

"RAFFLES, THE AMATEUR CRACKSMAN"

By E. W. Hornung, Author of "The Shadow of the Rope," "The Rogue's March," Etc.

No. V. Nine Points of the Law

"WELL," said Raffles, "what do you make of it?"

I read the advertisement once more before replying. It was in the last column of the Daily Telegraph, and it ran like this:—
TWO THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD.
The above sum may be earned by any one qualified to undertake delicate mission and prepared to run certain risk. Apply by telegram, Security, London.
"I think," said I, "it's the most extraordinary advertisement that ever got into print."
Raffles smiled.
"Not quite so that, Bunny; still, extraordinary enough, I grant you."
"Look at the figure."
"It is certainly large."
"And the mission—and the risk?"
"Yes; the combination is frank, to say the least of it. But the really original point is requiring applications by telegram to a telegraphic address. There's something in the fellow who thought of that, and something in his manner. One word he chokes off the million who answer an advertisement every day—when they can raise the stamp. My answer cost me five bob; but then I prepaid another."
"You don't mean to say that you're applied?"
"Rather," said Raffles. "I want two thousand pounds as much as any man."
"Put your own name?"
"Well—no, Bunny, I didn't. In point of fact, I smell something interesting and illegal, and you know what a cautious chap I am. I signed myself Glaspool, care of Hickey, 38 Conduit street; that's my tailor, and after sending the wire I went round and told him what to expect. He promised to send the reply along the moment it came. I shouldn't be surprised if that's it."

And he was gone before a double knock on the outer door had done rings through the rooms, to return next minute with an open telegram and a face full of news.
"What do you think?" said he. "Security's that fellow Addebroke, the police court lawyer, and he wants to see me instantly!"
"Do you know him, then?"
"Merely by repute. I only hope he doesn't know me. He's the chap who got six weeks for selling too close to the wind in the Sutton-Wilmer case; everybody wondered why he was out of the rolls. Instead of that, he's got a first-rate practice on the seamy side, and every blackguard with half a crown takes it straight to Bennett Addebroke. He's probably the one man who would have the cheek to put in an advertisement like that, and the one man who could do it without exciting suspicion. It's simply in his line; but you may be sure there's something shady at the bottom of it. The odd thing is that I have long made up my mind to go to Addebroke myself if accidents should happen."

"And you're going to him now?"
"This minute," said Raffles, brushing his hat, "and so are you."
"But I came in to drag you out to lunch."
"You shall lunch with me when we've seen this fellow. Come on, Bunny, and we'll choose a name on the way. Mine's Glaspool, and don't you forget it."
"The deuce he has," said Raffles. "I inquired who had bought it."
"A Queenslander by the name of Craze—the Honorable John Montagu Craze, M. L. C., to give him his full title. Not that we knew anything about him on Tuesday last, we didn't even know for certain that Debenham had stolen the picture. But he had gone down for money on the Monday evening, had been refused, and it was plain enough that he had helped himself in this way: he had threatened revenge, and this was it. Indeed, when I hunted him up in town on Tuesday night, he confessed as much in the most brazen manner imaginable. But he wouldn't tell me who was the purchaser, and finding out took the rest of the week; but I did find out, and a nice time I've had of it ever since. Backward and forward between Esber and the Metropole, where the Queenslander is staying; sometimes twice a day; threats, offers, prayers, entreaties, not one of them a bit of good."
"But," said Raffles, "surely it's a clear case. The sale was illegal; you can pay him back his money and force him to give the picture up."
"Exactly; but not without an action and a public scandal, and that my client declines to face. He would rather have even his picture than have the whole thing get into the papers; he has disowned his son, but he will not disown him; yet his picture he must have by hook or crook, and there's the rub! I am to get it back by fair means or foul. He gives me carte blanche in the matter, and I verily believe would throw in a blank check if asked. He offered one to the Queenslander, but Craze simply turned it down; the old boy is as much a character as the other, and between the two of them I'm at my wit's end."
"So you put that advertisement in the paper?" said Raffles.
"As a last resort, I did."
"And you wish us to attend this picture?"
"It was magnificently said; the lawyer flushed from his hair to his collar."
"I knew you were not the men!" he groaned. "I never thought of men of your stamp. I kept him in company by an equal indulgence; but Raffles, ever an exemplar in such matters, was more abstemious even than his wont, and very poor company to boot. I can see him now, his eyes in his plate—thinking, thinking. I can see the collector glancing from him to me in an apprehension of which I did my best to intimidate him by reassuring looks. At the close Raffles apologized for his preoccupation, called for an A. B. C. timetable, and announced his intention of catching the 2.30 to Esber. "You must excuse me," said Mr. Addebroke, "but I have my own idea, and for the moment I should much prefer to keep it to myself. It may end in a fiasco, I would rather not speak about it to either of you just yet. But speak to Sir Bernard I must, so will you write me one line to him on your card? Of course, if you wish, you must come down with me and hear what I say; but I really don't see much point in it."
And as usual Raffles had his way, though Bennett Addebroke showed some temper when he was gone, and I myself shared his annoyance to no small extent. I could only tell him that it was in the nature of Raffles to be self-willed and obstinate, but that no man of my acquaintance had half his audacity and determination; that I, for my part, would trust him through and through, and let him gang his own gear every time. More I dared not say, even to remove those chill misgivings with which I knew that the lawyer went his way.

The more of Raffles, but a telegram reached me when I was dressing for dinner.
"Be in your room tomorrow from noon and keep rest of day clear. RAFFLES."
It had been sent off from Waterloo at 6.15.

So Raffles was back in town; at an earlier stage of our relations I should have hunted him up then and there, but now I knew better. His telegram meant that he had no desire for my society that night or the following forenoon; that when he wanted me I should see him soon enough. And see him I did, toward 10 o'clock next day. I was watching for him from my window in Mount street, when he drove up furiously in a hansom, and jumped out without a word to the man. I met him next minute at the lift gates, and he fairly pushed me back into my room.
"Five minutes, Bunny," he cried. "Not a moment more."
And he tore off his coat before flinging himself into the nearest cab.
"Four is our figure, Mr. Addebroke," said Raffles, "and I couldn't go as a second representative of the other old chap, and it was thinking how I could do that made me such a bear at lunch. But I saw my way before we got up. If I had only lay hold of a copy of the picture I might ask leave to go and compare it with the original. So down I went to Esber to find out if there was a copy in existence, and was at Broom Hall for one hour and a half yesterday afternoon. There was no copy there, but they must exist, for Sir Bernard himself (there's a fellow!) has allowed a couple to be made since the picture has been in his possession. He hunted up the painters' addresses, and the rest of the evening I spent in hunting up the painters themselves; but their work had been done on commission; one copy had gone out of the country, and I'm still on the track of the other."

"You haven't seen Craze yet?"
"Seen him and made friends with him, and, if possible, he's the funnier odd customer of the two; but you should study 'em both. I took the train for Esber this morning, went in and lied like Ananias, and it was just as well I did—the old ruffian sells for Australia by tomorrow's 'boat. He wants to know who would sell me a copy of the celebrated Infanta Maria Teresa of Velasquez, that I'd been down to the supposed owner of the picture, only to find that he had just sold it up him. You should have seen his face when I told him that! He grinned all round his wicked old head. 'Did old Debenham admit the sale?' says he; and when I said he had he chuckled to himself for about five minutes. He was so pleased that he did just what I hoped he would do: he showed me the great picture; it lay by the hearth, and was a large one—also the case he's got it in. It's an iron map-case, in which he brought over the plans of his land in Britain; he wants to know who would buy it. I took the picture and was glancing at it, and he said, 'I'll be bound to suspect it of containing an Old Master, too?' But he's had it fitted with a new Chubb lock, and I managed to take an impression of the key while he was glancing over the canvas. I had the wax in the palm of my hand, and I shall make my duplicate this afternoon."
"Raffles looked at his watch and jumped up, saying he had given me a minute too much.
"By the way," he added, "you've got to bring the wax to the Metropole to-night."
"I?"
"Yes; don't look so scared. Both of us are invited—I swore you were dining with me. I accepted for us both; but I shan't be there."
"Well," he growled, "I suppose it can't be helped. Don't know why he couldn't come and have his dinner first. Like to see the deuced fellow to go to without my help. Don't forget to bring the wax to-night. You must keep him sitting as long

as possible, Bunny, and talking all the time."
In a flash I saw his plan.
"You're going for the picture while we're at dinner?"
"I am."
"If he hears you?"
"He shan't."
"But if he does?"
"And I fairly trembled at the thought. "If he does," said Raffles, "there will be a collision, that's all. Revolver would be out of place in the Metropole, but I shall certainly take a life-preserver."
"But it's ghastly!" I cried. "To sit and talk to an utter stranger and to know that you're at work in the next room!"
"Two thousand apiece," said Raffles, quietly.
"Upon my soul, I believe I shall give it away."
"Not you, Bunny, I know you better than you know yourself."
"He got on his coat and hat."
"What time have I to be there?" I asked him, with a groan.
"Quarter to eight. There will be a telegram from Esber in ten minutes. He'll be there to talk; you'll have no difficulty in keeping the ball rolling; but head him off his picture for all you're worth. If he offers to show it, you must go. He looked up the case elaborately this afternoon, and there's no earthly reason why he should unlock it again in this hemisphere."
"Where shall I find you when I get away?"
"I shall be down at Esber. I hope to catch the 8.15, and I shall be in town again this afternoon." I cried in a ferment, for his hand was on the door. "I'm not half cooked yet! I know I shall make a success of it."
"Not you," he said again, "but I shall if I waste any more time. I've got a deuce of a lot of reading about to do yet. You must find me at my rooms. Why not come down to Esber yourself by the last train? That's it—down you come with the latest news. I'll tell old Debenham to expect you; he shall give us both a bed. By Jove! he won't be able to do us too well if he's got his picture."
"After all, I had only to nod his adieu; and he left me limp with apprehension, sick with fear, in a perfectly pitiable condition of pure stage-fright.
"For, after all, I had only to act my part unless Raffles failed where he never did fail, unless Raffles the neat and noiseless was for once clumsy and inept, all I had to do was indeed to "smile and smile and be a villain." I practiced that smile and a half the afternoon. I rehearsed putative parts in hypothetical conversations. I got up stories. I dipped in a book or two, and at last I was making my bow to a somewhat elderly man with a small, bald head and a restraining bow.
"So you're Mr. Raffles' friend?" said he, overhauling me rather rudely with his light, small eyes. "Seen anything of him lately? He's a very nice fellow, isn't he? I expect he's got something, but he's never come."
No more evidently had his telegram, and my troubles were beginning early. I said I had not seen Raffles since 10 o'clock, telling the truth with unctuous when I could; even as we spoke there came a knock at the door; it was the telegram at last, and, after reading it himself, the Queenslander handed it to me.
"Called out of town?" he grumbled. "Gudden illness of near relative? What news? Don't know why he couldn't come. I knew of none, and for an instant I quailed before the perils of invention; then I replied that I had never met any of his people, and again felt fortified by my veracity.
"Thought you were bosom pals," said he, with (as I imagined) a gleam of suspicion in his crazy little eyes.
"Only in town," said I. "I've never been to his place."
"Well," he growled, "I suppose it can't be helped. Don't know why he couldn't come and have his dinner first. Like to see the deuced fellow to go to without my help. Don't forget to bring the wax to-night. You must keep him sitting as long

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"After all, I had only to nod his adieu; and he left me limp with apprehension, sick with fear, in a perfectly pitiable condition of pure stage-fright.
"For, after all, I had only to act my part unless Raffles failed where he never did fail, unless Raffles the neat and noiseless was for once clumsy and inept, all I had to do was indeed to "smile and smile and be a villain." I practiced that smile and a half the afternoon. I rehearsed putative parts in hypothetical conversations. I got up stories. I dipped in a book or two, and at last I was making my bow to a somewhat elderly man with a small, bald head and a restraining bow.
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as possible, Bunny, and talking all the time."
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"Not you, Bunny, I know you better than you know yourself."
"He got on his coat and hat."
"What time have I to be there?" I asked him, with a groan.
"Quarter to eight. There will be a telegram from Esber in ten minutes. He'll be there to talk; you'll have no difficulty in keeping the ball rolling; but head him off his picture for all you're worth. If he offers to show it, you must go. He looked up the case elaborately this afternoon, and there's no earthly reason why he should unlock it again in this hemisphere."
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