would you like a whisky and soda?"

"If it's only whisky and soda——"

"What! You think I'm going to doctor it—same as I did Mabel's?"

"I don't know to what you refer—but something of the kind was in my head."

It amused him finely—and I must say again that his attitude all through was that of a man who could hardly keep from laughing whatever he did, so that I came to think he must be little short of a raving maniac, and that perhaps the Court would find him such.

"Oh," says he, "don't you fear, Britten, I shan't treat you that way—you may drink my whisky all right, a barrelful if you can. When I want to deal with you, Britten, it will be another way altogether—cash, my boy; have you any objection to a little cash?"

I opened my eyes wide, telling myself, for the second time, that he was as certainly mad as any March hare in the picture-books; but I said nothing, for he had turned to a little wooden cupboard near the fireplace, and before he spoke again he set a bottle of whisky, a syphon, and two tumblers on the table, and poured out a stiffish dose for himself and its fellow for me. When I had watched him drink it, and not before, I followed suit, and never did a man want a whisky and soda as badly.

"Your health," says he—I believe I wished him the same. "And little Mabel Bellamy's——"

I put the glass down on the table with a bang.

"Good God!" said I, "not Mabel Bellamy that did the disappearing trick at the Folies Bergères in Paris two years ago?"

"The same," says he.

"And you are telling me——"

"That she was a very fine actress. Do you deny it, Mr. Britten?"

I rose and buttoned my coat—but the black look was in his eyes again.

"Britten," says he, "not in so much of a hurry, if you please. I am going round to the *Daily Herald* this afternoon to get that five hundred. You will sit here until I return, when I shall pay you fifty of the best. Is it a bargain, Britten—have we the right to the money or have you?"

I thought upon it for a moment and could not deny the justice of it.

"Do you mean to say you did it for an advertisement?" I cried.

"The very same," says he, "and this night, Mabel's fond papa, the gentleman with the big eyes, Britten, will go to Hampstead and take his long-lost daughter to his breast. She makes her first appearance at the Casino Theatre to-morrow night, Britten——"

I rose and shook him by the hand.

"Fifty of the best," said I, "and I'll wait for them here."

Well, I must say it was a tidy good notion, first for the pair of them to work a trick like that on the public just for the sake of letting all the world know that Mabel Bellamy was to disappear from a basket at the Casino Theatre; and secondly, dropping on the *Daily Herald* for five hundred of the best—and getting it, too, before the story got wind.

You see, the *Herald* lost no money, for they had a fine scoop all to their little selves, while the other papers gnashed their teeth and looked on. Nor was the

whole truth told by a long way, but a garbled version about foreign coves who worked the business and bolted, and a doting father who never consented to it—and such a hash-up and hocus-pocus as would have made a pig laugh.

Whether, however, the public really took it all, or whether it resented the manner of the play, is not for me to say.

Sentiment is, after all, a very fine thing, as I told Betsy Chambers the night I gave her the anchor brooch and asked her to wear it for auld lang syne, to say nothing of the good time we had when I took her to Maidenhead in old Moss's car and pretended I was broken down at Reading with a dot-and-go-one accumulator. Of course, Moss weighed in with an interview. I wonder the sight of his ugly old mug didn't shrivel the paper it was printed on.

Anyway me and Betsy—but that's another story, and so, perhaps, I had better conclude.

VI

THE COUNTESS

To begin with, I suppose, it would be as well to tell you her name, but I only saw it once in the address-book at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, and then I couldn't have written it down for myself—no, not if a man had offered me five of the best for doing so.

You see, she gave it out that she came from foreign parts, and her husband, when she remembered that she'd got one, was supposed to be a Hungarian grandee with a name fit to crack walnuts, and a moustache like an antelope's horns set over a firegrate to speak of her ancestors. Had I been offered two guesses, I would have said that she came from New York City and that her name was Mary. But who am I to contradict a pretty woman in trouble, and what was the matter with Maria Louise Theresa, and all the rest of it, as she set it down in the visitors' book at the hotel?

I'd been over to Paris on a job with a big French car, and worked there a little while for James D. Higgs, the American tin-plate maker, who was making things shine at the Ritz Hotel, and had a Panhard almost big enough to take the chorus to Armenonville—which he did by sections, showing neither fear nor favour, and being wonderful domesticated in his tastes.

When James was overtaken by the domestic emotions, and thought he would return to Pittsburg to his sorrowing wife and children, he handed me over to the Countess, saying that she was a particular friend of his, and that if her ancestors didn't sail with the Conqueror it was probably because they had an appointment at the Moulin Rouge and were too gentlemanly to break it—which was his way of tipping me the wink; and "Britten, my boy," says he, "keep her out of mischief, for you are all she has got in this wicked world."

Well, it was an eye-opener, I must say; for I hadn't seen her for more than two minutes together, and when we did meet, I found her to be just a jolly little American chassis, slim and shapely, and as full of "go" as a schoolgirl on a roundabout. Her idea, she told me, was to drive a Delahaye car she had hired, from Paris to Monte Carlo, and there to meet her husband with the jaw-cracking name; whom, she assured me, with the look of an angel in the blue picture, she hadn't seen for more than two years.

"Two years, Britten—sure and certain. Now what do you think of that?"

"It would depend upon your husband, madame," said I; upon which she laughed so loud they must have heard her in the garden below.

"Why, to be sure," says she, "you've got there first time. It does depend upon the husband, and mine is the kindest, gentlest, most foolish creature that ever was in this world. So, you see, I am determined not to be kept from him any longer."

"Then, madame," said I, "we had better start at once."

I thought that she hesitated, could have sworn that she was about to admit me further into her confidence; but I suppose she considered the time unsuited; and after asking me a few questions about the car, and whether I knew the road and was a careful driver, she gave me instructions to be at the hotel at nine o'clock on the following morning. So away I went, telling myself that the world was a funny place, and wondering what Herr Joseph, the jaw-cracker, would have to

say to his good lady when she did turn up at Montey and laid her new beehive hat upon his doting bosom.

This was no business of mine. I am a motor-driver, and two pound ten on Saturday is my abiding anxiety. Give me my wages regular, and the class of passenger who feels for the driver's palm at the journey's end, and I'll ask nothing more of Providence. So on the following morning, at nine sharp, I drove the big Delahaye round to the Ritz, and by a quarter past her ladyship was aboard and we were making for Dijon and the coast.

No motorist who knows anything of the game will ask me to describe this journey, or to tell him just where he should stop because of the dead 'uns of five hundred years ago, or where he should hurry on because of the livestock of to-day. I had a fine car under me, a pretty woman in the tonneau, a May-day to put life into me, and a road so fine that a man might dream of it in his sleep. And if that's not what the schoolmaster calls Eldorado, then I'll send him a halfpenny card to find out just what is.

So let it suffice to say that we went at our leisure—slept at Dijon and at Lyons, were one night at Avignon, and two nights later at Nice. If there was anything to remark during the journey, it was Madame's growing anxiety as we approached the Mediterranean, and the number of telegrams she sent to her friends whenever we chanced to halt—even in the meanest villages.

The telegrams I had the pleasure to read more than once as I handed them over the counter; but those that were in German were no good to me, and those that were in French I could but half decipher. None the less, I got the impression that she was in a state of much distress and perplexity, and that all her messages were to one end—namely, that she should have the right to go somewhere at present forbidden her, and that the Baron Albert, whoever he might be, should be interviewed on her behalf and persuaded that she was a lady of all the virtues.

A final telegram to an English gentleman at Vienna capped all, and was not to be misunderstood. It simply said, "I shall publish the story if they persevere." And that seemed to me an ugly threat to come from so pretty a sender, though of its meaning I had no more knowledge than the dead.

Perhaps you will say that I was a poor sort to have been reading her telegrams at all; that it didn't concern me; and that I was paid to hold my tongue. Well, that

is true enough, and Madame had little to complain of on such a score, I must say. To all and sundry who questioned me at the hotels, I just said she was the wife of a Hungarian nobleman, and that she travelled for her pleasure. When we arrived at Nice, and an impertinent policeman got me into a corner, so to speak, and tried to put me through the catechism, I simply said, "No speakee Frenchee—Mistress Americano," and at that he shook his head and wrote it down in a note-book about as large as a grocer's ledger. But I plainly perceived that something more than mere police curiosity accounted for all this cross-examination; and when Madame sent for me to her private sitting-room that night, I guessed immediately that something was up, and that I was about to learn the nature of it.

I shall always remember the occasion, as beautiful a night of a Southern summer as a man could hap upon. Still and starry, the sea without a ripple; the ships like black shapes against an azure sky; the lights of the houses shining upon the moonlit gardens; the music of the bands; the gay talk of the merry people—oh, who would go northward ho! if Providence set him down on such a spot as this? And upon it all was the picture of Madame herself—of that lady of the gazelle's eyes and the milk-white skin, as she invited me into her sitting-room and asked me to sit down while she talked.

You could not have matched her for beauty in Nice; I doubt if you could have done it nearer than Paris and the Ritz. Dressed in a lot of fluffy stuff, with a pink satin skirt, and arms bare to the shoulders and a chain of diamonds about her neck—dressed like this, and so sweet and gracious in her manner, talking to me just as though she had known me from infancy, and asking me, Lal Britten, to help her—why, you bet I said "Yes," and said it so plainly that even she could not mistake me.

"Why, Britten," says she, "do you know what has happened to-day?"

"Couldn't guess it if I tried, madame," said I.

"Well, then, I must tell you: they won't let me go to Monte Carlo, Britten. They say the Emperor forbids it."

"But, madame, is there any need to ask the old gentleman's permission? Aren't you an American citizen?"

She laughed at my idea of it, and asked me if I would like a glass of port wine, which I did to oblige her; while she took another as though she liked it,

which I have no reason to suppose she did not.

"You see, Britten," she said, presently, "a woman is of her husband's nationality, and so, of course, I am a Hungarian. That is why the Emperor has the power to say that I must not be admitted to Monte Carlo just at the moment when my dear husband is waiting for me there. Now, don't you think it is very hard upon us both?"

"It's very hard on him, madame, seeing you are in the case. I should want to know him before I said the same thing for you, asking your pardon for the liberty."

She took no notice of this, but casting up her eyes to heaven—and at that game Miss Sarah Bernhardt out of Paris couldn't beat her—she exclaimed:

"Oh, my poor Joseph, whatever will he think of me? I dare not contemplate it, Britten—I really dare not."

"Then I should leave it alone, madame. Is there no way of getting this decision altered?"

"None that I can think of, unless——"

"Unless what, madame?"

She tapped the table with her pretty fingers, and poured me out a second glass of port wine.

"Unless the mountain will come to Mahomet—but I guess you don't know what that means, Britten, now do you?"

She screwed her lips up to the kissing point with this, and looked at me so tenderly that I began to feel nervous—upon my word I did.

"Do you mean that your husband must come here, madame?"

"Of course I mean it, Britten. You must fetch him—by a trick. Now wouldn't that be splendid—say, wouldn't it be fine? If we could outwit them—if we could make the Emperor look foolish!"

I rubbed my chin and thought about it. There isn't much modesty in my profession, but the idea of getting up against a policeman so far from my humble home somehow put the brake on, and I found myself misfiring like one o'clock in spite of her pretty eyes and her red lips, and her "take me in your arms and kiss me" look. The Croydon lot are bad enough, but as for the beaks at Montey —well, I've heard tales of them and to spare.

"It would be fine, madame, if we could do it," said I at last; "but between talking of it here in this hotel and crossing the frontier——"

"Oh," she cried, interrupting me almost angrily—and she has the devil of a temper—"oh, there's no difficulty, Britten. Just drive to the Hermitage after my husband has dined to-morrow night, and say that if he wants the news of Madame Clara, you can take him where he will get it. Don't you see, Clara is one of my pet names. He'll understand in a moment, and you can drive him to this hotel. Are you afraid to do that, Britten?"

Of course I wasn't afraid, and she knew it. It was nothing to me anyway, and I could always plead that I was her servant and an Englishman, and didn't care a damn for this particular Emperor or any other. None the less, if she hadn't smiled upon me as she did at that particular moment—smiled like a daffy-down-dilly in April, and squeezed my hand as soft as June roses, which the same appeared to be done by accident, I might have left it alone, after all. As it was, I had set off at seven o'clock on the following evening, and at a quarter past nine I was asking at the Hermitage for Count Joseph, just as full of the story I had to tell as a history-book of kings.

A black and white *maître d'hôtel*, picked out with gold, replied to this, and after talking to half a dozen waiters and sending for another chap with a shirt-front like a Mercedes bonnet, they directed me to a little hotel down by Monaco; and there the head waiter received me quite affably, and said, "Certainly, the gentleman was at home." When I had given my name, but not my business, I was ushered up, perhaps after an interval of ten minutes, to a sitting-room on the first floor, and there I found myself face to face with a fat, red-faced man in evening dress; and if ever there was a martinet down Montey way, this fine gentleman was that same. He was fat, I say, and forty—but to write that he was fair would be impossible, for he hadn't more than about half a dozen hairs on his head, and those had drifted down his neck to get out of the wind. When I came in he appeared to be sipping Cognac out of a long green bottle, and to be reading

private papers just as fast as he could get through them, but he looked up presently, and a pair of wickeder eyes I do not want to see.

"Who sent you here?" he asked.

"A lady," said I.

"Her name?"

"Madame Clara."

He turned and snuffed the wick of a candle standing on the table by his side. From his manner I did not think him quite sober, but he appeared to pull himself together by-and-by, and then he exclaimed:

"Repeat your message."

"I am to say that if you wish for news of Madame Clara, I can take you where you will get it."

Well, I thought that he smiled, though I cannot be quite sure of that. Presently, however, he stood up without a word, and, going into his bedroom, he brought a heavy fur coat and cap into the sitting-room, and motioned me to help him on with them. When that was done, he opened the door and invited me to precede him down the corridor.

"I will see the lady," he said—and that was all. We were in the car two minutes afterwards, making for Nice on the "fourth," and not a soul to interfere with us or to do more than take a glance at our papers as we passed the stations. Never had there been a lighter job; never had a man helped a woman so easily.

I thought about all this, be sure, as we drew near Nice and the end of our game appeared to be at hand. The old women tell us not to count our chickens before they are hatched, and that's a thing I am not in the habit of doing; but the more I reflected upon it, the better pleased did I feel with myself, and the greater was my wonder at the lady's tastes. That such a pretty little woman, such a gay soul, such a good judge of men—for she was a judge, I'll swear—that she should have ever been in love with this sack of lard I was driving to Nice—well, that did astonish me beyond measure; though it should not have done so, knowing women as I do, and seeing how old Father Time does stick his dirty fingers on

our idols and make banshees of the best of them.

I say that I was astonished, but such a feeling soon gave place to others; and when I brought up my car with a dash to the door of the hotel, and the gold-laced porter helped the fat old gentleman out, curiosity took the place of wonder. I became as anxious as a parlourmaid at a keyhole to know what Madame would have to say to this twenty-stone husband, and, what particular terms of endearment he would choose for his reply. Certainly if pleasurable anticipation is to be denoted by smiles, he found no fault with his present situation, for he grinned like a gorilla when he got down, and, nodding to me quite affably, he asked:

"Upon which floor is Madame Clara staying, did you say?"

"The third floor—number 113."

"Ah," says he, adjusting his glasses and turning round to go in, "that is an unlucky number, my friend," and without another word he entered the hotel and left me there.

Of course, I didn't expect him to talk to me, was not looking for a tip from Madame's own husband, but I had expected a question or two; and when he had departed the porter and I stopped there gossiping a bit, for it was likely that the car might be wanted again that night—and, to be truthful, I more than half hoped that Madame would send for me.

"What's up?" asks the porter—he passes for a foreigner, but I happen to know he was born just off Soho. "What's up, matey?"

"Why," says I, "that's just what I'd like to know myself. Can't you tell the chambermaid at 113 to find out?"

"The maid's off. Is that old cove licensed?"

"All in order at Scotland Yard," says I. "He's took out a license to drive, and his papers are passed. That's my missis' husband."

"Oh," he remarked, in a dreamy kind of way, "which one?"

"Why, the gentleman who just went in."

"Poor soul!" says he, in a most aggravating manner, "how fast she do lose 'em. I wonder who pays for the headstones?"

"Do you know her?" asked I, for his words took me aback.

He shook his head at this, and then scratched it as though he were trying to think.

"Larst time," he said presently, "larst time she dropped one or two at Cannes, I'm thinking—— But, Lord love me, what's that?"

He stepped back on the pavement and looked up to the window of the room 113. I had heard the shindy as well as he—a regular scream, as though a woman was mad in her tantrums, and upon that a crash of glass and silence—while the porter and me, we just stared at one another.

"Votes for women!" says he, presently, and in so droll a way that I had to laugh in spite of myself; but before I could answer him, what do you think? Why, out come the old gentleman, just as calm and smiling as he had been ten minutes ago.

"You will drive me back to Monaco," he began. I asked him by whose orders; but at that he looked like a devil incarnate, and spoke so loud that I was right down frightened of him.

"You will drive me back to Monaco or spend the night in prison!" he shouted. "Now, which do you prefer?"

"Oh," says I, "in you get!" And in he did get, as I'm a Dutchman, and I drove him back to the hotel at Monaco—which was about the hour of one in the morning, and no mistake at all. When he got out at last, no babe in frocks could have looked more innocent, and he just handed me up a couple of louis, like a father blessing his only son.

"You drive very well, my lad. Where did you learn?"

"On a good car, sir. Henri Fourtnier taught me about the time of the second Gordon Bennett. But I don't suppose you remember that."

"Certainly I remember it. The late Count Zborowski was one of my friends.

Let me give you a little piece of advice. It is better to drive for a gentleman than a lady."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

But he waved his hand with a flourish, and crying, "A bonny arntarndure," or something of that kind, he disappeared into his hotel and left me to think what I liked. And a lot I did think as I drove back to Nice, I do assure you—for a rummier game I had never been engaged in, and that's the truth, upon my word and honour.

It was daylight when I reached the garage, and out of the question, of course, to think of seeing Madame. Speaking for myself, I was too dog-tired to ask if she wanted me or not; and going up to my bedroom, I must have slept till nine o'clock without lifting an eyelid. At that hour the boots waked me in a deuce of a stew, telling me that Madame must see me without a moment's loss of time. I dressed anyhow and went down to her. Poor little woman, what a state she was in! I don't think I ever saw a sorrier picture in all my life.

No fluffy stuff and fine pink satin now, but a shabby old morning gown and her hair anyhow upon her shoulders, and in her eyes the look of a woman who has been hunted and does not know where on God's earth she is going to find a habitation. I've seen it twice in my life, and I never want to see it again—for what man with a heart would wish to do so?

"Britten," she says, almost like a play-actress on the stage of a theatre, "Britten, do you know what happened last night?"

"Well," says I, "for that matter lots of things happened; but if you're speaking of the gentleman, your husband——"

"My husband!"—you should have heard her laugh; it was just like one of the animals at the Zoo—"my husband! That wasn't my husband! That was the Baron Albert—the man I dread more than any one in the world. How could you make such a mistake, Britten?"

I shook my head.

"Madame," says I, "I'm very sorry, but I took the first one that came along and answered to the name. It must have been the head waiter's fault."

She clenched her hands and began to step up and down the room, wild with perplexity.

"It was all planned, Britten—all planned. They knew that I should send for Count Joseph, and this villain came from Vienna to thwart me. He must have bribed the servants at the hotel. And now, what do you say to it? I am to be banished from France—he swears it. They have written to Paris, and the decree may come at any moment. I am to be banished, Britten—driven out like a common criminal! Oh, what shall I do? My God, what shall I do?"

That was a question I couldn't answer, but it did seem a wicked thing to treat a woman so, and I wasn't ashamed to admit it.

"Is there any law in France that can turn you out, madame?" I asked. She answered that quickly enough.

"Certainly there is, Britten. I know all about it. They can turn me out at twenty-four hours' notice."

"Why not go to the American Consulate, madame?"

"Oh, you don't understand. If my husband were but here! Oh, they would not insult me then—even if you were my husband, Britten."

Upon my life and soul, I believe that she meant it. There was a look in her eyes as she stood before me which, unless I'm the biggest fool in Christendom, told me what was what plainly enough. A word, and I could have taken that fine lady in my arms. I would swear to it.

And what forbade me, you ask? Well, perhaps I'd heard a smash of glass last night, and perhaps I hadn't; but I do believe it was that porter's foolish remark about "votes for women" which put me off more than anything else. So I drew back a step and answered her with more respect than ever.

"I'll see that nobody insults you while I am your servant, madame. If I may make a suggestion, I would advise you to leave this town."

She looked at me thoughtfully.

"And where should I go, Britten?"

"Back to Paris, madame—they won't interfere with you there."

"But my husband—my dear husband?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"Perhaps Mahomet will come to the—er—em—to you, madame."

It was her turn to laugh; but I soon learned that my suggestion was no good to her, and for a very simple reason.

"Ah," she said, "men are strange creatures, Britten. When we will, they will not; and when we will not, why, then they give us jewellery. I can't go back to Paris. If I do, a police officer goes with me."

"Take him on the box and call him a footman—unless you prefer to make for London right away, madame."

She was emphatic about this.

"I can't, Britten! I must stay in Paris. It is my last chance of seeing Count Joseph before he returns to Vienna for the summer. Oh, is there no way? Is it quite impossible?"

I scratched my head. Something had been inside it for some minutes.

"Would you care to sit on the box beside me, madame?"

She was all ears at this.

"Of course I wouldn't mind. Have I not myself driven a car? Count Mendez taught me at Cannes last year."

"Could you drive this car a little way on the road to Italy?"

"Why, certainly I could. But how would that help us?"

"Supposing," said I, "that you didn't mind my old mackintosh, madame. I've got that, and a leather cap I keep for the cold weather. If you would put them on and sit beside me, I think we might do it. You can drive if there's any necessity to do so."

She clapped her hands so loud that I thought they would hear us on the Promenade des Anglais below.

"I'll do it, Britten—as I'm a living woman I'll do it. Go and bring your clothes. We may not have an hour to spare. I'll cheat them yet, Britten. Oh, you clever man—you clever man to have thought of it."

"We might start at dusk, madame. Pay your bill, and give it out that we are going into Italy this afternoon. You needn't come back. I'll find you a private room next door to the garage, where you can change, and we can set off just like two drivers on the box-seat, and nobody a penny the wiser. When you get to Paris I can take you to a little hotel——"

She was like a child about it.

"Why, of all the clever men! You shall look after me in Paris. I won't forget you, Britten, and I'm rich enough for anything—at present. You shall stop with me until Count Joseph comes——"

I thought to myself that it would be an over-long engagement in that case; but there was no call to say anything of the kind to her, and stopping only to repeat my directions, I went round to the garage and made ready. If Madame herself was excited at the prospect of giving the fat man the go-by, I was no less; and I assure you that no boy's game I had ever played excited me half as much. Best of all was the thought that our quickness would forestall them; and if the authorities did decide to expel her, we should be on the road to Paris long before the edict arrived.

As to what might happen afterwards, I was indifferent; for Paris is the same as London to a proper motor-man, and I am just as much at home in the Champs Elysêes as in Regent Street. So I left that to fortune, and, setting about the plan, I had my things packed and the car made ready under an hour, and at four o'clock sharp that afternoon I picked up Madame and her trunks at the door of the hotel and set off boldly as though to drive her to the Italian frontier. But I turned back before we had gone a mile, and making straight for the little Italian hotel next door to the garage, I smuggled her in without a soul being the wiser, and out again as cleverly just after dusk. She was dressed then just as I have told you—mackintosh up to her ears and a flat leather cap, suiting her pretty face to perfection. But any fool could have seen she was a woman twenty yards away;

and I began to ask which was the bigger idiot—me for making the suggestion, or she for taking it? It was too late, however, to think of that, and trusting that good luck might pull us through, perhaps looking on the whole affair as one which was pretty near its end—and that no good end—I let the car go and made straight for Brignoles.

Quite what apprehension of danger was in her head or mine I really don't know. Sometimes I think that she had a silly notion of what the French prefect might have done to her, exaggerating, as women will, the real situation, and dreadfully frightened of "foreigners."

For myself, I wanted to get her back to Paris in spite of the attempt to stop us; perhaps I wanted to be even with the red-faced man, who had ordered me about last night; but whichever way it was, I could have laughed fit to split every time I looked at that odd little bundle by my side and thought of it as it was last night, all dressed in flummery and rustling like the leaves. Nevertheless, I made no mention of it; and, as much to her surprise as mine, we passed through Frejus without any one stopping us, and drove right through the night without let or hindrance. Not until dawn did I begin to ask myself some questions—and they were awkward ones. What the devil was I going to do with her in the towns? Why had I never thought of it? She was wearing my long mackintosh, to be sure; but who would fail to recognise her, and what would the talk be like?

A hundred difficulties, not one of which I had had the brains to think of last night, kept popping up like midgets in a puppet-show; and, as though to crown them all, bang went the near-side back tyre at that very moment, and there we were by the roadside, at five in the morning, in as desolate a place as you want to find, and not the sign of house or village wherever the eye might turn.

Now Madame had been nearly asleep upon my shoulder when this happened, but she woke up at the report and looked up all about her as though she had been dreaming.

"Where are we, Britten?" she asked. "What has happened to us?"

"Tyre gone, madame. I must trouble you to get down."

She woke up at this, and got out immediately. I could see that she was more clear-headed than she had been last night, if not less frightened.

"This was a very foolish thing to do, Britten. We are sure to be followed."

"That's as it may be, madame. I fear it's too late to think of it now. My business is to get this tyre fixed up."

"Will it take you very long, Britten?"

"Thirty minutes ordinary. But it's a new cover and stiff—I'll say forty."

"Then I'll see to the breakfast. Wasn't it clever of me to think of it? I've brought a Thermos and a basket. We'll have breakfast in the little wood on the hillside. If no one follows us, I can be myself again at Aix, and we shall get to Paris, after all. But oh, Britten, I must look an object in your clothes. Why ever did you ask me to wear them?"

I made a dry answer. A man wrestling with a 935 by 135 cover isn't exactly in the mood to compliment a woman on her frippery or talk about the mountains. And I'm no more than human, all said and done, and the sight of the food she took out of the basket made me feel well-nigh desperate. So I turned my back upon her, and she went off to the copse to prepare breakfast as she had promised. Not five minutes afterwards I heard the hum of another car in the distance, and, looking up from my wheel, I saw a great red Mercedes coming down the hillside like a racer at Brooklands.

I knew that we were in for it; instinct told me immediately that we had been followed from Frejus or Nice, and that danger was aboard that flyer, and would be up with us in less than two minutes. What to do, whether to shout to Madame to run and hide herself—to do that or just go on with my work as though nothing had happened was a problem to make a man half silly. But in the end I held on tenaciously, and when the big car drew up beside me, I merely looked up and nodded to the driver as though to signal to him that all was well.

"Bon jour," says he.

"Morning," says I.

"Vous-êtes en panne, mon ami?"

"Hit it first time," says I—for those words are understood by every motor-man who's been in the Riviera—"in the pan and the grease together. Where are

you for?"

"Brignoles et Paris. Mais où donc est Madame?"

I looked up, my heart beating fast, and took a peep into his tonneau. The red-faced man was there right enough, but as fast asleep as a parson over his empty port-wine glass. Could I persuade this bonny Frenchman to get on with his job, we were half out of the wood sure and certain. But could I? Lord, how my hands shook when I replied:

"Madame est allé dans le train—Paree—Calais—moi je suis seul"—which was rather good, I thought, though that was not the time to say so.

Well, it seemed successful enough. The Frenchee took a look to the right and a look to the left of him, opened his throttle as though to let in his clutch and closed it again, took off his side brake, and then, just when I was pluming myself that we were through, what do you think the fool does? Why, turns deliberately round and wakes the red-faced Baron.

What passed between them I don't pretend to say, for the French went to and fro like lightning between summer clouds. But of this I am certain: that there never was such a devilish smile as the old Baron turned on me when he got down from the tonneau and took a swift survey of the scene as though sure already of his quarry.

"Ah," he cried, "here is our faithful friend once more. Good-day, Mr. Britten. I hope I see you well?"

"You see me next door to the devil," said I—for out here on the mountain side I didn't care a dump for him. Bluff, however, went for nothing that morning. I had met my match, and I knew it.

"Britten," says he, taking a big cigar from a case and lighting it with provoking deliberation. "Shall we make a truce, Britten?"

"Make what you like," says I. "This car has got to get to Paris to fetch my mistress. If a truce will do it, I'm taking some, right here."

He smiled again, but so softly that I could have hit him.

"Where is she hiding, Britten?" he asked, almost in a whisper. "Where has that very pretty lady chosen to conceal her charms? Come, tell me, my lad, and I'll give you five louis. What is the good of being so foolish?"

I didn't answer a word, and he took another look all round the hills. Luckily, if there was one coppice, there were twenty in that gorge, and when I saw him walking away to the wrong one, I thought I should burst out laughing on the spot. That, I am glad to say, I did not do; but calmly going on with my work, I had the new cover in presently and was ready to make a start. From that moment the drollery of the situation—for it was droll, as I live—began in dead earnest, and lasted right through a hot summer's day—until dusk came down, in fact, and the issue was over for good and all.

Can't you imagine just what happened, and see the irony of it all? Depict a great open chasm between the hills, little copses of pines everywhere, and more than one thicket; a white road winding through the valley, and two cars stuck up on that same.

Say that there was a fat Baron trotting to and fro like a dog hunting for rabbits; put down two tired and hungry chauffeurs, famished for want of meat and cursing their fate; do this, and add that they swore at both the sexes indifferently, and you'll have the thing to a tick. But I assure you that it's pleasanter to read about than to suffer; and any driver would admit as much.

Good Lord, what a day it was! The fat Baron, I should tell you, did not give up the hunt until near twelve o'clock; but when he had searched every thicket within a mile or more, he came back to us and deliberately made himself comfortable inside his car. As for me, I did not dare to move a step either way. If I had gone on, it would have been to have left Madame in the woods; while if I stayed, he stayed—and there you had it. And this game went on till dusk, mind you, and would have gone on longer but for the instinct which came to me quite suddenly like a thought dropped from the skies: that her ladyship had given us both the slip, after all, and would be already where the Baron Albert could not find her. This idea growing to an unalterable conviction decided me at last. I started my engine, mounted my box-seat, and without a word to either of them drove straight away to Brignoles—thence, without a question from any one, to Paris and my master.

It would have been three months afterwards that I received a letter from Madame, addressed from the yacht *Mostar,* then in Norwegian waters. She sent me ten pounds for myself, and after telling me that she was cruising with Baron Albert and his sister—a piece of news which fairly took my breath away—she went on to remark that the train service from Brignoles to Aix is excellent, but that she preferred not to make the journey in a leather cap and a mackintosh.

So, you see, I guessed in a moment that she had slipped away to Brignoles while we were talking about her that morning, and just taken the early express to Aix without a word to anybody. We had been but three kilometres from the town when the tyre burst, and so the journey could hardly have fatigued her.

As for her husband, the so-called Count Joseph, I heard in Paris afterwards that he wasn't her husband at all, but a rich young Hungarian noble she was trying desperately hard to marry. The Count Albert had been sent to Monte Carlo by the young man's people to protect him from this ambitious lady, and right well he appears to have done the business, for he must have found her in Paris afterwards and offered her the hospitality of his yacht.

I hope his sister was on board; I do indeed hope so.

But this is a rum world—and Lord, the scandal that some people will think of makes me quite unhappy sometimes.

Book catalog 1

Book catalog 2

Book catalog 3

Book catalog 4

Book catalog 5

Book catalog 6

performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg-tm works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works provided that

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg-tm works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, "Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation."

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg-tm License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.

- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from both the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and Michael Hart, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread public domain works in creating the Project Gutenberg-tm collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain "Defects," such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the "Right of Replacement or Refund" described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg-tm trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg-tm electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE

PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH F3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS' WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTIBILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg-tm work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg-tm work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg-tm

Project Gutenberg-tm is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg-tm's goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg-tm collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg-tm and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation web page at http://www.pglaf.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive

Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Its 501(c)(3) letter is posted at http://pglaf.org/fundraising. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's principal office is located at 4557 Melan Dr. S. Fairbanks, AK, 99712., but its volunteers and employees are scattered throughout numerous locations. Its business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887, email business@pglaf.org. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's web site and official page at http://pglaf.org

For additional contact information:
Dr. Gregory B. Newby
Chief Executive and Director
gbnewby@pglaf.org

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg-tm depends upon and cannot survive without wide spread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations ($1 to $5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit http://pglaf.org

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg Web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: http://pglaf.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg-tm electronic works.

Professor Michael S. Hart is the originator of the Project Gutenberg-tm

concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For thirty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg-tm eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as Public Domain in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our Web site which has the main PG search facility:

http://www.gutenberg.net

This Web site includes information about Project Gutenberg-tm, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.