"RAFFLES, THE AMATEUR CRACKSMAN"

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

WHEN the King of the Cannibal Islands made faces at Queen Victoria and a European monarch set the cables tingling with his compliments on the exploit, the indignation in England was not less than the surprise, for the thing was not so common as it has since become. But when it transpired that a gift of peculiar significance was to follow the congratulations, to give them weight, the inference prevailed that the white potentate and the black had taken simultaneous leave of their fourteen senses. For the gift was a pearl of price unparalleled, picked aforetime by British cutlasses from a Polynesian setting and presented by British royalty to the sovereign who seized this opportunity of restoring it to its original possessor.

The incident would have been a godsend to the press a few weeks later. Even in June there were leaders, letters, large headlines, leaded type, the Daily Chronicle devoting half its literary page to a charming drawing of the island capital which the new Pall Mall, in a leading article headed by a pun, advised the government to blow to flinders. I was myself driving a poor, but not dishonest quill at the time, and the topic of the hour goaded me into satiric verse, which obtained a better place than anything I had yet turned out. I had let my flat in town and taken inexpensive quarters at Thames Ditton, on the plea of a disinterested passion for the river.

"First rate, old boy!" said Raffles (who must needs come and see me there), lying back in the boat while I sculled and steered. "I suppose they pay well for these, eh?"

"Not a penny."

"Nonsense, Bunny! I thought they paid so well? Give them time and you'll get your check."

"Oh, no, I shan't," said I gloomily. I've got to be content with the honor of getting in; the editor wrote to say so in so many words," I added. But I gave the gentleman his distinguished name.

"You don't mean to say you've written for payment already?"

No; it was the last thing I had intended to admit. But I had done it. The murder was out; there was no sense in further concealment. I had written for my money because I really needed it; if he must know, I was cursedly hard up. Raffles nodded as though he knew already. I warmed to my woes. It was no easy matter to keep your end up as a raw free lance of letters; for my part, I was afraid I wrote neither well enough nor ill enough for success. I suffered from a persistent, ineffectual feeling after style. Verse I could manage, but it did not pay. To personal paragraphs and the baser journalism I could not and I would not stoop.

Raffles nodded again, this time with a smile that stayed in his eyes as he leaned back watching me. I knew that he was thinking of other things I had stooped to, and I thought I knew what he was going to say. He had said it before so often; he was sure to say it again. I had my answer ready, but evidently he was tired of asking the same question. His lids fell, he took up the paper he had dropped, and I sculled the length of the old red wall of Mapton Court before he spoke again.

"And they gave you nothing for these! My dear Bunny, they're capital, not only qua verses, but for crystallizing your subject and putting it in a nutshell. Certainly you've taught me more about it than I knew before. But is it really worth £50,000—a single pearl?"

"A hundred, I believe; but that wouldn't scan."

"A hundred thousand pounds!" said Raffles with his eyes shut. And again I made certain what was coming, but again I was mistaken. "If it's worth all that," he cried at last, "there would be no getting rid of it at all; it's not like a diamond that you can subdivide. But I beg your pardon, Bunny. I was forgetting!"

And we said no more about the Emperor's gift, for pride thrives on an empty pocket, and no privation would have drawn from me the proposal which I had expected Raffles to make. My expectation had been half a hope, though I only knew it now. But neither did we touch again on what Raffles professed to have forgotten—my "apostasy," my "lapse into virtue," as he had been pleased to call it. We were both a little silent, a little constrained, each preoccupied with his own thoughts. It was months since we had met, and as I saw him off toward 11 o'clock that Sunday night I fancied it was for more months that we were saying good-bye.

But as he waited for the train I saw those clear eyes peering at me under the station lamps, and when I met their glance Raffles shook his head.

"You don't look well on it, Bunny," said he. "I never did believe in this Thames valley. You want a change of air."

I wished I might get it.

"What you really want is a sea voyage."

"And a Winter at St. Moritz, or do you recommend Cannes or Cairo? It's all very well, A. J., but you forget what I told you about my funds."

"I forget nothing. I merely don't want to hurt your feelings. But look here, a sea voyage you shall have. I want a change myself, and you shall come with me as my guest. We'll spend July in the Mediterranean."

"But you're playing cricket—"

"Hang the cricket!"

"Well, I thought you meant it—"

"Of course I meant it. Will you come?"

"Like a shot—if you go."

And I shook his hand and waved mine in farewell, with the perfectly good-humored conviction that I should hear no mor eof the matter. It was a passing thought, no more, no less. I soon wished it were more; that week found we wishing myself out of England for good and all. I was making nothing. I could but subsist on the difference between the rent I paid for my flat and the rent at which I had sublet it, furnished, for the season. And the season was near its end and creditors awaited me in town. Was it possible to be entirely honest? I had run no bills when I had money in my pocket, and the more downright dishonesty seemed to me the less ignoble.

But from Raffles of course I heard nothing more; a week went by, and half another week; then late on the second Wednesday night I found a telegram from him at my lodgings, after seeking him vainly in town and dining with desperation at the solitary club to which I still belonged.

"Arrange to leave Waterloo by North German Lloyd special," he wired. "9:25 A. M. Monday next; will meet you Southampton aboard Uhlan with tickets; am writing."

And write he did, a light-hearted letter enough, but full of serious solicitude for me and for my health and prospects—a letter almost touching in the light of our past relations, in the twilight of their complete rupture. He said that he had booked two berths to Naples, that we were bound for Capri, which was clearly the island of the Lotos eaters; that we would bask there together "and for a while forget." It was a charming letter. I had never seen Italy; the privilege of initiation should be his. No mistake was greater than to deem it an impossible country for the Summer. The Bay of Naples was never so divine, and he wrote of "fairy lands forlorn," as though the poetry sprang unbidden to his pen. To come back to earth and prose, I might think it unpatriotic of him to choose a German boat, but on no other line did you receive such attention and accommodation for your money. There was a hint of better reasons. Raffles wrote, as he had telegraphed, from Bremen; and I gathered that the personal use of some little influence with the authorities there had resulted in a material reduction in our fares.

Imagine my excitement and delight! I managed to pay what I owed at Thames Ditton, to squeeze a small editor for a very small check and my tailors for one more flannel suit. I remember that I broke my last sovereign to get a box of Sullivan's cigarettes for Raffles to smoke on the voyage. But my heart was as light as my purse on the Monday morning, the fairest morning of an unfair Summer, when the special whirled me through sunshine to the sea.

A tender awaited us at Southampton. Raffles was not on board, nor did I really look for him till we reached the liner's side. And then I looked in vain. His face was not among the many that fringed the rail; his hand was not of the few that waved to friends. I climbed aboard in a sudden heaviness. I had no ticket, nor the money to pay for one. I did not even know the number of my room. My heart was in my mouth as I waylaid a steward and asked if a Mr. Raffles was on board. Thank heaven—he was! But where? The man did not know, was plainly on some other errand, and a-hunting I must go. But there was no sign of him on the promenade deck and none below in the saloon; the smoking-room was empty but for a little German with a red mustache twisted into his eyes; nor was Raffles in his own cabin, whither I inquired my way in desperation, but where the sight of his own name on the baggage was certainly a further assurance. Why he himself kept in the background, however, I could not conceive, and only sinister reasons would suggest themselves in explanation.

"So there you are; I've been looking for you all over the ship!"

Despite the graven prohibition I had tried the bridge as a last resort, and there indeed was A. J. Raffles seated on a skylight and leaning over one of the officers' long chairs, in which reclined a girl in a white drill coat and skirt—a slip of a girl with a pale skin, dark hair and rather remarkable eyes. So much I noted as he rose and quickly turned; thereupon I could think of nothing but the swift grimace which preceded a start of well-feigned astonishment.

"Why, Bunny!" cried Raffles. "Where have you sprung from?"

I stammered something as he pinched my hand.

"And are you coming in this ship? And to Naples, too? Well, upon my word! Miss Werner, may I introduce him?"

And he did so without a blush, describing me as an old school fellow whom he had not seen for months, with wilful circumstance and gratuitous detail that filled me at once with confusion, suspicion and revolt. I felt myself blushing for us both, and I did not care. My address utterly deserted me, and I made no effort to recover it, to carry the thing off. All I would do was to mumble such words as Raffles actually put into my mouth, and that I doubt not with a thoroughly evil grace.

"So you saw my name in the list of passengers and came in search of me? Good, old Bunny I say, though I wish you'd share my cabin. I've got a beauty on the promenade deck, but they wouldn't promise to keep me by myself. We ought to see about it before they shove in some alien. In any case, we shall have to get out of this."

For the quartermaster had entered the wheelhouse, and even while we had been speaking the pilot had taken possession of the bridge; as we descended the ladder left us with flying handkerchiefs and shrill goodbyes, and as we bowed to Miss Werner on the promenade deck there came a deep, slow throbbing under foot and our voyage had begun.

It did not begin pleasantly between Raffles and me. On deck he had overborne my stubborn perplexity by dint of a forced, though forceful, joviality; in his cabin, the gloves were off.

"You idiot," he snarled, "you've given me away again!"

"How have I given you away?"

I ignored the separate insult in his last word.

"How? I should have thought any clod could see that I meant us to meet by chance!"

"After taking both tickets yourself!"

"They knew nothing about that on board; besides, I hadn't decided when I took the tickets."

"Then you should have let me know when you did decide. You lay your plans and never say a word, and expect me to tumble to them by light of nature. How was I to know you had anything on?"

I had turned the tables with some effect. Raffles almost hung his head.

"The fact is, Bunny, I didn't mean you to know. You—you've grown such a pious rabbit in your old age!"

My nickname and his tone went far to mollify me; other things went further, but I had much to forgive him still.

"If you were afraid of writing," I pursued, "it was your business to give me the tip the moment I set foot on board. I would have taken it all right. I am not so virtuous as all that."

Was it my imagination or did Raffles look slightly ashamed? If so, it was for the first time and last time in all the years I knew him; nor can I swear to it even now.

"That," said he, "was the very thing I meant to do—to lie in wait in my room and get you as you passed. But—"

"You were better engaged?"

"Say otherwise."

"The charming Miss Werner?"

"She is quite charming."

"Most Australian girls are," said I.

"How did you know she was one?" he cried.

"I heard her speak."

"Brute!" said Raffles, laughing; "she has no more twang than you have. Her people are German, she has been to school in Dresden and is on her way out alone."

"Money?" I inquired.

"Confound you!" he said, and, though he was laughing, I thought it was a point at which the subject might be changed.

"Well," I said, "it wasn't for Miss Werner you wanted us to play strangers, was it? You have some deeper game than that, eh?"

"I suppose I have."

"Then hadn't you better tell me what it is?"

Raffles treated me to the old, cautious scrutiny that I knew so well; the very familiarity of it, after all these months, set me smiling in a way that might have reassured him, for dimly already I divined his enterprise.

"It won't send you off in the pilot's boat, Bunny?"

"Not quite."

"Then—you remember the pearl you wrote them—"

I did not wait for him to finish his sentence.

"You've got it!" I cried, my face on fire, for I caught sight of it that moment in the stateroom mirror.

Raffles seemed taken aback.

"Not yet," said he; "but I mean to have it before we get to Naples."

"Is it on board?"

"Yes."

"But how—where—who's got it?"

"A little German officer, a whipper-snapper with perpendicular mustaches."

"I saw him in the smokeroom."

"That's the chap; he's always there. Herr Captain Wilhelm von Heumann, if you look in the list. Well, he's the special envoy of the Emperor, and he's taking the pearl out with him!"

"You found this out in Bremen?"

"No, in Berlin, from a newspaper man I know there. I'm ashamed to tell you, Bunny, that I went there on purpose!"

I burst out laughing.

"You needn't be ashamed. You are doing the very thing I was rather hoping you were going to propose the other day on the river."

"You were hoping it?" said Raffles, with his eyes wide open. Indeed, it was his turn to show surprise and mine to be much more ashamed than I felt.

"Yes," I answered, "I was keen on the idea, but wasn't going to propose it."

"Yet you would have listened to me the other day?"

Certainly I would, and I told him so without reserve; not brazenly, you understand; nor even now with the gusto of a man who savors such an adventure for its own sake, but doggedly, defiantly, through my teeth, as one who had tried to live honestly and failed. And while I was about it I told him much more. Eloquently enough, I dare say, I gave him chapter and verse of my hopeless struggle, my inevitable defeat; for hopeless and inevitable they were to a man with my record, even though that record was written only in one man's soul. It was the old story of the thief trying to turn honest man; the thing was against nature, and there was an end of it.

Raffles entirely disagreed with me. He shook his head over my conventional view. Human nature was a board of checkers; why not reconcile one's self to alternate black and white? Why desire to be all one thing or all the other, like our forefathers on the stage or in the old-fashioned fiction? For his part he enjoyed himself on all squares of the board, and liked the light the better for the shade. My conclusion he considered absurd.

"But you err in good company, Bunny, for all the cheap moralists preach the same twaddle; old Virgil was the first and worst offender of you all. I back myself to climb out of Avernus any day I like, and sooner or later I shall climb out for good. I suppose I can't very well turn myself into a limited liability company. But I could retire and settle down and live blamelessly ever after. I'm not sure that it couldn't be done on this pearl alone!"

"Then you don't think it too remarkable to sell?"

"We might take a fishery and haul it up with smaller fry. It would come after months of ill luck, just as we were going to sell the schooner; by Jove, it would be the talk of the Pacific!"

"Well, we've got to get it first. Is this Von what's-his-name a formidable cuss?"

"More so than he looks, and he has the cheek of the devil."

As he spoke a white drill skirt fluttered past the open stateroom door, and I caught a glimpse of an upturned mustache beyond.

"But is he the chap we have to deal with? Won't the pearl be in the purser's keeping?"

Raffles stood at the door, frowning out upon the Solent, but for an instant he turned to me with a sniff.

"My good fellow, do you suppose the whole ship's company knows there's a gem like that aboard? You said that it was worth £100,000; in Berlin they say it's priceless. I doubt if the skipper himself knows that Von Heumann has it on him."

"And he has?"

"Must have."

"Then we have only him to deal with?"

He answered me without a word. Something white was fluttered past once more, and Raffles, stepping forth, made the promenaders three.

II.

I do not ask to set foot aboard a finer steamship than the Uhlan, of the Norddeutscher Lloyd, to meet a kindlier gentleman than her commander or better fellows than his officers. This much at least let me have the grace to admit. I hated the voyage. It was no fault of anybody connected with the ship; it was no fault of the weather, which was monotonously ideal. Nor even in my own heart did the reason reside; conscience and I were divorced at last and the decree made absolute. With my scruples had fled all fear, and I was ready to revel between bright skies and sparkling sea with the light-hearted detachment of Raffles himself. It was Raffles himself who prevented me, but not Raffles alone. It was Raffles and that colonial minx on her way home from school.

What he could see in her—but that begs the question. Of course he saw no more than I did, but to annoy me, or perhaps punish me for my long defection, he must turn his back on me and devote himself to this chit from Southampton to the Mediterranean. They were always together. It was too absurd. After breakfast they would begin and go on until 1 or 12 at night; there was no intervening hour at which you might not hear her nasal laugh, or his quiet voice talking soft nonsense into her ear. Of course it was nonsense! Is it conceivable that a man like Raffles, with his knowledge of the world and his experience of women (a side of his character upon which I have purposely never touched, for it deserves another volume)—is it credible, I ask, that such a man could find anything but nonsense to talk by the day together to a giddy young schoolgirl? I would not be unfair for the world. I think I have admitted that the young person had points. Her eyes, I suppose, were really fine, and certainly the shape of the little brown face was charming, so far as mere contour can charm. I admit, also, more audacity than I cared about, with enviable health, mettle and vitality. I may not have occasion to report any of this young lady's speeches (they would scarcely bear it), and am therefore the more anxious to describe her without injustice. I confess to some little prejudice against her. I resented her success with Raffles, of whom, in consequence, I saw less and less each day. It is a mean thing to have to confess, but there must have been something not unlike jealousy rankling within me.

Jealousy there was in another quarter—crude, rampant, undignified jealousy. Captain Von Heumann would curl his mustaches into twin spires, shoot his white cuffs over his rings and stare at me insolently through his rimless eyeglasses; we ought to have consoled each other, but we never exchanged a syllable. The Captain had a murderous scar across one of his cheeks, a present from Heidelberg, and I used to think how he must long to have Raffles there to serve the same. It was not as though Von Heumann never had his innings. Raffles let him go in several times a day for the malicious pleasure of bowling him out as he was "getting set"; these were his words when I taxed him disingenously with obnoxious conduct toward a German on a German boat.

"You'll make yourself disliked on board!"

"By Von Heumann merely."

"But is that wise when he's the man we've got to diddle?"

"The wisest thing I ever did. To have chummed up with him would have been fatal—the common dodge."

I was consoled, encouraged, almost content. I had feared Raffles was neglecting things, and I told him so in a burst. Here we were near Gibraltar, and not a word since the solent. He shook his head with a smile.

"Plenty of time, Bunny; plenty of time. We can do nothing before we get to Genoa, and that won't be till Sunday night. The voyage is still young and so are we; let's make the most of things while we can."

It was after dinner on the promenade deck, and as Raffles spoke he glanced sharply fore and aft, leaving me next moment with a step full of purpose. I retired to the smoking-room to smoke and read in a corner and to watch Von Heumann, who very soon came to drink beer and to sulk in another.

Few travelers tempt the Red Sea at mid-Summer; the Uhlan was very empty indeed. She had, however, but a limited supply of cabins on the promenade deck, and there was just that excuse for my sharing Raffles' room. I could have had one to myself down stairs, but I must be up above. Raffles had insisted that I should insist on the point. So we were together, I think, without suspicion, though also without any object that I could see.

On the Sunday afternoon I was asleep in my berth, the lower one, when the curtains were shaken by Raffles, who was in his shirt sleeves on the settee.

"Achilles sulking in his bunk."

"What else is there to do?" I asked him, as I stretched and yawned. I noted, however, the good humor of his tone, and did my best to catch it.

"I have found something else, Bunny."

"You misunderstand me. The whipper snapper's making his century this afternoon. I've had other fish to fry."

I swung my legs over the side of my berth and sat forward, as he was sitting, all attention. The inner door, a grating, was shut and bolted and curtained like the open port hole.

"We shall be at Genoa before sunset," continued Raffler. "It's the place where the deed's got to be done."

"So you still mean to do it!"

"Did I ever say I didn't?"

"You have said so little either way."

"Advisedly so, my dear Bunny; why spoil a pleasure trip by talking unnecessary shop? But now the time has come. It must be done at Genoa or not at all."

"On land?"

"No, on board, tomorrow night. Tonight would do, but tomorrow is better in case of mishap. If we were forced to use violence we could get away by the earliest train and nothing be known till the ship was sailing and Von Heumann found dead or drugged—"

"Not dead," I exclaimed.

"Of course not," assented Raffles, "or there would be no need for us to bolt;

"A Whipper-Snapper With Perpendicular Mustaches."

but if we should have to bolt, Tuesday morning is our time, when this ship has got to sail, whatever happens. But I don't anticipate any violence. Violence is a confession of terrible incompetence. In all these years how many blows have you known me to strike? Not one, I believe; but I have been quite ready to kill my man every time if the worst came to the worst."

I asked him how he proposed to enter Von Heumann's stateroom unobserved, and even through the curtained gloom of ours his face lighted up.

"Climb into my bunk, Bunny, and you shall see."

"I did so, but could see nothing. Raffles reached across me and tapped the ventilator, a sort of a trap door in the wall above his bed, some 18 inches long and half that height. It opened outward into the ventilating shaft.

"That," said he, "is our door to fortune. Open it if you like, you won't see much, because it doesn't open far; but loosening a couple of screws will set that all right. The shaft, as you may see, is more or less bottomless; you pass under it whenever you go to your bath, and the top is a skylight on the bridge. That's why this thing has to be done while we're at Genoa, because they keep no watch on the bridge in port. The ventilator opposite ours is Von Heumann's. It again will only mean a couple of screws, and there's a beam to stand on while you work."

"But if anybody should look up from below?"

"It's extremely unlikely that anybody will be astir below—so unlikely that we can afford to chance it. No, I can't have you there to make sure. The great point is that neither of us should be seen from the time that we turn in. A couple of ship's boys do sentry-go on these decks, and they shall be our witnesses; by Jove, it'll be the biggest mystery that ever was made."

"If Von Heumann doesn't resist."

"Resist! He won't get a chance. He drinks too much beer to sleep light, and nothing is so easy as to chloroform a heavy sleeper; you've even done it yourself on an occasion of which it's perhaps unfair to remind you. Von Heumann will be past sensation almost as soon as I get my hand through his ventilator. I shall crawl in over his body, Bunny, my boy!"

"And I?"

"You will hand me what I want and hold the fort in case of accidents, and generally lend me the moral support you've made me require. It's a luxury, Bunny, but I found it devilish difficult to do without it after you turned pi!"

He said that Von Heumann was certain to sleep with a bolted door, which he, of course, would leave unbolted, and spoke of other ways of laying a false scent while rifling the cabin. Not that Raffles anticipated a tiresome search. The pearl would be about Von Heumann's person; in fact, Raffles knew exactly where and is what he kept it. Naturally, I asked how he could have come by such knowledge, and his answer led up to momentary unpleasantness.

"It's a very old story, Bunny. I really forget in what book it comes; I'm only sure of the Testament. But Samson was the unlucky hero and one Delilah the heroine."

And he looked so knowing that I could not be in moment's doubt as to his meaning.

"So the fair Australian has been playing Delilah?" said I.

"In a very harmless, innocent sort of way."

"She got his mission out of him?"

"Yes, I've forced him to score all the points he could, and that was his great stroke, as I hoped it would be. He has even shown Amy the pearl."

"Amy, eh, and she promptly told you?"

"Nothing of the kind. What makes you think so? I had the greatest trouble in getting it out of her."

His tone should have been a sufficient warning to me. I had not the tact to take it as such. At last I knew the meaning of his furious flirtation, and stood wagging my head and shaking my finger, blinded to his frowns by my own enlightenment.

"Wily worm!" said I. "Now I see through it all; how dense I've been!"

"Sure you're not still?"

"No; now I understand what has beaten me all the week. I simply couldn't fathom what you saw in that little girl. I never dreamt it was part of the game."

"So you think it was that and nothing more?"

"You deep old dog—of course, I do."

"You didn't know she was the daughter of a wealthy squatter?"

"There are wealthy women by the dozen who would marry you tomorrow."

"It doesn't occur to you that I might like to draw stumps, start clean and live happily ever after—in the bush?"

"With that voice? It certainly does not!"

"Bunny!" he cried so fiercely that I braced myself for a blow.

But no more followed.

"Do you think you would live happily?" I made bold to ask him.

"God knows!" he answered. And with that he left me to marvel at his look and tone, and more than ever at the insufficiently exciting cause.

III.

Of all the more feats of cracksmanship which I have seen Raffles perform, at once the most delicate and most difficult was that which he accomplished between 1 and 2 o'clock on the Tuesday morning aboard the North German steamer Uhlan lying at anchor in Genoa harbor.

Not a hitch occurred. Everything had been foreseen; everything happened as I had been assured everything must. Nobody was about below, only the ship's boys on deck and nobody on the bridge. It was 25 minutes past 1 when Raffles, without a stitch of clothing on his body, but with a glass phial, corked with cotton wool, between his teeth and a tiny screwdriver behind his ear, squirmed feet first through the ventilator over his berth; and it was 19 minutes to 2 when he returned, head first, with the phial still between his teeth and the cotton wool rammed home to still the rattling of that which lay like a great gray bean within. He had taken screws out and put them in again; he had unfastened Von Heumann's ventilator and had left it fast as he had found it—fast as he instantly proceeded to make his own. As for Von Heumann, it had been enough to place the drenched wad first on his mustache, and then to hold it between his gaping lips; thereafter the intruder had climbed both ways across his shins without eliciting a groan.

And here was the prize—this pearl as large as a filbert—with a pale pink tinge like a lady's finger nail—this spoil of a filibustering age—this gift from a European Emperor to a South Sea chief. We gloated over it when all was snug. We toasted it in whisky and soda laid in over night in view of the great moment. But the moment was greater, more triumphant than our most sanguine dreams. All we had now to do was to secrete the gem (which Raffles had pried from its setting, replacing the latter, so that we could stand the strictest search and yet take it ashore with us at Naples; and this Raffles was doing when I turned in. I myself would have landed incontinently that night at Genoa and bolted with the spoil. He would not hear of it, for a dozen good reasons which will be obvious.

On the whole I do not think that anything was discovered or suspected before we weighed anchor, but I cannot be sure. It is difficult to believe that a man could be chloroformed in his sleep and feel no tell-tale effects, sniff no suspicious odor in the morning. Nevertheless Von Heumann reappeared as though nothing had happened to him, his German cap over his eyes and his mustaches brushing the peak. And by 10 o'clock we were quit of Genoa; the last lean, blue-chinned official had left our decks; the last fruit-seller had been beaten off with bucketsful of water and left cursing us from his boat; the last passenger had come aboard the last moment—a fussy graybeard, who kept the big ship waiting while he haggled with his boatman over half a lira. But at length we were off, the tug was shed, the lighthouse passed, and Raffles and I leaned together over the rail watching our shadows on the pale green, liquid, veigned marble that again washed the vessel's side.

Von Heumann was having his innings once more; it was part of the design that he should remain in all day and so postpone the inevitable hour, and, though the lady looked bored and was forever glancing in our direction, he seemed only too willing to avail himself of his opportunities. But Raffles was moody and ill at ease. He had not the air of a successful man. I could but opine that the impending parting at Naples sat heavily on his spirit.

He would neither talk to me nor would he let me go.

"Stop where you are, Bunny. I've things to tell you. Can you swim?"

"A bit."

"Ten miles?"

"Ten?" I burst out laughing. "Not one! Why do you ask?"

"We shall be within ten miles' swim of the shore most of the day."

"What on earth are you driving at, Raffles?"

"Nothing; only I shall swim for it if the worst comes to the worst. I suppose you can't swim under water at all?"

I did not answer his question. I scarcely heard it; cold beads were bursting through my skin.

"Why should the worst come to the worst?" I whispered. "We aren't found out, are we?"

"No."

"Then why speak as though we were?"

"We may be; an old enemy of ours is on board."

"An old enemy?"

"Mackenzie."

"Never!"

"The man with the beard who came aboard last."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure! I was only sorry to see you didn't recognize him too."

I took my handkerchief to my face; now that I thought of it, there had been something familiar in the old man's gait, as well as something rather youthful for its apparent years. His very beard seemed unconvincing, now that I recalled it in the light of this horrible revelation. I looked up and down the deck, but the old man was nowhere to be seen.

"That's the worst of it," said Raffles. "I saw him go into the captain's cabin 20 minutes ago."

"But what can have brought him?" I cried miserably. "Can it be a coincidence—is it somebody else he's after?"

Raffles shook his head.

"Hardly this time."

"Then you think he's after you?"

"I've been afraid of it for some weeks."

"Yet there you stand!"

"What am I to do? I don't want to swim for it before I must. I begin to wish I'd taken your advice, Bunny, and left the ship at Genoa. But I've not the smallest doubt that Mac was watching both ship and station till the last moment. That's why he ran it so fine."

He took a cigarette and handed me the case, but I shook my head impatiently.

"I still don't understand," said I. "Why should he be after you? He couldn't come all this way about a jewel which was perfectly safe for all he knew. What's your own theory?"

"Simply that he's been on my track for some time, probably ever since friend Crawshay slipped clean through his fingers last November. There have been other indications. I am really not unprepared for this. But it can only be pure suspicion. I'll defy him to bring anything home, and I'll defy him to find the pearl! Theory, my dear Bunny? I know how he's got here as well as though I'd been inside that Scotchman's skin, and I know what he'll do next. He found out I'd gone abroad and looked for a motive; he found out about Von Heumann and his mission, and there was his motive cut and dried. Great chance—to nab me on a new job altogether. But he won't do it, Bunny; mark my words, he'll search the ship and search us all when the loss is known, but he'll search in vain. And there's the skipper beckoning the whipper-snapper to his cabin; the fat will be in the fire in five minutes!"

Yet there was no conflagration, no fuss, no searching of the passengers, no whisper of what had happened in the air; instead of a stir there was portentious peace, and it was clear to me that Raffles was not a little disturbed at the falsification of all his predictions. There was something sinister in silence under such a loss, and the silence was sustained for hours, during which Mackenzie never reappeared. But he was abroad during the luncheon hour—he was in our cabin! I had left my book in Raffles' berth, and in taking it after lunch I touched the quilt. It was warm from the recent pressure of flesh and blood, and on an instinct I sprang to the ventilator. As I opened it the ventilator opposite was closed with a snap.

I waylaid Raffles. "All right! Let him find the pearl."

"Have you dumped it overboard?"

"That's a question I shan't condescend to answer."

He turned on his heel, and at subsequent intervals I saw him making the most of his last afternoon with the inevitable Miss Werner. I remember that she looked both cool and smart in quite a simple affair of brown holland, which toned well with her complexion, and was cleverly relieved with touches of scarlet. I quite admired her that afternoon, for her eyes were really very good, and so were her teeth, yet I never admired her more directly in my own despite. For I passed them again and again in order to get a word with Raffles to tell him I knew there was danger in the wind; but he would not so much as catch my eye. So at last I gave it up. And I saw him next in the captain's cabin.

They had summoned him first; he had gone in smiling, and smiling I found him when they summoned me. The stateroom was spacious, as befitted that of a commander. Mackenzie sat on the settee, his beard in front of him on the polished table; but a revolver lay in front of the captain, and when I had entered, the chief officer, who had summoned me, shut the door and put his back to it. Von Heumann completed the party, his fingers busy with his mustache.

Raffles greeted me.

"This is a great joke!" he cried. "You remember the pearl you were so keen about, Bunny, the Emperor's pearl, the pearl money wouldn't buy? It seems it was intrusted to our little friend here to take out to Canoodle Dum, and the poor little chap's gone and lost it; ergo, as we're Britishers they think we've got it!"

"But I know ye have," put in Mackenzie, nodding to his beard.

"You will recognize that loyal and patriotic voice," said Raffles. "Mon, 'tis our auld acquaintance Mackenzie, o' Scoteland Yarrd an Scoteland itsel'!"

"Dat is enough," cried the captain. "Have you submid to be scarge, or do I vorce you?"

"What you will," said Raffles, "but it will do you no harm to give us fair play first. You accuse us of breaking into Captain von Heumann's stateroom during the small hours of this morning and abstracting from it this confounded pearl. Well, I can prove that I was in my own room all night long, and I have no doubt my friend can prove the same."

"Most certainly I can," said I indignantly. "The ship's boys can bear witness to that."

Mackenzie laughed and shook his head at his reflection in the polished mahogany.

"That was very clever," said he, "and like enough it would ha' served ye had I not stepped aboard. But I've just had a look at the ventilators, and I think I know how ye worrked it. Anyway, captain, it makes no matter. I'll just be clappin' the darbies on these young sparks, an' then—"

"By what right?" roared Raffles in a ringing voice, and I never saw his face in such a blaze. "Search us if you like, search every scrap and stitch we possess, but you dare to lay a finger on us without a warrant!"

"I wouldn't dare," said Mackenzie gravely as he fumbled in his breast pocket, and Raffles dived his hand into his own. "Haud his wrist!" shouted the Scotchman; and the huge Colt that had been with us many a night, but had never been fired in my hearing, clattered on the table and was raked in by the captain.

"All right," said Raffles savagely to the mate. "You can let go now. I won't try it again. Now, Mackenzie, let's see your warrant!"

"Ye'll no mishandle it?"

"What good would that do me? Let me see it," said Raffles peremptorily, and the detective obeyed. Raffles raised his eyebrows as he perused the document; his mouth hardened, but suddenly relaxed, and it was with a smile and a shrug that he returned the paper.

"Wull that do for ye?" inquired Mackenzie.

"It may. I congratulate you, Mackenzie, it's a strong hand at any rate. Two burglaries and the Melrose necklace, Bunny!" And he turned to me with a rueful smile.

"An' all easy to prove," said the Scotchman, pocketing the warrant. "I've one o' these for you," he added, nodding to me, "only not such a long one."

"To think," said the captain reproachfully, "that my ship should be made a den of thiefs! It shall be a very disagreeable madder. I have been obliged to pod you both in irons until we ged to Nables."

"Surely not!" exclaimed Raffles. "Mackenzie, intercede with him; don't give your countrymen away before all hands! Captain, we can't escape; surely you could hush it up for the night? Look here, here's everything I have in my pockets; you empty yours, too, Bunny, and they shall strip us stark if they suspect we've weapons up our sleeves. All I ask is that we are allowed to get out of this without gyves upon our wrists!"

"Webbons you may not have," said the captain; "but wad about der pearl dat you were sdealing?"

"You shall have it!" cried Raffles. "You shall have it this minute if you guarantee no public indignity on board!"

"That I'll see to," said Mackenzie, "as long as you behave yourselves. There now, where is't?"

"On the table, under your nose."

My eyes fell with the rest, but no pearl was there, only the contents of our pockets—our watches, pocketbooks, pencils, penknives, cigarette cases—lay on the shiny table along with the revolvers already mentioned.

"Ye're humbuggin' us," said Mackenzie. "What's the use?"

"I'm doing nothing of the sort," laughed Raffles. "I'm testing you. Where's the harm?"

"It's here, joke apart?"

"On that table, by all my gods."

Mackenzie opened the cigarette cases and shook each particular cigarette. Thereupon Raffles prayed to be allowed to smoke one, and when his prayer was heard observed that the pearl had been on the table much longer than the cigarettes. Mackenzie promptly caught up the Colt and opened the chamber in the butt.

"Not there, not there," said Raffles; "but you're getting hot. Try the cartridges."

Mackenzie emptied them into his palm and shook each one at his ear without result.

"Oh, give them to me."

And in an instant Raffles had found the right one, had bitten out the bullet and placed the Emperor's pearl with a flourish in the center of the table.

"After that you will perhaps show me such little consideration as is in your power. Captain, I have been a bit of a villain, as you see, and as such I am ready and willing to lie in irons all night if you deem it requisite for the safety of the ship. All I ask is that you do me one favor first."

"That shall debend on wad der vafor has been."

"Captain, I've done a worse thing aboard your ship than any of you know. I have become engaged to be married, and I want to say good-by!"

I suppose we were all equally amazed, but the only one to express his amazement was Von Heumann, whose deep-chested German oath was almost his first contribution to the proceedings. He was not slow to follow it, however, with a vigorous protest against the proposed farewell; but he was overruled and the masterful prisoner had his way. He was to have five minutes with the girl while the captain and Mackenzie stood within range (but not earshot), with their revolvers behind their backs. As we were moving from the cabin in a body he stopped and gripped my hand.

"So I've let you in at last, Bunny—at last and after all! If you knew how sorry I am . . . But you won't get much—I don't see why you should get anything at all. Can you forgive me? This may be for years, and it may be forever, you know! You were a good pal always when it came to the scratch; some day or other you mayn't be so sorry to remember you were a good pal at the last!"

There was a meaning in his eye that I understood, and my teeth were set and my nerves strung ready as I wrung that strong and cunning hand for the last time in my life.

How that last scene stays with me and will stay to my death! How I see every deatil, every shadow on the sunlit deck! We were among the islands that dot the course from Genoa to Naples; that was Elba failing back on our starboard quarter, that purple patch with the hot sun setting over it. The captain's cabin opened to starboard, and the starboard promenade deck, sheeted with sunshine and scored with shadow, was deserted but for the group of which I was one, and for the pale, slim, brown figure further aft with Raffles. Engaged? I could not believe it, can not to this day. Yet there they stood together, and we did not hear a word; there they stood out against the sunset, and the long, dazzling highway of sunlit sea that sparkled from Elba to the Uhlan's plateau and their shadows reached almost to our feet.

Suddenly—an instant—and the thing was done—a thing I have never known whether to admire or detest. He caught her—he kissed her before us all—then flung her from him so that she almost fell. It was that action which foretold the next. The mate sprang after him and I sprang after the mate.

Raffles was on the rail, but only just.

"Hold him, Bunny!" he cried. "Hold him tight!"

And as I obeyed that last behest with all my might, without a thought of what I was doing save that he bade me do it, I saw his hands shoot up and his head bob down, and his lithe, spare body cut the sunset as cleanly and precisely as though he had plunged at his leisure from a diver's board!

. . . . . .

Of what followed on deck I can tell you nothing, for I was not there. Nor can my punishment, my long imprisonment, my everlasting disgrace, concern or profit you beyond the interest and advantage to be gleaned from the knowledge that I at least had my deserts. But one thing I must set down, believe it who will—one more thing only and I am done.

It was into a second-class cabin on the starboard side that I was promptly thrust in irons, and the door locked upon me as though I were another Raffles. Meanwhile a boat was lowered and the sea scoured to no purpose, as is doubtless on record elsewhere. But either the setting sun flashing over the waves must have blinded all eyes, or else mine were victims of a strange illusion.

For the boat was back, the screw throbbing and the prisoner peering through his porthole across the sunlit waters that he believed had closed forever over his comrade's head. Suddenly the sun sank behind the island of Elba, the lane of dancing sunlight was instantaneously quenched and swallowed in the trackless waste, and in the middle distance, already miles astern, either my sight deceived me or a black speck bobbed amid the gray. The bugle had blown for dinner; it may be that all save myself had ceased to strain an eye. And now I lost what I had found, now it rose, now sank, and now I gave it up utterly. Yet anon it would rise again, a mere mote dancing in the dim gray distance, drifting toward a purple island, beneath a fading western sky streaked with dead gold and cerise. And night fell before I knew whether it was a human head or not.

(THE END.)

Particeps Criminis.

C. L. Benjamin in Smart Set.

Were you not partly to blame? Confess!
How could I know what you really meant?
Your lips said no; but your eyes said yes.

You sat beside me, a wind-blown tress
Touched me with ravishing blandishments;
Were you not partly to blame? Confess!

Why did I kiss you? A tenderness
In your glance, I fancied, gave consent;
Your lips said no; but your eyes said yes.

How could I help it, you sorceress?
Your eyes—why are they so eloquent?
Were you not partly to blame? Confess!

Of course, you didn't quite acquiesce,
But—well, I stick to my argument;
Your lips said no; but your eyes said yes.

Who heeds, dear heart, what the lips profess