

The Adventures of the Eleven Cuff-Buttons

Being one of the exciting episodes in the career of the famous detective
Hemlock Holmes, as recorded by his friend Dr. Watson

James Francis Thierry



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The Adventure of the Eleven Cuff-Buttons

*BEING ONE OF THE EXCITING EPISODES IN THE
CAREER OF THE FAMOUS DETECTIVE
HEMLOCK HOLMES, AS RECORDED
:: :: BY HIS FRIEND DR. WATSON :: ::*

BY
JAMES FRANCIS THIERRY

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE ELEVEN CUFF- BUTTONS



CHAPTER I

Well, you see, it was like this:

After my illustrious friend, Hemlock Holmes, champion unofficial detective of the world, had doped out "The Adventure of the Second Stain,"—the last one to be pulled off after his return to life,—thereby narrowly averting a great war, he got sick of London life and hiked over to the United States. He prevailed upon me to accompany him to that remarkable country; and we stayed there for three years, living in New York City all the time. There, on many occasions, Holmes displayed to great advantage his marvelous powers, and helped the New York police to clear up many a mystery that they had been unable to solve; for we found the police of that city to be just as stupid and chuckle-headed as those of London.

While in New York Holmes and I both learned to use American slang, and in case this little book should happen to be read by any of London society's "upper crust," I humbly beg their pardon for any examples of slang that may have crept into its pages.

Upon the death of King Edward in May, 1910, Hemlock Holmes was called back to London by the Scotland Yard officials to solve the mysterious disappearance of the British royal crown, which somebody had swiped the same day that Ed kicked the bucket; and of course I had to trail along with him! Well, to cover up a "narsty" scandal, my unerring friend, Hemlock Holmes, detected the guilty wretch within two days, but the culprit was so highly placed in society that the cops couldn't do a thing to him. In fact, he was one of the dukes, and after King George, Ed's successor, had recovered the crown,—which was found in an old battered valise in a corner of the duke's garage,—and had got a written confession out of him in Holmes's old rooms in Baker Street, in the presence of myself and Inspector Barnabas Letstrayed, we all swore a solemn oath, on a bound volume of Alfred Austin's poems, that we would never, never tell who it was that had stolen the English crown in the year 1910! Wild horses shall not drag from me the name of that ducal scoundrel, and, besides, there might be a German spy looking over your shoulder as you read this.

Holmes and I decided to stay back in the tight little isle for a while after that

episode, and there in the same old den, at 221-B Baker Street, in the city of London, we were domiciled on that eventful April morning in 1912 that saw us introduced to what turned out to be positively the dog-gonedest, most mixed-up, perplexing, and mysterious case we ever bumped up against in all our long and varied career in Arthur Conan Doyle's dream-pipe. It completely laid over "The Sign of the Four" and "The Study in Scarlet," and had "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" all beaten to a frazzle.

To be painfully precise about it, it was just twenty minutes after nine, Monday morning, April the eighth, 1912, the day after Easter, and it was raining something fierce outside. The whirling raindrops pattered against our second-story windows, and occasional thunder and lightning varied the scene.

Holmes was sitting, or, rather, sprawling in a Morris chair, wrapped in his old lavender dressing-gown, and was wearing the red Turkish slippers King George had given him for Christmas a few months before. He had his little old bottle of cocaine on the table beside him, and his dope-needle, which he had just filled, in his hand. I was sitting on the opposite side of the littered-up table, engaged in rolling a pill, that is to say, a coffin-nail. I had just poured out the tobacco into the rice-paper, and Hemlock Holmes had pulled back his left cuff, baring his tattooed but muscular wrist, just ready to take his fifth shot in the arm since breakfast, when all of a sudden there was a terrible clatter and racket down at our front door; we heard the door jerked open and then slammed shut; somebody rushed up the stairway three steps at a time; our own door was kicked open, and a tall, bald-headed man, about forty years old, wearing a monocle in his right eye, and with a derby hat in one hand, and a wet, streaming umbrella in the other, stood before us.

"Say! The cuff-buttons are gone,—the cuff-buttons are gone! One pair of them, anyhow. Come quick! The earl is nearly wild about it. Money's no object to him!" the apparition yelled at us.

I was so completely taken aback by the way that chump had burst in on us that I spilled all the beautiful tobacco off the cigarette-paper onto the floor. Holmes, however, like the cold-blooded old cuss that he always was, didn't even bat an eye, but calmly proceeded to squirt the cocaine into his wrist, and then, with the usual deep sigh of contentment, he stretched out full length in the chair, with his arms above his head, and yawned.

"Well, my hasty friend from Hedge-gutheridge, so you haven't got all your

buttons, eh?" he drawled. "I congratulate you upon your frankness, as it isn't everybody who will admit it. But sit down, anyhow, and make yourself at home. Watson has the 'makings' over there; I've got a cocaine-squirter here you can use, if you wish, and you will find a nice dish of red winter apples up on the mantelpiece. Beyond the mere facts that you are a bachelor, live at Hedge-gutheridge in County Surrey, do a great deal of writing, belong to the Fraternal Order of Zebras, and shaved yourself very quickly this morning, I know nothing whatever about you."

Of course, I knew that was the cue for *my* little song and dance.

"Marvelous! marvelous!" I shouted.

But our visitor was a long ways more surprised than I was. He flopped down in a chair, stared at Holmes as if he were a ghost, and said:

"Good Lord! How in thunder did you get onto all that?"

My eminent friend smiled his old crafty smile, as he waved his hands, and replied:

"Why, you poor simp, it's all as plain as that little round window-pane called a monocle that you've got stuck in your eye there. I knew right away that you were a bachelor, because there is a general air of seediness about you and two buttons are missing from your vest; I knew that you live at Hedge-gutheridge, because you've got a ticket marked to that place sticking out of your vest-pocket; I knew that you do lots of writing, for the perfectly obvious reason that you have ink smeared over the thumb and first two fingers of your right hand; I knew that you belong to the Fraternal Order of Zebras, because I can see an F. O. Z. watch-charm on your pocket; and, finally, I knew that you scraped the incipient spinach off your mug very rapidly this morning because I can see three large recent razor-cuts on your chin and jaws! Perfectly easy when you know how!" And old Hemlock winked at me. "So spill out your little story to me, one mouthful at a time, and don't get all balled up while you're telling it either,—or eyether."

Our visitor gasped again in amazement, handed Holmes his card, and began:

"Well, my name is Eustace Thorneycroft, private secretary to George Arthur Percival Chauncey Dunderhaugh, the ninth Earl of Puddingham, who lives at Normanstow Towers, near Hedge-gutheridge, over in Surrey. As you are probably aware, the Earl's most precious treasure is,—or, rather, are the six pairs

of fancy, diamond-studded, gold cuff-buttons that His Majesty King George I presented to his ancestor, Reginald Bertram Dunderhaugh, the second Earl of Puddingham, upon King George's accession to the British throne in the year 1714.

"It is an historical fact that King George paid twenty-four hundred pounds for the six pairs of cuff-buttons,—their value being considerably greater now,—and the diamond in each one is as large as the end of a man's thumb; so you can see at once how very valuable they are, to say nothing of the sentimental value of having been a present from a king to the Earl's ancestor two centuries ago."

"Oh, yes; I have heard about the Puddingham cuff-buttons," said Holmes, as he reached over, and grabbing the cigarette I had just rolled, calmly stuck it in his own mouth, and lit it. "Old King George I had no more taste than a Pittsburg millionaire! But go on with your little yarn."

Thorneycroft continued, occasionally taking a bite out of one of the apples Holmes had offered him:

"Well, just this Easter Monday morning, when the Earl was being dressed by his valet, an Italian named Luigi Vermicelli, he noticed with horror that his nice pink-and-green silk shirt, lying over the back of the mahogany arm-chair beside his bed, had the ancestral cuff-buttons missing from the cuffs!

"He is absolutely sure that they were in the cuffs when he took the shirt off last night, since he remembers distinctly having polished them up a bit with his handkerchief when he retired, and he cannot account for their mysterious disappearance. He has a large and ferocious bulldog on guard outside the castle every night, so he is sure no burglar got in, as the dog made no noise during the night.

"As for any possible suspicion attaching to the Earl's servants, I will say that they have all been with him for several years, all came highly recommended, and he would not presume to suspect any of them of having stolen the heirlooms."

"Which apparently reduces us to the two interesting hypotheses that either the cuff-buttons flew away by themselves or else the Earl hid them while he was drunk," interrupted Holmes, as he thoughtfully rubbed his left ear.

At this, the secretary stared, but went on:

"The constables from the village of Hedge-gutheridge, a half a mile from the

castle, to whom the Earl telephoned immediately upon discovering his loss, and who came up there within twenty minutes after, were not so confident of the servants' innocence, however, as they insisted on lining up all fourteen of them in the main corridor and searching them in a very ungentlemanly manner! As an after-thought, the constables even had the temerity to search *me*, as if I would dream of doing such a thing as that,—me, Eustace Thorneycroft!

"But they couldn't find the precious pair of diamond cuff-buttons on them at all; so the Earl had me beat it right into London on the next train, and engage you to ferret out the scoundrels responsible for this dastardly outrage! His Lordship didn't even give me time to finish my breakfast, he was so worked up about it, and compelled me to catch the eight-fourteen train out of Hedge-gutheridge, with a rasher of bacon and a half-empty cup of coffee on the dining table behind me. So that's why you see me tearing into these red apples so voraciously, Mr. Holmes! I reckon the swift ride through the Surrey downs on a rainy morning sharpened my appetite, too.

"So that's all there is to tell you, except that here's a hundred gold sovereigns for your retaining fee, and the Earl will positively pay you a reward of ten thousand pounds more when you recover the lost pair of cuff-buttons."

And Thorneycroft threw a chamois bag, full of coins, across the table.

"Ah, ha! Five hundred cold bucks in Yankee money!" cried Hemlock Holmes, as he rubbed his hands with pleasure. "Gather up this mazuma, Watson, and give His Nibs a receipt for it, as we are both after the coin, only you haven't got the nerve to admit it. Well, Mr. Wormyloft,—er, I mean Thorneycroft,—tell the Earl of Puddingham that I and my bone-headed assistant here will guarantee to give him a run for his money, and that if we don't find the ancestral cuff-buttons, at least we'll tear up half of County Surrey looking for them!"

Our bald-headed visitor here took up his hat and umbrella and opened the door, about to depart.

"Gosh, it's raining worse than ever now!" he said. "Well, I've got to shovel dust,—or, rather, mud,—back to Normanstow Towers, anyhow, or the Earl will raise the deuce with me! Be sure to come out on the next train after this, Mr. Holmes, which leaves London at one-twenty-two, as the Earl will be expecting you, and what's more, he'll have a coach-and-four waiting for you at the Hedge-gutheridge station. So long!"

And the Earl's secretary stepped out, closed the door after him, and was gone.

As we heard him going down the stairs, and then leaving by the outer door, Holmes got up, shook himself, stretched out his lanky arms, and yawned.

"Well, we've got a hundred pounds in gold here, Watson," he said. "Now it's up to us to scare up a good bluff at earning it! Let's see,—it's ten o'clock now, and we must leave the rooms at one o'clock to get to the station for the one-twenty-two train. So we'll have luncheon,—or lunch, just as you prefer,—at twelve-thirty. That leaves me two hours and a half to read 'Old Nick Carter.'"

Hemlock got out several yellow-back dime-novels from the book-rack in the corner, pulled the Morris chair over to the window, and started in on his light literature.

"What! Aren't you worrying about the Puddingham cuff-buttons at all? Aren't you going to try to dope out an explanation of their disappearance?" I inquired anxiously.

"There you go again, Watson, you old boob!" my friend replied. "How many times must I tell you that it is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts! Keep your shirt on till we get out to the castle, Doc; and in the meantime *ich kebibble* who swiped the cuff-buttons!"

I knew from long experience that it was useless to argue with him, so I just sat there like a bump on a log for the rest of the morning, wondering why the Sam Hill it was that I still continued to swallow such talk as that, when I knew it was my duty to rise up and paste him one in the eye for his sarcasms.



CHAPTER II

As Holmes and I were sitting down to luncheon at twelve-thirty that noon, and Mrs. Hudson, our old reliable landlady, was placing a fried pork-chop on my plate, we were again startled at hearing a terrific banging at the front door. The rain had died down somewhat, but it was still cloudy and disagreeable outside. In a moment more our own door was thrust open, and another visitor,—a young man of about thirty,—butted in on our privacy.

"Oh, I'm sure I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said this guy as he entered, "but I am Lord Launcelot Dunderhaugh, younger brother of the Earl of Puddingham, whose secretary, Mr. Thorneycroft, was here this morning. I came to tell you that since his return, two more pairs of those historic cuff-buttons have been stolen, and to see that you come out to the castle on the one-twenty-two train without fail!"

"Hum, that's hard lines, ain't it, Launcelot?" said Holmes, as he waved him to a chair; "you'll excuse us if Watson and I go on with our luncheon while you talk. Got any idea who lifted the second and third pair,—any clues at all to the guilty wretches?"

"No, Mr. Holmes; I really haven't," replied Lord Launcelot, as he sat down. "It's quite annoying to have to think about such a disconcerting event, so much out of my usual line, doncherknow."

And the Earl's brother contemplated the floor in gloomy silence for the next twenty-five minutes, while H. H. and I were feeding our faces.

When we had finished and had lit a couple of cigarettes, Holmes, handing one to Launcelot, said:

"Well, it's just one o'clock. Time to beat it, boys!"

"All right, Mr. Holmes, I'm your man," said our visitor.

And, the rain having stopped now, we left the house together, after hurriedly packing a few things in our suit-case.

We soon arrived at the station, where we boarded the Surrey train. No further

word could be got out of our noble companion as we sped through the southern London suburbs and along the country landscape,—not even after the April sun had straggled through the clouds and begun to brighten up the scene.

"Ax-gibberish!" yelled the guard,—or words to that effect,—as he slammed open the door of our compartment, and the train slowed down and at length stopped in front of a dinky little two-by-four station, with a cluster of worm-eaten old houses and a couple of sloppy-looking store buildings near it that looked as if they had all been erected prior to the Norman Conquest, or even possibly antedated the Christian era.

"Well, I guess this must be Hedge-gutheridge all right, in spite of the guard's mispronunciation of its euphonious name," remarked Holmes, stepping off the train onto the decayed platform, which sagged perilously under his athletic tread.

As Launcelot and I followed suit, a short, nervous-looking man of about thirty-five, with a florid countenance, rushed out of the ancient station toward us, and shouted:

"O Launcie, Launcie, misfortune has followed misfortune upon our venerable family of Dunderhaugh this miserable day! Two more pairs of those cuff-buttons have been abstracted during your absence, making five pairs in all that are gone! I suppose this is the eminent Mr. Holmes?"

And the noble Earl of Puddingham hurriedly shook hands with my boss.

"Right you are, Your Lordship," said Holmes, "and here is the egregious Dr. Watson, also at your service. You see, he's my old side-kicker, and I couldn't think of entering upon a crook-chase without him tagging along after me to write it up in well-chosen language. Do you get me, Steve? And, say, don't worry about the cuff-buttons. We'll find 'em all right."

"Assuredly, Mr. Holmes," said the Earl, as we all stepped into a coach that was waiting back of the station, with Launcelot more gloomy and depressed than ever.

"Home, Olaf! And get a move on!" This to the fat little coachman who drove the ancestral chariot.

"Ay bane get there pooty qvick, Your Lordship," said that Norwegian worthy, as he whipped up the horses, and in five minutes' time we had dashed up to a large and imposing stone castle with round towers at each corner,—apparently about

five hundred years old and five stories high,—surrounded by an extensive garden and park, with a small woods in the rear: just the kind you read about, with green gobs of ivy hanging down over the gray walls.

"Well, here we are, my friends," said the Earl, as he stepped out; while two footmen in light green livery assisted us to alight. "Let's see if I've still got the sixth and last pair of my diamond cuff-buttons safe here."

He fumbled with his cuffs a moment, and added:

"Yes, they're still here. What with Lloyd-George soaking all the British nobility with his preposterous income-tax, and everything going to the demnition bow-wows generally, you can't tell but that you'll be beaten out of your eye-teeth the next minute!"

As Holmes stepped out of the Puddingham coach and started up the broad stone stairway leading to the main entrance of the five-story castle, he stumbled over a good-sized rock lying on the graveled road at the foot of the stairs, and would have landed on his revered nose if I had not caught him.

"I fear that this is a bad omen," said the Earl, frowning; "but I trust it may not prevent the success of our undertaking."

"Don't worry! I wasn't hurt," answered Holmes.

And we went up the stairway together.

The great bronze door opened, and a lady dressed in the latest London style (or maybe it was Paris) greeted us with:

"Welcome to Normanstow Towers, Mr. Holmes, and Dr. Watson, also. I am sure that my husband the Earl and all of us will be more than glad if you recover the lost diamond cuff-buttons for us."

"I hope so, madame," said Holmes, as the Earl formally introduced us. "We will certainly do our best."

The butler, standing beside the Countess Annabelle, winked at us as she went into the drawing-room on one side of the corridor, and beckoned to us to enter the library on the other side.

"Well, Harrigan, you may pour us out each a glass of wine," said the Earl, as Holmes, Lord Launcelot, and I followed him into the room.

The library was a very handsomely furnished library, but it looked as if the noble master of Normanstow Towers did more drinking than reading in its luxurious interior, as three trays with at least a dozen empty glasses stood on the broad mahogany table, while a decanter of whiskey, a siphon of seltzer-water, and five quart bottles of wine decorated a smaller table at one side.

The butler filled four glasses with some excellent Burgundy, and as we finished them, the Earl said:

"Where are Uncle Tooter, Mr. Hicks, and Mr. Budd,—and Thorneycroft, too, Harrigan?"

"They're all up in the billiard room, trying to forget the unseemly tragedy that has marred the tranquil tenor of our lives here," replied Harrigan, winking at us again.

"Well, I only wish I, too, could forget it; but how can I? King George will never receive me again if those precious cuff-buttons aren't coughed up."

And the Earl started up the stairs to the second floor. "Come on up and join them, Mr. Holmes, before you begin your usual tape-measuring, snooping around with a magnifying-glass, and analyzing cigar ashes! You see, I'm on to all your little tricks."

"Well, say, hold on a minute, Puddy,—er, I mean Your Lordship. I don't mind stalling awhile before I begin pulling off my historic stunts, as this detective business is only a graft anyhow. But as my long suit has always been to criticize the regular police force, I must ask you why in thunder those constables from the village aren't here on guard, considering that three successive thefts have occurred here in the same day," remonstrated my friend.

"Oh, they went back to Hedge-gutheridge at noon," replied the Earl, shrugging his shoulders, "telling me they would wait till all six pairs of cuff-buttons were stolen before they would do anything more, as they would then probably have more clues to follow!"

"Can you beat it, Watson?" said Holmes to me as we ascended the elegant stairway to the fourth floor. "These guys are just about as brainy as the average American cop I bumped into on the other side of the Big Pond."

On the fourth floor we entered a large room with a billiard table and a pool table in it, where four men were busily engaged in killing time,—two at each table.

"Put up your cues a minute, Uncle Tooter and the rest of you, while I introduce you to Mr. Hemlock Holmes, the celebrated butter-in on other people's business, whom I have hired at an exorbitant price to run down the depraved scoundrels who cabbaged my diamond cuff-buttons. If he can't catch 'em, nobody can, I guess. Mr. Holmes, meet the Countess's uncle, Mr. J. Edmund Tooter, of Hyderabad, India; my friend, Mr. William Q. Hicks, of Saskatoon, Canada; and Mr. William X. Budd, of Melbourne, Australia." The Earl had us shake hands with the three. "My secretary, Eustace Thorneycroft, you have already met."

"Hello, Holmes, old fellow," was the smiling greeting of this worthy. "I'll shoot you a game of pool. Billiards is too intricate a game for my limited intellect to follow."

"All right," agreed Holmes with a grin.

The Earl stepped to a speaking-tube on the wall and called downstairs to the butler:

"Say, Harrigan, hurry us up a box of Havanas,—will you?"

In a minute the jovial master of refreshments came running up the stairs with a box of cigars under each arm.

"I thought I might as well bring two, Your Lordship," he explained.

"Sure, Harrigan; hand 'em around. Now, smoke up, gents," said the Earl. "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.' As long as I've still got the last pair of those blarsted cuff-buttons in my cuffs,"—here he took off his coat and displayed to full view the famous heirlooms, which gleamed like a pair of locomotive headlights,—"we'll wait till to-morrow before tearing up the foundations of the castle looking for the others!"

So they played on, at pool and billiards, for the rest of that Monday afternoon, Hemlock Holmes and the six gilded loafers, while I sat idly in a chair at one side, smoking several good cigars, my job being that of an innocent looker-on, trying to figure out who was the biggest fool in the place,—the easy-going Earl of Puddingham, for shoveling out good money to my grafting partner, or Holmes himself, for frittering away his brilliant talents in such piffle pastimes.

At six o'clock we were served a delectable dinner in the great oak-paneled dining-room of the castle, prepared by the Earl's French chef, Louis La Violette; and we passed the evening in the library, sipping away several more bottles of

the Earl's best vintages and listening to the more or less improbable tales of their adventures in the three faraway realms of the world by Messrs. Tooter, Hicks, and Budd, while Holmes managed to pump Harrigan on the Q. T., and found out from him that the Earl was rated at two million pounds, in the form of several thousand acres of valuable land up in Yorkshire, including one or two good-sized towns.

At half-past ten Holmes and I retired for the night, having been assigned to one of the spacious guest-rooms on the third floor; and soon we were wrapped in slumber.



CHAPTER III

Thud—thud—thud! Biff! Rattle! Bang! came a noise from below.

I sat bolt upright in bed, and hollered through the pitch-darkness at the top of my voice:

"Help! Police! Burglars! Robbers! Wake up, Holmes, and catch 'em!"

Despite the racket I made, which was increased by my jumping out of bed and falling head-first over a chair, upsetting the latter, the hardened old cuss slept on. When I yelled again, and shook him by the shoulder, he half opened his eyes and said:

"Well, what's eating you, Watson? Got the nightmare? I told you that you took too much mince-pie last night!"

"For Heaven's sake, didn't you hear the noise downstairs, Holmes?" I shouted. "Somebody is breaking in, trying to steal the Earl's last pair of diamond cuff-buttons!"

Holmes yawned lazily, rolled over in bed, and said, as he settled himself to sleep again:

"Well, I can't help it, Watson. I was hired to work in the daytime, not at night. I guess the excitement will keep till morning."

And,—would you believe it?—I couldn't get another word out of him! I looked at my watch by the moonlight, and found that it was thirteen minutes after two a. m. Then, thinking I might get a sight of the burglar from our bedroom window, I drew the heavy, old-fashioned curtains aside, and peered out over the silent landscape thirty feet below. But I couldn't see a blamed thing but trees and grass, and a moss-covered stone wall out by the road; the Earl's bulldog not being in evidence anywhere.

I knelt down by the window, put my elbows on the sill, and resolved to wait there awhile, to see if the nocturnal disturber would hike out again.

Apparently I fell asleep in this attitude, for the next thing I knew, Holmes, fully

dressed, was bending over me with a grin on his face, and it was broad daylight.

"Well, why don't you wake up yourself, Doc? It's eight o'clock," he said. Then I arose sheepishly, and dressed.

After our ablutions in the lavatory next door,—where we helped ourselves to a bottle of whiskey we found in a medicine cabinet on the wall,—we descended the two flights of stairs to the main floor. Finding nobody around, we walked through the different rooms on an exploring tour, seeking evidences of the disturbance the night before.

"Say, they evidently don't use alarm-clocks in this shack, Watson. Not a thing stirring yet," said Holmes, as we came to a room with the door slightly ajar.

"Hello, what's this?" he exclaimed, as we entered the room. "His Lordship must have retired in a rather submerged condition! Look at him there!"

I was surprised to see the noble heir of all the Puddinghams lying on the floor of his bedroom, flat on his back, his eyes closed, and with one foot resting on an overturned chair; and horrified, as I came closer, to see a large purple bruise on his forehead, and a heavy iron poker lying on the floor beside him. The diamond cuff-button was also gone from his right cuff, but the rays of the morning sun, coming through the east windows, shone on the other glittering bauble, still in his left cuff.

Holmes very unconcernedly took a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it, his eyes meanwhile glancing about the room; but I dropped on my knees beside the Earl and placed my ear over his chest. To my horror, I could not hear even the faintest heart-beat. My face paled as I looked up at my companion.

"Holmes," I said solemnly, "the Earl is dead! Murder has been added to robbery here!"

"That so, Doc?" queried the cold-blooded old cuss, blowing out a cloud of cigarette-smoke and yawning. "Well, what'll I do first,—magnifying-glass or tape-measure?"

"Holmes," I remonstrated sharply, unable to contain myself at his manner, "if you had come down here six hours ago when we heard that noise, we might have caught the criminals! Now it's too late."

And I turned to examine the bruise on the Earl's forehead.

"Oh, keep your shirt on, Watson," retorted Holmes, "I'm not the Earl's private bodyguard, and what's more, I'm not concerned with what might be, but with what *is*. Are you sure he's dead, or are you only making another awkward mistake? 'Twould be rather embarrassing, I should think, to have the Earl wake up in a minute and tell us he's not dead!"

At this insult to my professional ability as a physician, I got on my ear, and said with a frown:

"Well, if you don't think he's dead, just see whether *you* can detect any heart-beat there,—smart as you are."

Holmes was bending down over the apparent corpse, when we heard some one walking along the corridor outside.

"Quick, Watson, sneak into this closet here, and observe developments!" whispered Holmes, as he gripped me by the arm, and hustled me into the closet, the door of which stood slightly ajar.

In a moment more Her Ladyship, Annabelle, Countess of Puddingham, appeared in the Earl's room, took one look at her husband's recumbent form on the floor, and let out a scream that might have been heard in the next county, before she toppled over in a dead faint.

Holmes rushed out of the closet, seized her just in time to prevent her falling over the Earl's body, and whispered to me, as he placed her propped up in a chair, and as various people were heard running through the other rooms toward us, attracted by the Countess's scream:

"Well, *she* didn't have a hand in this, Doc. That scream was genuine, and she didn't know we were listening, either."

A small crowd of servants, all gaping in amazement, now filled the doorway, and Holmes asked authoritatively:

"Which one of you people is the Earl's valet?" Adding: "You had better lay your master on the bed there."

One of the men stepped forward, and answered:

"I am the Earl's valet, sir. Is His Lordship dead?"

"Well, Dr. Watson says he is. But lay him out on the bed, anyhow,—he will look

more respectable there than on the floor," said Holmes, as Vermicelli, the valet, assisted by another man, who said he was Peter Van Damm, valet to Lord Launcelot, picked up the Earl's body and deposited it, or him, on the bed.

Launcelot, Uncle Tooter, Budd, Hicks and Thorneycroft here crowded themselves into the room and, on seeing what had happened, added to the general buzz of excited exclamations; but Holmes took command of the situation, like the old hand that he was, entirely used to such gruesome sights, and stepped to the telephone on a small table in one corner of the Earl's room.

"Give me the village constables,—any of them,—at Hedge-gutheridge, quick!" he called through the instrument. "This one of the constables?"—after a moment. "This is Normanstow Towers. The Earl of Puddingham has apparently been murdered by some one attempting to steal the last of his diamond cuff-buttons.... Hemlock Holmes, from London, talking. Have all your men come up here at once and surround the place, letting no one in or out!... Whom do I suspect? Never mind whom I suspect. I'd never suspect you constables of having too much brains after the way you left here yesterday noon, with the castle unguarded,—that's a cinch!... Now don't take all day getting here. Good-by!"

And Holmes slammed the receiver back on the hook, whirled around on the chair, and faced the gaping crowd of people in the room.

"Well, what are you looking at?" he demanded. "Get together there, some of you, and bring order out of chaos. You there, with the vacant look on your face, are you the Countess's maid?"—addressing one of the three woman servants. "Take care of your mistress there in that chair. Can't you see she's coming out of her faint? If the cook is among you, he'd better get back to the kitchen and prepare breakfast. Watson, you take this revolver here,"—fishing a six-shooter out of his pocket and handing it to me,— "go to the rear entrance of the castle, and stand guard there till those tortoise-like constables arrive. Let no one in or out; and I will do the same at the front entrance. Do you get me, Steve?"

And Holmes jumped up, full of renewed "pep," and boldly pushed those of the friends and servants of the deceased Earl who didn't move quickly right out of the room into the corridor, the Countess having been assisted in the meantime up to her own room on the second floor by her Spanish maid.

"I say there, Holmes, don't you think you're going it pretty strong?" protested Billie Budd, the man from Australia, as he was shoved along with the rest of them by the masterful detective.

"Just keep your shirt on, Mr. Budd," said the latter, as he locked the door of the Earl's room behind him and put the key in his pocket. "I'm running this show, not you. I was sent here to get results, and I'm going to get 'em,—see?"

"I guess the old cocaine is beginning to work on him again," I muttered.

Then I started with the gun to the rear door of the castle, while Holmes, after overawing the others, stationed himself at the front door, with another loaded and cocked revolver in his hand.

After about fifteen minutes of tiresome waiting, while several of the servants peeped out at me from the rear rooms as I stood sentinel at the end of the corridor, just inside the great iron barred door, I heard Holmes's welcome shout from the front of the building:

"All right, Watson; the constables are here!"

In a moment a wooden-faced gink appeared, who said he had come to relieve me. I put the revolver in my pocket and rejoined Holmes in the drawing-room, where I found him with Lord Launcelot and the others.

"Well, boys, I've got four constables completely surrounding the castle now,—one on each side,—so we'll sit down to breakfast. It's nearly nine o'clock now."

And Holmes moved toward the dining-room.

"All right, old top," said Launcelot, smiling at the detective. "As long as George Arthur,—the Earl, you know,—is disabled or dead, I am the master of the house, and I'll back you up in everything you do."

"Even if I should happen to arrest you for stealing some of the cuff-buttons yourself, eh?" queried Holmes with a grin, as we sat down to our delayed breakfast.

Launcelot sort of choked at this, stared at the speaker, and said:

"What queer things you *do* get off, Mr. Holmes! Your idea of a joke, I suppose."



CHAPTER IV

The ever-smiling butler we had met the day before, whose spirits did not seem dampened by the tragedies that had lately occurred, moved around the table silently and quickly as he waited on us seven men partaking of breakfast, with a dead man in the other room.

As I watched them there, I noticed that the five habitués of the castle all seemed rather embarrassed when Holmes looked at them, and would then look the other way, evidently on account of his brutal remark to the Earl's brother.

Harrigan had just brought me a second cup of coffee, holding it poised over the edge of the table, when the door opened, and His Lordship, the deceased Earl of Puddingham, walked in on us, looking very pale, with one hand pressed to his forehead.

I felt cold chills creep over me, as Harrigan dropped the cup of coffee crash-*splash* on the floor, yelling:

"Good-night! A ghost!"

Every one else in the room was so surprised that he sat speechless, except Holmes. Billie Budd swallowed a peach-stone in his astonishment, and coughed and spluttered for quite a while.

"What, aren't you dead, George?" Launcelot finally managed to gasp, as the Earl walked over to his vacant chair at the head of the table and sat down in it.

"Why, no; of course not. You're a fine bunch of rumdums, though, I must say, to leave a man like that, after he's been assaulted and robbed!" said the Earl, as he motioned to Harrigan to bring him some breakfast.

Holmes turned to me, with his customary irritating grin, and said: "Well, Doc; what did I tell you? Never count your coroner's fees before they're hatched!"

The Earl bade Harrigan summon one of the footmen and tell him to carry the news of his sudden return to life to the Countess in her room upstairs. Then he proceeded with his breakfast, just as much alive as ever.

"For the benefit of you who do not know, I will say that I have a very peculiar heart," he volunteered after a pause, "and it sometimes stops beating entirely for a while. All that I remember since I retired last night,—with my clothes on, after tossing off a few more glasses in the library,—was being awakened in the middle of the night by some one opening the door, darting over to me, and jerking the diamond cuff-button out of my right cuff, which was on the side nearest the door, and my rising up out of bed to hit him a crack, when I was knocked unconscious in my struggles by the iron poker, which the intruder seized from the fireplace. He hit me on the forehead, and I didn't know anything more until just a moment ago, when I woke up with a headache, and only one cuff-button left. If Mr. Holmes can lay hands on the unholy miscreant who is guilty of this and the previous outrages, he will have earned my everlasting gratitude, also a reward of twenty thousand pounds,—double what I had Thorneycroft offer him yesterday."

"That sounds like business," said Holmes, as he jumped up, the Earl and all of us being finished by this time. "Watson, you can put it down in your little red notebook that at precisely"—here he glanced up at the ornate clock on the mantelpiece—"twenty minutes after nine, Tuesday morning, April the ninth, 1912, the burglar-hunt began; just exactly twenty-four hours, by the way, since we were first informed of the Earl's loss."

"All right, go to it, Holmes," said the Earl. "I guess you know how. I give you *carte blanche* to go as far as you like."

We at once adjourned to the drawing-room, at the right side of the front of the first floor of the castle, and Hemlock Holmes issued his orders.

"Your Lordship, the first thing I will pull off is an examination of every one on the place,—your relatives, friends, servants and all,—no one is exempt. Your own story I have heard. Now, then——"

Here we were interrupted by the constable whom Holmes had set to guard the front of the castle, who came in and said:

"Hi beg pahdon, Mr. 'Olmes, but here is Inspector Bahnabas Letstrayed, just arrived from London, to see that everything is hall right."

"I don't see how it could be, when he ain't right himself!" snapped Holmes, with a frown, as the bulky form of our old friend in previous adventures loomed up in the doorway. "Well, come in, you old nuisance," he added, as he motioned him

to one end of the room. "It's enough to make a man bite a piece out of the wall when he has to contend with two such rummies as you and Doc Watson around him, particularly when he has a job on hand that requires close and attentive brain-work."

Inspector Letstrayed removed his tweed cap and joined us over by the mantel, with a fatuous smile on his large face.

"As I was about to say, when Barnaby butted in, the first man who noticed any of the cuff-buttons stolen, next to the Earl himself, was Luigi Vermicelli, his Italian valet. Call him in," ordered Holmes.

On a motion from the Earl, his secretary Thorneycroft went out to the corridor and brought in the more or less scared valet.

"What's your full name?" demanded Holmes.

"Luigi Vittorio Vermicelli."

"Where were you born?"

"At Brescia, in the north of Italy."

"How old are you,—and where did you work before you gave the Earl the benefit of your services?"

"Thirty-two. I was valet to a prominent banker in Venice."

"Ever been in jail?"

"Why, er,—yes," and the Italian became embarrassed. "I was arrested for intoxication once just before I left Venice; but I was imprisoned for only ten days."

"So you fell off the water-wagon, eh,—even in the watery city?" commented Holmes. "Well, were you sober when you put away the Earl's shirt last night, with the diamond cuff-buttons in it,—that is, sober enough to notice that the buttons were really there in the cuffs?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I am quite sure that the cuff-buttons must have been stolen during the night."

"Did you hear any noise Sunday night to indicate that burglars were getting in?"

"No, sir; not a thing. I didn't even hear the dog bark, as he usually does. I think that the cuff-buttons were stolen by somebody inside the castle."

"Ah, ha! This is getting interesting," said Holmes, with animation. "And whom do you suspect? Anybody in particular?"

"Yes, sir. I suspect Donald MacTavish, the second footman. I saw him with something shiny in his hand last night, which he hastily concealed when he saw me coming."

"That will be all, Luigi," said Holmes; "you are excused."

The valet looked like Mephistopheles, as he glanced around with a triumphant expression on his swarthy face, and left the room.

"Bring in Lord Launcelot's valet next, Thorneycroft," said Holmes. "And we may as well sit down, as the examination of this crowd will take some time."

The Earl and the rest of us found chairs in the drawing-room as Thorneycroft, looking very important, hustled out in the corridor to rope in the next victim. The constables had the servants all considerably frightened, and they stood around on one foot with mixed expressions on their faces. In a moment the other valet confronted us.

"State your name, age, previous place of employment, and whether you have ever been arrested," commanded Holmes, who seemed to be speeding up a little on his inquisition.

I wondered at my friend's somewhat more nervous manner as he questioned the second servant, until I noticed his old cocaine-squirter being shoved gently back into his pocket with his left hand, as he pointed his right forefinger at the servant. Holmes had evidently just sneaked in an extra shot in the arm without any one's getting wise, and I, who knew him of old, was sure that he would have a fit on for several hours.

"Peter Adrian Van Damm. Twenty-nine. Pretorius Brothers' diamond-importing house in Amsterdam, Holland. No, sir," replied the valet, just as quickly as Holmes had questioned him.

"I see that you are not to be flustered," nodded Holmes approvingly; "also that you are familiar with diamonds. What would you think of a man who would steal the Earl's diamond cuff-buttons?"

"I would say that he didn't show very good taste. They are too large and crude. Not fit to be worn to a prize-fight," answered Van Damm calmly.

"Impudent fellow! I'll fire you for that," growled the Earl.

"Hold on, Your Lordship, we may need this man later. Don't do anything rash. Thorneycroft, send candid Peter out, and bring in the first footman," Holmes commanded, consulting a list of the servants, which the Earl had given him.

"What's your name, age, previous place of employment, and prison-record,—if any?" snapped Holmes impatiently, as he noticed the obese face and low brow of the man before him.

"Why, er,—ah,—my name is Hegbert Bunbury, sir. Hi ham forty-two years old. Hi hused to work for the Duke of Bridgerswold, sir, but Hi 'ave come down hin the world, sir, and now Hi ham working for honly a hearl. Er, what was that hother question you harsked me, sir?"

"I asked if you had any prison-record."

"Well, now, what a question, Mr. 'Olmes! Do you really think that Hi would stoop so low as to swipe 'Is Lawdship's cuff-buttons?"

"I didn't ask you whether you stole the cuff-buttons or not. I'll find out soon enough whether you did. What I want to know is whether you have ever been arrested for anything before."

And Holmes scowled at the fat footman before him, who fidgeted uneasily as he replied:

"Well, er,—ah, yes; Hi was put in chokey once about ten years ago for lifting a diamond stick-pin belonging to a fellow-servant when Hi was working for the Duke of Bridgerswold; but Hi gave it back to him, Hi hassure you Hi did, Mr. 'Olmes."

"After they compelled you to, I suppose, by the third degree," commented Holmes, as he glanced meaningly at the Earl, who frowned heavily at Bunbury. "Well, do you suspect anybody here of stealing the cuff-buttons?"

A smile passed over the footman's face, as he replied:

"Yes, sir; Hi 'ave no 'esitation whatever in saying that Hi suspect Teresa Olivano, the Countess's Spanish maid, of having stolen them."

"I think that I can account for that accusation," said Uncle Tooter to Holmes. "This fellow Bunbury was recently rejected when he proposed marriage to Teresa. Now, you beat it out of here at once," he added, as he turned to the footman, "and keep your fake suspicions to yourself."



CHAPTER V

The bald-headed secretary led the discomfited Egbert outside, and, at Holmes's request, returned with Donald MacTavish, the second footman.

"Well, Donald, I don't suppose it makes any difference how old you are, and your name I already know. I only asked those routine questions of the first three servants to humor my fat friend from Scotland Yard here, Inspector Barnabas Letstrayed, who represents the slow and beef-witted majesty of the London police." And Holmes winked at me, as he added: "Now, Mac, have you ever been in prison?"

The second footman, who seemed just as embarrassed as the first footman had been, shifted his feet uneasily and answered:

"Well, I suppose you might call it that, Mr. Holmes. About three years ago, when I was employed at Balmoral Castle, in Scotland, I was taken before the village squire and given three days in jail for having been caught with a bottle in my pocket."

"It isn't a crime in Scotland to carry a bottle, is it?" said Holmes, grinning.

"No; but they claimed that it was half full of Scotch 'smoke,' and that I had been found totally unconscious up in the hayloft at the time," said MacTavish, with downcast eyes.

"Whom do you suspect of having stolen the cuff-buttons?"

The man from Balmoral brightened up, as he answered:

"I am inclined to believe that my partner, Egbert Bunbury, stole them, sir. When he went to propose to Miss Olivano, the Countess's maid, yesterday afternoon, I saw something sparkling in his hand."

"Think he intended to give her a diamond cuff-button, instead of a diamond ring, Donald?" queried Holmes.

"Well, who can say? Perhaps he was going to have it taken out, and then reset in a ring."

"You're an original cuss,—aren't you, Donald? Also pretty good at passing the buck. The Italian valet we examined first accused *you* of having stolen the Earl's precious heirlooms. Now, go and fight it out with him. Thorneycroft, you may bring in the butler."

"Ah, that reminds me," said the Earl, "I feel pretty dry. Harrigan, you may pour me out a glass of wine before you answer any of Mr. Holmes's questions," he added as the genial butler stood before us.

When the Earl had been sufficiently refreshed from a bottle that stood handy on a nearby table, Holmes began:

"What is your full name?"

"I have no full name. Despite the fact that I belong to the Bartenders' and Butlers' Union, I am always sober," said Harrigan, with a wink.

"Well, Mr. Smart Alec, what's your entire name?"

"Joseph Patrick Harrigan, and I can lick the first son-of-a-gun that says I stole those darned cuff-buttons!"

"Nobody said you stole 'em. Where were you born, and how did such an able man as yourself come to be working in this menagerie of lowbrows?"

"I was born in little old New York, in the Ninth Ward. I used to be a waiter in a Bowery hash-foundry, and afterwards graduated into one of the Broadway lobster-palaces. I have the reputation of being one of the best living judges of rare wines; and the Earl has said many a time that he could not possibly do without my talents."

"Is that the reason the Earl hired you,—because you are so good at looking upon the grape-juice when it is red?" asked Holmes with a smile, as he winked at His Lordship.

"Your perspicacity is marvelous, Mr. Holmes," replied Harrigan. "My reputation having crossed the ocean, through the men who knew me on Broadway coming over to visit friends in London, the Earl heard of me, and cabled me my expenses and an offer of double the salary I was getting there; so I snapped it up immediately, and here I am, in full charge of the ancient Puddingham wine-cellar."

And Harrigan cleared his throat, threw out his chest, and winked at me.

"Well, Joe," continued Holmes, "what do you know about the lost and lamented cuff-buttons,—if anything?"

"Not a darned thing, and that's the Gospel truth. And as to whom I may possibly suspect of having cabbaged them, I'll come right out flat-footed and say that I wouldn't put it past a single person in the place, with the sole exceptions of Louis La Violette, the French cook, Heinie Blumenroth, the German gardener, and myself! Nothing backward about *me*, you know. I lay the whole crowd under a blanket suspicion, on general principles; and I'll say, furthermore, that I have particular reason to suspect Bunbury, the first footman, of having stolen the cuff-buttons, because he tried to steal a necktie from my room last week, and I only caught him in the nick of time, helping him out of the room with a couple of well-placed kicks!"

"It's sad, indeed, Harrigan," said Holmes, "to contemplate what one's fellow-man will stoop to. Well, I guess I'll excuse you from any further questions. Thorneycroft, call in His Excellency, Monsieur La Violette, the Chief Cook of this noble castle."

"Harrigan, you may pour me out another glass of wine," interposed the Earl before the butler had a chance to leave the room.

After His Lordship had been refreshed and Harrigan had departed, the Earl said to Holmes:

"Now go on with the bad news. Let's see what kind of an alibi Louis the soup-maker, pancake-tosser, and egg-breaker, has to offer."

And he nudged the fatuous Inspector Letstrayed in the ribs. That worthy, who had been thoughtfully regarding the ceiling for some time, jumped back in surprise.

Just then Thorneycroft returned with the cook,—a short, fat, and irascible-looking man, with black eyes that seemed to snap fire as he returned the stare of the phlegmatic Letstrayed, black hair, and a black mustache and imperial, *à la* Napoleon III.

"Ah, Monsieur La Violette, what do you know concerning the recent sad affair here at the castle,—the theft of the diamond cuff-buttons, you know?" said Holmes, as the Frenchman faced him.

"The diamond cuff-buttons, I know, eh? *Sacré bleu!*" shouted the Frenchman, his face blazing red with anger, as he nearly hit the ceiling in his wrath. "You mean to insinuate that I know where they are, you—you! If you were a gentleman, I'd challenge you to a duel for that!"

"Here, here, keep your shirt on a minute, Louis," Holmes advised reassuringly. "I didn't mean to insinuate anything at all. I was just looking for information."

La Violette regarded Hemlock Holmes for a moment with the bitterest disdain, then he answered:

"Well, if you're such a smart and sagacious detective as you have been cracked up to be, you could ascertain who pilfered those accursed cuff-buttons without using such common methods as lining up the servants, and asking them if they stole them or not. Any one of the servants is likely to be guilty, except only Harrigan, Blumenroth, and myself. All the others are unspeakable imbeciles! Go ahead, then, and get your information, without casting your despicable insinuations upon me."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders, and looked at the Earl.

Barnabas Letstrayed at this point evidently thought it was up to him to pull off something; and he did,—more than he thought.

"Er, Hi say," he began, with great importance, as he motioned to the cook's cuffs, "aren't those the lost cuff-buttons this fellow is wearing now? They look just like them, Hi think."

Every one stared at La Violette's cuffs, and that worthy nearly had an apoplectic fit, as the Earl, after having taken one look at the cook's jewelry, leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"Say, Inspector, those aren't the lost Puddingham cuff-buttons by some lengths. They're diamonds, all right, but the resemblance ends there. The stolen ones are at least twelve times bigger; that's all."

And the Earl laughed again.

Louis La Violette didn't laugh, however, but made a mad rush at the obese police inspector from London, who had so grievously and wrongly accused him.

"Pig-dog, scoundrel, liar!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "I'll carve you up into

ribbons for that! Take that, you big heap of over-grown beef-fat!"

And the infuriated Gaul launched a blow with his fist at Letstrayed that knocked that astonished person out of his chair and tumbled him flat on the floor, with the chair upside down on top of him.

"Here, don't let's have another attempted murder in the castle, La Violette," remonstrated Holmes, as he pulled back the enraged cook from a further assault on Letstrayed; "contain yourself. Letstrayed is only a rumdum, anyhow, as I have found out from long experience with him. He's always making bad breaks like that. You really mustn't mind him."

Louis shook off Holmes's grasp, and faced the Earl, crying out:

"But I *will* mind him. I have been insulted. I shall avenge it. I shall throw up my job, and return instantly to that dear Paris! Why did I ever leave it?"

"Good Heavens, Louis!" shouted the Earl in alarm, "you mustn't think of doing that! I couldn't get along without you and Harrigan, the butler. Doggone it, Inspector," he added, as that personage slowly and painfully arose from the floor and brushed himself off, "now you *have* done it. Offended the chef,—and the best chef in the whole country, too! You'd better go outside, and take a walk for your health until Louis cools off. Your further presence here will only tend to aggravate him. Louis, I'll double your salary if you'll agree to stay. It wasn't my fault, you know."

"Well, all right, Your Lordship," agreed La Violette, after some hesitation, "I guess I'll pocket my outraged pride, also the one hundred per cent increase in salary, and let you have the further benefit of my services. But I want it distinctly understood by every one present," he added, as he faced around to the others, "that I wouldn't have those pestiferous Puddingham cuff-buttons as a gift! *Comprenez vous cela*, Mr. Hemlock Holmes of Baker Street, London, and Broadway, New York?"

"Yes, I get you, Louis," replied Holmes, as he glanced at his watch impatiently. "It's five minutes after ten already, and the diamond baubles haven't been found yet. If you'll kindly stand aside, and let somebody else without such a large supply of easily outrageable pride have the floor, I'll examine them."

The Frenchman, with a sniff and with head in air, walked out of the library; and my friend summoned in the seventh servant so far, the Russian second cook.

CHAPTER VI

"Well, what's your name, stupid?" snapped Holmes, as a colorless-looking fellow with vacant eyes stood before us.

"Ivan Galetchkoff. I was born in Tikhoretzkaia, Northern Caucasia, I work as second cook in the Earl's kitchen, and I can tell you just who stole his cuff-buttons; so I can!"

"Well, this is interesting, if true," commented Holmes. "And whom do you accuse as the guilty miscreant, Ivan?"

"I accuse that black scoundrel Vermicelli, the Earl's valet. Oh, how I hate him, with his smooth and slippery ways, and his air of superiority over me, because he helps the Earl on and off with his silk shirts, and I mix the hash in the kitchen!" replied Ivan.

"Well, that's hardly valid ground for accusing him of the robbery,—don't you think?" said Holmes, smiling.

"No; but I have other reasons, all right. Vermicelli is the guy who attends to the Earl in his bedroom, and he was the last man to see the diamond cuff-buttons as His Lordship retired Sunday night. Therefore, he certainly stole them. I guess it doesn't take a London detective to dope that out. Why didn't you search his room the very first thing?"

And Galetchkoff looked about him with an air of triumph.

"Evidently this subject of the Czar didn't observe his object of suspicion going around with something shiny in his hand, as the others did. Call in the next boob," said Holmes.

The Russian hash-mixer departed, and a very charming black-eyed señorita from sunny Spain stood before us.

"What is your name, madam?" said Holmes, with some embarrassment, since, as I have observed before in the course of our mutual adventures, he was a confirmed bachelor, and didn't like women.

"Teresa Olivano, from Seville, sir. I am Her Ladyship the Countess's maid, sir," she replied, with a bewitching smile at my misogynist friend.

"Er, ah,—well, what do you know about the stolen cuff-buttons, if anything? Of course, I don't mean to insinuate that you had a hand in it."

She smiled again, and replied:

"I am quite sure that you will find the Earl's stolen jewelry upon the person or concealed in the room of Adelaide Meerckenloo, the second chambermaid. I happened to overhear her whispering to Natalie Nishovich, the first chambermaid, last night, about some 'diamonds,' and they abruptly stopped talking, and acted greatly embarrassed, when I came into the room where they were."

"Is that all you know about it?" said Holmes.

"Well, I should think it was enough. That Adelaide is a regular old cat, and I am positive she stole the diamond cuff-buttons. If you don't want to take my word for it, then don't!" And the Spanish lady walked out with a toss of her head.

"Everybody accuses everybody else. This is getting to be a joke," said Holmes, with a scowl at me, which was quite undeserved, as I hadn't been doing anything.

"Bring in the next victim, the first chambermaid," he snapped.

Eustace Thorneycroft, who had been acting as a sort of bailiff for Holmes's court of inquisition, now brought in a girl with the same sort of lack of intelligence on her face as had distinguished the Russian Galetchkoff.

"What's your name, there?" said Holmes.

"Natalie Nishovich, and I used to work in King Alexander of Servia's royal palace in Belgrade before his sudden death nine years ago."

"Well, Natalie, have you seen the diamond cuff-buttons lying around loose anywhere?"

"No, sir; but I have an idea that that conceited Spanish girl that just walked out of here stole them,—Teresa Olivano, I mean."

"Hum, have you overheard her talking about the diamonds, or is it just on

general principles?" asked Holmes, as Tooter frowned severely at the chambermaid.

"Just on general principles. I don't like her at all."

"All right. Good-by. You've said enough. Call in the next one," ordered Holmes; adding: "They all seem to belong to the 'I-used-to-be' club. You certainly have combed the world looking for variegated characters, Earl. I suppose the next one will be a Chinaman or a Patagonian."

But it wasn't; only a Belgian girl, with dark eyes that couldn't look Holmes straight in the face as he questioned her.

"What's your name, previous place of employment, and opinion as to the present location of the stolen cuff-buttons?"

"My name is Adelaide Meerckenloo, and I used to be maid to the late Queen of Belgium. I think the man who stole the Earl's diamonds is Peter Van Damm, Lord Launcelot's valet. He used to work for a diamond firm in Amsterdam, Holland; so he would know best how to dispose of them."

"Which is about as good a reason for your suspicions as the others gave for theirs. You're excused, Addie. Next," said Holmes.

"Well, you don't need to bite my head off about it," grumbled Addie, as she went out, and her place was taken by a cheerful and rubicund coachman, the same one who had driven us up from the station the day before.

"What's your name, antecedents, and knowledge as to the diamond-theft?" Holmes demanded.

"Vell, Ay bane Olaf Yensen, from Aalesund, Norway. Ay bane the Earl's first coachman. Und Ay suspect strongly that my partner out at das stables, Carol Linescu, sviped das Earl's cuff-buttons. Ay saw das rascal hiding someding in das hay up in the loft last evening, und Ay bet you, by Golly, that if you yump on him, you vill find that he is das tief. So!"

And the fat little coachman looked around with a cherubic smile on his face.

"All right, Yensie, maybe we will. You're excused. Next."

The man who had just been accused of the robbery was now presented by the secretary. He formed a marked contrast to his partner,—being tall, dark and

slender, with a hangdog expression on his face.

"What's your name, and what have you got to say about the disappearance of the diamonds?" pursued the relentless inquisitor.

"Carol Linescu. I used to run a livery stable in Bucharest, Roumania. The guy who stole the diamonds is that fat little loafer Olaf Yensen, the first coachman. I am the second coachman. He must be the guilty one because last week he tried to swipe my best pair of boots while I was asleep."

"Terrible, ain't it? Any other reason? No?—All right, Carol, beat it. Next! Now shoot 'em along quick, Thorney," Holmes said to the secretary, as the Roumanian went out, and a heavy-set man with blond hair, whose blue eyes blazed fiercely behind his spectacles, entered.

"Your name, please. And what do you know about the diamonds?"

"Heinrich Blumenroth, formerly of His Majesty the King of Bavaria's royal gardens at Munich, Germany. I don't know who stole the diamonds, but I can say that any one in the place is likely to have stolen them, except Harrigan, La Violette, and myself. We are the only three that are worth a darn. Nothing else, is there? I'd like to get back to the gardens. Very busy this morning."

And the first gardener turned on his heel, whereupon Holmes remarked with a grin:

"Sorry to have troubled you, Herr Blumenroth. You're all right. You're exonerated. Next!"

A short and swarthy fellow entered, who looked like a bandit.

"Well, what's *your* name, anyhow? Where did you drop from, and what do you know about this affair?" queried Holmes.

"Demetrius Xanthopoulos. I am the second gardener, and I used to work in the King of Greece's gardens at Corfu. I think that La Violette, the chef, is the man who stole the cuff-buttons. He's entirely too supercilious, and kicks me out of the kitchen every time I try to get in after a hand-out!"

"All right. If I were Louis I'd do the same. Beat it. Next!"

"Er, ah,——I beg pardon, Holmes, you have now examined all of the servants. Fourteen of them, you know," said Thorneycroft.

"Oh, yes. That's right," said Holmes, as he consulted the list in his hand; "but you people here will have to be examined too,—every one of you. No excuses, now," he added, as the Earl started to object. "You hired me to find those stolen cuff-buttons, and by thunder, I'm going to find them, no matter who it hits! Thorneycroft, what do you know as to the probable guilty party?"

The perspiration stood out on the secretary's bald head, and he stammered greatly as he replied:

"Well, er,—ah, you know, that is——"

"Come, come! Don't keep me waiting all day. Speak up."

"Well, if you must know, I think that the Earl's Italian valet, Luigi Vermicelli, is the man. He was the last man near the cuff-buttons when the Earl retired Sunday night."

"Yes, that's what Galetchkoff said. I should think that you'd show greater originality than that, Eustace. Lord Launcelot, I shall have to question you as to your opinion on the robbery."

"Well, I think that Pete Van Damm took 'em,—my valet, you know. Entirely too fresh, that fellow. Thinks he knows more than I do, bah Jove!"

"Wouldn't be at all surprised if he did," muttered Holmes under his breath, adding aloud: "Mr. Tooter, you are the Countess's uncle, I believe. What do you know about the affair?"

"Mr. Holmes, I don't like to say it, because he's an awfully good fellow, but between you and me, I think that Joe Harrigan, the butler, swiped the diamonds," answered the elderly man from India. "He gets pretty well soused sometimes, as I have observed, and you know that a man in that condition is likely to do almost anything."

"Under the same principle, then, you may be guilty also, Uncle Tooter," interposed the Earl, "because you know blamed well that I've caught both you and Harrigan down in the wine-cellar many a time since you've been here. I guess that'll be about all from you."

The India merchant subsided, and Holmes turned to Billie Hicks. "Mr. Hicks of Canada, what do you say about it?"

"Unquestionably the guilty man is that Russian scoundrel Ivan Galetchkoff," replied Hicks, "he put pepper in the charlotte russe at dinner on Sunday, and I nearly choked on it. A man who would do that would steal sheep!"

"Well, Mr. Budd of Australia, we'll hear from you," said Holmes, as he stretched out his arms and yawned.

"Sorry as I am to say it, Mr. Holmes, there stands the guilty wretch!" and Mr. Budd pointed dramatically at the fidgeting and uneasy Thorneycroft. "I saw him come out of the Earl's room late Sunday night at an hour when all good citizens should be in bed."

"You're entirely mistaken, Budd, I assure you," said Thorneycroft nervously. "I am as innocent as you are, and you know it. I just went into His Lordship's room Sunday night to get my pocket-comb."

Holmes grinned as he looked at the secretary's more or less bald pate, and said:

"I don't see what you want with a comb, Thorney. But we'll give your alibi due consideration, nevertheless. Well, I guess I've questioned everybody in the castle now, Your Lordship, including the mutual admiration society formed by Harrigan, La Violette and Blumenroth."

And Holmes turned an inquiring countenance to the Earl.

"Er, well, not exactly, Holmes. You haven't interrogated the Countess and myself," smiled the Earl.

"By George, that's right! Here, somebody, get the Countess in here."

In a moment the mistress of Normanstow Towers stood before us. She gave a sniff of disdain as she looked at her brother-in-law, Lord Launcelot.

"I beg pardon, Your Ladyship, but what do you know concerning this sad affair?" asked Holmes politely,—that is to say, politely for him.

The Countess regarded Launcelot with a frown, as she replied:

"I am practically certain that the man who has brought this disgrace upon our ancient family is Lord Launcelot, the Earl's own brother. He was entirely in too much of a hurry to get away from here yesterday morning to rush into London to tell you about it. He did it just to cover up his own theft."

"These family jars do beat the dickens," said Holmes, scratching his head in perplexity, while the Countess sailed out of the room, very much on her dignity. "Your Lordship, what's your own opinion as to the robbery?"

"Oh, good night! Don't ask me. I give it up. Let's all have a drink, and then adjourn somewhere else. The air is getting kind of close in here, after all these hot accusations. Harrigan," the Earl added, turning to the butler, who had just returned from the corridor, "pour us out one or two glasses of wine, or three or four of them. Drink up, gentlemen,—you, too, Letstrayed." And the Earl winked at me.



CHAPTER VII

After we had all imbibed freely of the blood of the grape the Earl then led the way out to the front door. Inspector Letstrayed seemed to have something in his noodle, and after much cogitation he finally came out with it.

"Er, Hi say, Mr. 'Olmes," he blurted out, "you have forgotten to search any of the servants, to see whether or not they have the diamond cuff-buttons concealed about their persons, doncherknow."

"Say, Letstrayed, for the love of Mike, don't interrupt me again with your well-meant but rattle-headed advice, or I'll be liable to forget myself and commit murder on the premises. I'm running this show, not you,—gol darn it!" And Holmes ground his teeth as he added: "The idea of Letstrayed being chump enough to think that the servants, if they have stolen the diamonds, would risk discovery so boldly as to carry them around with them!—and besides, the village constables searched them yesterday. It's a cinch he owes his appointment as Inspector at Scotland Yard to a political pull, and not to his merit!"

The sky looked rather changeable as we all passed out by the great main entrance of Normanstow Towers, and went down the broad stone stairway to the lawn, alternately clouding over and then letting the fugitive April sun shine through.

"Ah, fickle Springtime, it's just like a woman!" said Uncle Tooter, with a deep-drawn sigh that must have come all the way up from his boots.

"Well, what's eating *him*, the old duffer, I wonder?" growled Holmes. "Is he falling in love, at his age?"

"He's dippy over that Spanish maid, Teresa Olivano, and I hear that she has refused him twice," whispered the Earl so that only Holmes and myself could hear him.

"For Heaven's sake, don't mention it in the Countess's hearing, because she's simply wild over her bachelor uncle being in love with a servant, both on account of the social disgrace, and because, if Uncle Tooter married Teresa, she and I would lose a large part of the inheritance that we expect when the old boy

finally cashes in. He's worth over forty million dollars, or eight million pounds, all made in the tea and spice business in India and Ceylon."

"Well, what gets *me* is why this Teresa ever turned him down, then, instead of jumping at the offer the first time he proposed," said Holmes, with a grin. "Forty million cold bones don't grow on *every* bush, you know."

"Teresa is a rather peculiar girl, Holmes, and what would attract others doesn't attract *her*," replied the Earl.

"Very, very peculiar, I'll say," commented Holmes cynically, as the Countess, Tooter, Hicks, Budd, Letstrayed, Lord Launcelot, and Thorneycroft stopped at the edge of the wide-spreading lawn on observing its wetness.

"Come on, everybody, let's take a little stroll around these beautiful ancestral acres. A few rain-drops won't hurt you."

And, so saying, the masterful detective grabbed the Earl and me by the arm and signalled to the others to accompany us.

"I have a motive for doing this, Earl," whispered Holmes to the latter, as the rest of the party reluctantly followed us, "which I will let you in on later."

I consented to be hauled around over the drenched grass by my domineering partner, as I knew from long experience that he was liable to do almost anything while on a mystery-hunt, and I accordingly kept my mouth closed. Billie Budd had his hat knocked off by a low-hanging limb of a tree that we passed under, and he let out a few choice Australian cuss-words that he had learned at the Ballarat gold mines, as he scowled at Hemlock Holmes, the author of this unaccountable promenade in the wet grass.

"Say, what do you think you're doing, anyhow, Mr. Smart-Alec from London,—adopting the Kneipp cure?" he growled.

"Don't you worry, Budd old boy, maybe I'll find the lost diamond cuff-buttons out here in the grass. The robbers may have dropped them here as they fled," answered Holmes smilingly, as he slapped the Earl on the back.

"Yes, and, then, again, they may not. I'll just bet you a five-pound note, Holmes, that you don't recover a single one of the eleven cuff-buttons to-day," said Budd.

"Done!" shouted my partner. "Doc Watson, you hold the stakes," he added,

turning to me; "here's my five."

"And here's *my* five," said Budd, with a smile, as he handed me a five-pound note to match Holmes's.

"That's it. I'm always the goat," I grumbled, as I shoved the kale in my pocket. "Here I am with the responsibility of keeping ten pounds of other people's money safely, while Holmes cops all the limelight!"

"Cheer up, Watson, old boy," said Holmes. "Here,—have a cigarette! Now, I think we've seen about enough of this lovely Puddingham lawn," he added as he calmly surveyed the wide green expanse that stretched for four hundred feet out from the front of the castle to the road and for three hundred feet on each side of the massive pile, dotted here and there with trees and incipient flower-beds, on the latter of which Heinrich Blumenroth had been exercising his skill, planting spring flowers. "So I guess we'll go back inside, and consider the case of the lost jewels further," continued Holmes.

And the whole nine of us obligingly trudged after him like sheep after the bellwether, and reëntered the castle.

It was now after eleven o'clock, and nothing in the shape of a diamond cuff-button had turned up yet, but I was not surprised, because I knew that Hemlock Holmes had not yet put in his best licks,—that is to say, had not yet pulled off any of his deepest cogitations and deductions. Just as I happened to see him slipping his little old cocaine-squirter back in his pocket after a surreptitious shot in the arm (while our party was entering the drawing-room on the left side of the front corridor), Lord Launcelot evidently thought it incumbent upon him to kid Holmes for the lack of results so far; but he hadn't spoken more than a few words of his would-be witty remarks when Holmes turned and barked at him like a terrier.

"Say, you, lord or no lord, you'll have to chop out the funny remarks on my method of handling this case, or else I'll drop the whole thing right here," he flung at the surprised Launcelot. "I can't stand this eternal butting-in while I'm trying to think!"

The Earl warned Launcelot to cease the comedy, and then Holmes motioned all of them except me out of the room, saying that he had some deep thought on hand that would take up at least two hours, and that we shouldn't be called to luncheon until a quarter after one. My stomach rebelled at this, but my head

knew better than to oppose the old boy when he had a thought-tantrum on.

Billie Hicks,—he from Canada,—was the last one to go, and as he was leaving he hurled this Parthian shot at Holmes:

"Now go ahead and try to think, Holmes. Maybe you'll succeed in the attempt!"

Holmes threw a book at him, which narrowly missed Hicks as he banged the door shut behind him, and my partner immediately locked the door, put the key in his pocket, pulled a couple of cushions off a couch, placed them on the piano, perched himself up on top of the improvised seat, with his feet on the ivory keys, and then calmly proceeded to fill his well-worn pipe with some of that strong-smelling shag tobacco that he generally used when he started a meditation, or pipe-dream, just as you prefer to call it.

I knew what was coming, so I opened one of the windows all the way up, to let out the terrific fumes of the uncivilized stuff that he smoked, while he curled himself up comfortably in his strange position on top of the piano, with his chin resting on one hand, and his elbow on some sheet-music, and then smoked away like a steam-engine, as immovable as a bronze statue, while he thought and pondered and meditated, and then thought some more, about the stolen diamond cuff-buttons,—with me all the time sitting on the couch like a bump on a log, trying my best to figure out the conflicting testimony advanced by the fourteen different servants and the seven other persons.

Time rolled on, and the clock on the marble mantel struck half-past eleven,—twelve,—half-past twelve,—one,—and at length came to a quarter past one, while I couldn't dope out who swiped the cuff-buttons to save my neck!

"I've got it!" shouted Holmes suddenly, as he jumped off the piano, scattering the sheet-music right and left, and paced up and down in front of the mantel, while I heaved a sigh of relief.

"Time for luncheon, ain't it, Holmesy, old boy?" I questioned.

"Yes. Sure, Watson. I'm hungry, too, after all that heavy thought. We'll go in and have luncheon now, and then we'll get some swift action."

Thereupon Holmes led the way to the dining-room, where the others awaited us.

And so we did get some swift action, but not exactly what Holmes had expected, sad to relate. To all adroit inquiries on the part of the Earl as to what he had

deduced, Holmes returned a smiling and evasive answer during the elaborate luncheon, which proceeded to the end,—when the finger-bowls were brought on,—without untoward incident.

As my partner deftly massaged his long tapering digits in the perfumed water, he leaned over and whispered to Inspector Letstrayed, who sat next to him. Letstrayed's eyes bulged out, and Holmes then arose, pushed his chair back, inserted his left thumb in the left armhole of his vest, expanded his chest, cleared his throat, and pointed his right fore-finger dramatically at Billie Budd at the other end of the table, as he said:

"Inspector Letstrayed, do your duty! There stands the guilty wretch!"



CHAPTER VIII

As Holmes finished, the man from Scotland Yard quietly got up, also cleared his throat, waddled around the table in a very pompous manner, placed his fat left hand on Budd's shoulder, and said solemnly, in that sepulchral tone of voice that he generally adopted for such occasions:

"William X. Budd, it now becomes my painful duty to arrest you in the Queen's name—er, no, I mean the King's (that's right, old Vic is dead now),—to arrest you in the King's name for the following high crimes and misdemeanors, contrary to the statutes made and in such cases provided, to wit: Burglary, Robbery, Conspiracy, Assault and Battery, and Attempted Murder! It is also my duty to inform you that anything you may say will be used against you, as usual, you know! Now come with me quietly!"

"Aw, what the Sam Hill are you giving us, you old dub? I never did anything to you to have you call me names like that!" shouted Budd, and he instantly wrenched himself loose from Letstrayed's none too muscular grasp, and ran at top speed out of the room and down the long corridor outside, upsetting the contents of his finger-bowl all over the leather seat of his fancy chair.

The Countess promptly had hysterics, and then fainted in the arms of her gaping brother-in-law, Lord Launcelot, while everybody else, except Holmes, myself, and the Earl, grew red and white by turns; and Uncle Tooter, in attempting to arise suddenly, fell out of his chair and tumbled on the floor in a very undignified manner.

"Holy smoke! Don't let him get away like that, you pack of rummies! Get up and chase him!" shouted Holmes in great excitement, as he pulled a revolver out of his hip-pocket and dashed madly out of the room after the fleeing and recreant Budd, while the rest of us, galvanized back to life by the sudden developments, took after the great detective down the corridor, in the way that they generally do in the movies, all hollering: "Stop—thief!" at the top of our voices.

Bang! Bang! Holmes shot twice at Budd, but the bullets went wild, and we all continued the chase through the kitchen, down the rear stairway, and out through the wide gardens between the castle and the stables, while Louis La Violette, the French cook, cursed us volubly in his best Parisian for disturbing him.

Budd was a pretty good runner, so he was about a hundred feet ahead of us when Holmes dashed up to the open front door of the Earl's great stone stable-building. He took another shot at Budd as the latter fled up the stairs to the hay-loft, and then disappeared suddenly, thus frightening the eight horses in their stalls at the rear, who neighed loudly, while Holmes and the rest of us piled up the stairs after him, like a pack of dogs after a rabbit!

When we got up to the loft we found that it covered the entire upper floor of the building; was at least two hundred feet long by a hundred and fifty feet wide, and except for a small space just around the head of the stairs, was filled up eight feet deep with odorous hay and piles of straw.

Of course, not a trace of that scoundrel Budd was to be seen. He was evidently somewhere under the hay, because the shuttered windows were too high up for him to have made his escape through them in the short time that had elapsed; and the pigeons that roosted around on the rafters cooed their darned heads off just as if they didn't know that a desperate crook was concealed somewhere beneath the wide-spreading piles of hay.

Holmes ground his teeth with rage as he recognized his temporary defeat by the resourceful guy from Australia, and it was a good thing the Countess was still back in the castle being assisted out of her fainting-spell by her Spanish maid Teresa, because the language that Hemlock Holmes used as he called down imprecations on the head of the hay-hidden Budd was frightful to hear!

"Gol darn it!" he said, when he had somewhat recovered his usual equanimity; "this is certainly the first and only time in my life that I've been held up and stalled by such a common thing as a load of hay! What in thunder did you ever get in such an enormous lot of the darned stuff for, anyhow?" he demanded, turning to the Earl. "I should think there was enough hay in here to feed a regiment of horses for three years!"

"Well, you don't need to take it out on me, Holmes," returned the Earl with some asperity. "How could I foresee that some one would steal my cuff-buttons and then run up here and hide in the hay? I bought the hay two months ago, when prices were lower than they are now, so I got a lot of it, anticipating the rise in prices that has followed since then; and I also bought a large lot of corn, oats, bran, and so on, which I keep downstairs. You're getting to be rather unreasonable, don't you think?"

Holmes didn't reply, but stood there contemplating the great piles of hay and

straw in silent wrath, while the hidden Budd was probably smiling to himself somewhere underneath. Lord Launcelot, who was watching the chagrined expression on Holmes's face, leaned back against the wall and said:

"Oh, Gee! I have to laugh! This is the funniest thing I've seen for a long time!"

"It is, eh?" shouted Holmes, dashing at Launcelot. "Now, you beat it! You've been warned before not to interrupt while I'm thinking."

And he grabbed Launcelot by the arm and hustled him down the stairs, then returned and faced the Earl.

"Well, it would certainly be an endless job to try to dig Budd out of all this hay, Your Lordship," he said, "so we'll adopt some strategy, and starve him out. We'll have Inspector Letstrayed watch the loft here at the head of the stairs, as I see this is the only way out, have his dinner brought to him this evening, while he stands guard, and then I'll stand guard through the night, for I can keep awake better than Fatty can. Then we'll keep up the sentinel business all day to-morrow, if necessary, Letstrayed and I relieving each other, till we finally force that robber to come out and beg for food,—when we'll nab him! How does that sound for a scheme?"

"It listens well, Holmes,—that is, if Letstrayed doesn't make a mess of it," said the Earl musingly.

"Woe to him if he does, I can tell you." And Holmes glared at the obese inspector, who sat on the top step trying to get his breath back after the hard race out from the castle. "But then, I don't see how he can. Right here is the only place where Budd could get out, and I'll give Letstrayed my revolver to use instead of his own, since mine is a little bit quicker on the trigger. Here, Barney," he added as he turned to the Inspector, "take my six-shooter, and I'll take yours. Now see that you don't spill the beans, like you've done before, and stand guard faithfully this afternoon till six o'clock, when we'll bring your dinner out to you, and if William X. Budd tries to break away from under the horse-feed, why, you know what to do with your little cannon there!"

"Well, all right, fellows, I'll be the goat if you'll send down to the village and telegraph in to headquarters in London now, telling them where I am. Say, Earl, haven't you got a pack of cigarettes about your person that isn't working?" asked Letstrayed, as he took up his station on a particularly soft pile of hay nearby, and stretched his fat legs over it comfortably.

"What! Smoke cigarettes up here in the hay, and burn down my ancestral stables for me!" shouted the Earl in surprise. "Good night! You've got about as much brains as Holmes says you have, Letstrayed. But here, I realize that it'll be pretty lonesome up here watching for a hidden crook with nobody but a lot of pigeons for company, so you can take this package of fine-cut, and chew to your heart's content. Good-by, now."

Barnabas took the proffered pack of chewing tobacco, and sighed deeply.

"Well, good-by. If you hear any shooting, you'll know it's me," he said, as he took a big mouthful of the fine-cut.

And so we left him to his afternoon vigil, after Holmes had taken a look at the bulldog chained up near the horses downstairs,—and returning to the castle we all entered the library, where the Earl called the butler, and said:

"Harrigan, you may pour us out each a glass of wine."

Harrigan smilingly agreed, and after we had all imbibed, the Earl and Uncle Tooter played chess on the great mahogany table in the center of the room; Holmes and Thorneycroft started a game of checkers, as did Lord Launcelot and myself, sitting on the leather-covered divans in the broad bay-window, while Billie Hicks sprawled himself out in a comfortable arm-chair at one side. The Countess did not appear, being still upstairs in her own room with her maid Teresa, and the various servants were scattered through the numerous rooms of the castle engaged in their various duties.

So the afternoon passed,—from a little after two o'clock, when we returned from the stables, until ten minutes after five, when suddenly two loud shots split the silence, coming from the direction of the rear of the castle.

"Ha! There he is now!" yelled Holmes, as he jumped up instantly, knocking the checkerboard and all the pieces into the lap of the astonished Thorneycroft, and ran out into the corridor, shouting to us to accompany him. Holmes had pretty long legs, and he distanced the rest of us while we did another Marathon out to the stables, with the servants staring at us out of the back windows. I hate to have to tell it, but the sight that met our eyes in the hay-loft was honestly enough to make an archangel swear!

There, stretched out flat on his back on the hay-littered floor near the top of the stairs, bound and gagged, and snoring in the deepest slumber, lay our luckless

friend, Inspector Barnabas Letstrayed!

Holmes turned pale with rage, and then he roared:

"Asleep at the switch! And Billie Budd far away by this time! Grab me, fellows, quick, before I forget myself and murder him where he lies! Oh, horrors!"

And he began to swear in French, which, as I have remarked in one of our previous adventures, was his mother's native tongue, to which he resorted when so excited that he couldn't express himself further in English.

The Earl and I untied the ropes that bound the sleeping Letstrayed, removed the gag from his mouth, which consisted of another piece of rope, and shook him to his feet, where he stood blinking in surprise, while Holmes leaned against the nearest wall and shook his fists in the air, while he made the air blue with variegated French cuss-words.

"Let's leave them alone, boys, and return to the castle, while the master-mind and his faithless guard have it out between themselves," suggested the Earl.

Whereupon we all followed him quietly back to the library, filled with mixed emotions. When we were back again in the seats from which we had recently been so sharply disturbed, the Earl said to me:

"Well, Doctor Watson, what do you make of it? You've had a good deal of experience with the great detective. Tell us what you think."

"What I think of Inspector Letstrayed wouldn't look very well in print," I began; "but it's easy enough to see what happened. The old dope fell asleep, so, of course, as soon as Budd heard those elephantine snores, he sneaked out from his hiding-place under the hay and tied him up with the ropes while he slept, took his revolver away from him, shot it off twice out of pure bravado, and then beat it for parts unknown. If he's as good a runner yet as he was this noon, he must be over in the next county by this time! Of course, it couldn't have been Letstrayed who shot the revolver off, because we found him still asleep and snoring; and he couldn't have shot first at Budd and then have been overpowered by the latter, because he didn't have time enough in the short minute between our hearing the shots and racing out there to have fallen asleep again, especially when he was tied up so tightly. I think you will find that I am right,—when Holmes returns with the information he has pried out of the Inspector."

Holmes returned soon afterward, still fuming and growling over his second

setback of the day, with Letstrayed trailing along behind him, looking like a flour-sack that had been stepped on! The latter sat down quietly, without a word, and Holmes corroborated my deductions. He said Letstrayed told him he didn't know a thing about what had taken place until we untied the ropes from him; for he had fallen asleep in his too comfortable position on the pile of hay, and had not been awakened even by the shots.

"I'm so mad I could chew nails," said Holmes. "The only thing I can do now is to send a telegram down to the village to be dispatched to the authorities in all the surrounding towns, asking them to apprehend Budd when he shows up. Can your secretary here be trusted to send the messages right, Earl?"

He sized up the bald-headed Thorneycroft with a critical eye, as he spoke, and suddenly changed his mind.

"No. I'll go down to Hedge-gutheridge myself and send the telegrams. Then I know it'll be done right, without a third balling-up. Ta, ta! I'll be back in half an hour."

And my erratic partner was out of the building before we hardly knew what had happened.

At a quarter of six he returned, somewhat out of breath, and announced that we might as well sit down to dinner, since he would not resume operations until morning. The Earl quietly accepted his tacit assumption of mastery of the castle, since he recognized by this time that Hemlock Holmes simply had to have his own way while on a case, or else he wouldn't play,—that's all!

The dinner as prepared by Louis La Violette,—and served by Joe Harrigan the butler,—was fully as scrumptious and all to the mustard as the one we had partaken of the evening before, and so was the wine served afterwards. We passed the evening in the library smoking and swapping lies, while Her Ladyship the Countess pleaded a severe headache and remained in her room, her dinner being served up there by her maid. At about half-past ten we retired; that is, the others retired, but Holmes grabbed me by the arm as soon as we had entered our room upstairs, and whispered:

"I'm going to pull off something now, Watson. We'll have to wait here until they're all asleep, as Letstrayed was out in the hayloft this afternoon, and then I'm going to get some evidence."

CHAPTER IX

Well, the two of us sat up in our room for an hour, and when his watch pointed to half-past eleven, my partner said:

"Hist! Here we go now. Take off your shoes."

Grumblingly I complied, and he did the same. Then Holmes led me down the corridor to Thorneycroft's room, and noiselessly opened the door.

"I'm going to steal his shoes," he whispered.

"Steal his shoes! What the——" I began under my breath; but I subsided as Holmes tightened his warning grip on my arm and tiptoed quietly into the bedchamber of the sleeping secretary. He took the pair of shoes under the chair beside the bed, and then just as quietly passed out, closing the door behind us.

Only a dimly flickering gas-light on the wall of the corridor illuminated the strange scene as we left Thorneycroft's room, and Holmes tiptoed along in his stocking feet to the next room, inhabited by Lord Launcelot, the Earl's brother.

"Say, are you going to swipe all their shoes, Holmes?" I whispered in his ear, as we softly opened Launcelot's door. "If you don't look out, there'll be another detective from London sent down here to investigate their disappearance!"

"Oh, shut up, you old duffer!" he answered irritably. "Can't you ever learn anything after all your long association with me? If you can't do anything else right, at least keep still, and don't arouse these sleeping dummies."

I obeyed, and so the two of us gradually worked our way around to the four other rooms, taking the shoes we found beside the bed in each room, until we had six pairs of them—Thorneycroft's, Lord Launcelot's, Uncle Tooter's, Billie Hicks's, Billie Budd's (who, fortunately for Holmes's purposes, had left a pair of shoes in his room, and had escaped that afternoon in another pair) and even the Countess's. I demurred considerably at burglarizing her room and stealing her dainty high-heeled shoes; but the cold-blooded Holmes would stop at nothing, and took her shoes along with the rest. And the worst part of it was that he made me carry them all! Toting around a large and awkward collection of six pairs of shoes in my arms, through the dark corridors of an ancient castle in the middle of

the night, was certainly something new in my sleuthing experience, and I so expressed myself when we finally got back to our own room, and Holmes had closed the door behind us. I laid down the pile of shoes on the floor in one corner of the room, and grumbled:

"I've done a good many funny things since I took up this job of being your side-partner, Holmes, but I never thought I'd sink so low as to go sneaking around into people's rooms while they're asleep and steal their shoes!"

"Oh, forget it, Doc. I'll tell you more about it in the morning," was all that my tyrannical partner would reply.

And in a short time we were both in bed, with the light out,—at last.

I was rather tired by this time, and was just dozing off when Holmes suddenly jumped up to a sitting posture, and said:

"By the great horn spoon, I almost forgot that Letstrayed still has my perfectly good revolver and I have his, since we exchanged this afternoon out in the hay-loft. I must go and get it back, or there's no telling what may happen to it in his incompetent keeping!"

Then, before I could say a word, Holmes bounced over me with his long legs, went over to his coat-pocket, took out the Inspector's revolver, opened the door, and started down the corridor, in his flapping nightgown.

In a minute or so I heard a loud noise as of some one falling over a chair in the dark, and I knew it must be Holmes in Letstrayed's room, exchanging the guns. I had to stuff a corner of the pillow into my mouth to keep from laughing. Holmes soon returned, with his own revolver in his hand, and fire in his eye, so I knew it wouldn't be safe to kid him about it. All I said was:

"What did you find?"

"Nothing," he answered. "Go to sleep."

I did so with alacrity.

Zing-g-g-g-g! went the alarm-clock, which Holmes had placed on the chair beside our bed. Jumping up to turn it off, I saw with vexation that it was only six o'clock.

"What in thunder did you set it so early for, Holmes?" I demanded. "They don't

blow any early factory-whistle around here."

"Well, I have some work to do,—scientific work that admits of no delay. You can lay in bed till they call you for breakfast, if you want to," was Holmes's reply, piling out of bed and jerking his clothes on as if he were a fireman answering a fire. Then he took out the magnifying glass that he always carried in his pocket, and a microscope out of our suit-case, pulled a chair over to one of the windows, and began to go over the twelve shoes one by one, first with the magnifying glass and then with the microscope, which was arranged so that objects as large as the shoes could be inspected through it, all the time taking down notes in his little notebook.

I couldn't for the life of me see what he was up to nor what he expected to find from the shoes; and still less could I figure out why he had insisted on our all walking out in the wet grass the morning before.

Every once in a while his eyes would light up with a subdued gleam of triumph, and I knew he was on the trail of something or other. Suddenly he jumped up and jerked the window-shade so that it flew up to the top of the window, then dragged his chair closer to the window, and continued examining the shoes through his two instruments. At length, after more than an hour had passed, he put them down with a deep-drawn sigh of relief, after hastily scribbling a few more notes, and turned to me.

"Well, Doc, what would you say as to the shoes from a cursory examination, without the instruments?" he inquired with a smile.

By this time I, having arisen and dressed, was kind of anxious to see what was going to happen next. I picked up one of the shoes that we had pilfered from Thorneycroft's room, and turned it over in my hands.

"All I can say about it is that this particular shoe ought to be sent to the cobbler's. There's a small hole in the middle of the sole," I said, "and it should also have this smear of red clay wiped off," I added, as I pointed to the stain along the outer side of the shoe.

"Oh, use your bean, Doc, use your bean!" cried Holmes. "Is that all you can detect?"

"Well, that's all there is to detect without your magnifying glass and microscope there," I replied.

"Honestly, Watson, I think you're getting dumber and dumber every day! Think, man, think! Where in this immediate vicinity did you see red clay like that before?" said Holmes. I scratched my head with perplexity, and after a moment it came to me:

"Oh, yes; out behind the stables, near where the horses' stalls are. I remember now having seen the clay there when we were out after Billie Budd yesterday afternoon."

"Well, that shows that Eustace Thorneycroft, the owner of the shoe, was out behind the stable some time recently," said Holmes; "a rather incongruous place for a private secretary, and one of such sedentary and scholarly appearance too. Putting two and two together, it is not a very violent assumption to say that Eustace went out to the stables for a very special purpose, and what more special purpose could he have than to hide the diamond cuff-buttons, or at least some of them, which he probably stole! *Comprends-tu cela, tu imbécile?*" Then my partner added: "Of course, I couldn't exactly swear to it yet that Eustace is the guilty gink we are after, but I'm going to disguise myself as a race-track follower and go out and talk 'horses' to the two coachmen, Yensen and Linescu, and we'll probably learn some more. I've found a good many other clues on the other shoes, which I will not divulge into your capacious ears until later. Suffice it to say, however, that the reason I made you people walk out on the wet grass yesterday was not because I own stock in a cough-and-cold medicine company, as you might think, but because I wanted whatever telltale stains there might be on the six pairs of shoes (indicating to my trained eye where their owner had been recently) to become moistened and to stick more firmly to the shoes, so they wouldn't dry up and get knocked off before I could grab the shoes and inspect them. You see, Watson, there are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it to death with butter!"

As the sarcastic old cuss continued his lecture, he shoved all the twelve shoes he had examined into the lower drawer of the dresser in the room, locking it and putting the key in his pocket.

"I guess breakfast must be about ready now," said Holmes, as he glanced at his watch; "it's twenty minutes after seven. If there's any of that whiskey left that we found on the shelf in the lavatory yesterday morning, I'm going to help myself to some more of it. I feel kind of chilly after sitting up for an hour inspecting the shoes."

We washed, after Holmes had taken the chill-remedy, and were passing down the front stairway to the lower hall on our way to the dining-room when I suddenly thought of the consequences of our nocturnal escapade.

"Say, Holmes," I whispered anxiously, "what'll we do when all these people report the loss of their footgear to the Earl?"

"What'll we do, you chump? Why, sit tight and say nothing, of course. Just leave it to your revered Uncle Dudley to deal with the situation. I'll handle 'em, all right; and if you forget yourself so far as to blab out where the shoes are, by Gosh, I'll decapitate you! Now, remember!"

And Holmes squeezed my arm warningly.

Nobody else was in the dining-room yet, but just as we entered, the rotund figure of Egbert Bunbury obtruded itself upon the otherwise pleasant scene, and Egbert stammered:

"Oh, er,—ah, Mister 'Olmes, Hi was just going hupstairs to call you."

"Oh, you *were*, were you, Eggie," said Holmes cuttingly. "Well, I found my way down here, and Doctor Watson also, without your kind assistance. If I were you, I'd have him prescribe for you, as I'm afraid you're walking in your sleep!"

In a moment His Lordship and the others,—including the Countess this time,—came in, and we all sat down to breakfast. As Harrigan was pouring out a cup of coffee for Thorneycroft, the latter said to the Earl: "Do you know that to-day is the tenth of the month,—Wednesday, April the tenth?"

"Well, what of it, Eustace? *Ich kebibble* about the date, just so Mr. Holmes here recovers my diamond cuff-buttons for me," replied the Earl, as he smiled at my partner.

"Why, on the tenth of each month you have to send a check for ten pounds to the treasurer of the Society for the Amelioration of Indigent Pearl-Divers of the Andaman Islands, in London, according to the promise you signed last fall," said Eustace.

"Do I?" said the Earl, stirring his oatmeal. "Well, I fell for it in the fall all right—haw! haw!"

Everybody laughed, as in duty bound when the boss cracks a joke, no matter

how punk it is; and then Holmes put his oar in.

"I say, Thorneycroft, is the pearl-diving business out there in the Andamans as good as the diamond-swiping industry in this country?"



CHAPTER X

Thorneycroft, greatly embarrassed at the brutal insinuation of Holmes, colored deeply, and didn't seem to know what to say for a moment.

"Why, how should I know? If you've got the goods on anybody, as the quaint American expression has it, go ahead and arrest them," he finally stammered.

"What peculiar things you *do* say, Mr. Holmes," said the Countess, leaning forward with interest, as she looked meaningly at Lord Launcelot. "I wonder if your remarkable talents will discover who made away with my best pair of shoes last night. I missed them the first thing this morning, as they were the ones I wore Easter Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, and I wanted to wear them again to-day."

"Why, *my* shoes are gone, too! I thought at first I had mislaid them in my room, but a thief must have been in the castle!" chorused everybody at once, while I heard Holmes quietly chuckle in his throat. "If a certain person in high social standing," continued the Countess, "thinks that such outrages, first the theft of the Earl's diamond cuff-buttons and then the theft of our shoes, are to be lightly condoned because of his close relationship to the Earl, then he is greatly mistaken!"

And she again looked daggers at Lord Launcelot.

"Oh, come, come, Your Ladyship," protested Holmes with a smile, "you mustn't be too hard on your brother-in-law. I don't think he took the shoes last night. In fact, I am quite sure of it. I'll guarantee to get your shoes back for you before noon to-day, and you can gamble on that!"

"Why, of course," interposed Launcelot hastily. "Billie Budd must have come back in the middle of the night, and stolen the shoes, after he escaped yesterday afternoon. I guess he's probably hiding around in the neighborhood somewhere."

I was just opening my mouth to get off a witticism about who took the shoes, when Holmes, observing me, gave me a warning kick under the table, so I desisted.

After breakfast was over,—at which meal Inspector Letstrayed ate at least three

times as much as any one else,—Holmes announced he was going down to Hedge-guthridge to investigate some clues, and would not be back until noon. He signaled to me to accompany him, and when nobody was looking, we hurriedly beat it upstairs to our room, where Holmes quickly took out a disguise from the suit-case, took off his regular clothes, and put on the new outfit, which consisted of a well-worn and dirty suit of loud yellow checks, with a dinky little red cap, broken tan shoes, and a riding-whip to carry in his hand. Then he deftly got out his make-up stuff, and in a moment had fixed a lump of flesh-colored wax on the bridge of his long aquiline nose, and painted his face red with actors' grease-paint until he looked as if he had been drunk for a week. Changing his voice, he addressed me in a thick Cockney dialect:

"My name is now Dick Henderson, from the Epsom race-track, and don't you forget it, old Sawbones, or I'll make hash out of you!"

"All right, Dick, I'm on, as usual. Say, now's a good chance to put back those six pairs of shoes in their respective owners' rooms before Natalie and Adelaide, the chambermaids, get up here," I said.

"Good for you, Doc! You betray a gleam of intellect at last. We'll replace the stolen brogans at once," congratulated Holmes.

We, thereupon, went around to the six rooms and restored the shoes, without encountering anybody who might ask embarrassing questions.

Holmes,—in his elegant disguise,—and I now descended the stairs and quickly slid out of the front door. It was now a quarter after eight. Making his way around the castle, keeping close to the walls, so as not to be seen from the high windows by any one inside, Holmes led me out to the stables.

Here I hid myself in one of the horses' stalls, and Holmes walked into another one, where he found fat little Olaf Yensen, the first coachman, currying one of the noble steeds.

"Hello, there, What's-your-name," Holmes called out, addressing Olaf. "My name is Dick Henderson. I just came around to ask you what you know about some of the Earl of Puddingham's eight fine horses here being entered in the coming races at Epsom. If you can give me any information about the horses, so I can bet on them with a good chance to win, why I'll make it worth your while, you know."

And he winked at the coachman, who stood open-mouthed in admiration of the false Dick Henderson's noisy clothes.

"You bane a pretty sporty feller, Mister Henderson, but Ay really haven't heard that das Earl is going to have any of dese horses run in das races," replied Olaf, as he scratched his round little head; "but Ay tink if he does, this horse here will run, because he is das best in das Puddingham stables. Yust look at vat a elegant pair of legs he has,—er, I mean two pair of legs! Oh, my! he can run like das vind, Ay bet you!"

"Well, that's good. What's this wonderful horse's name?" said Holmes, as he took out a notebook and pencil.

"His name bane Ajax II, und Ay take care of him myself. My assistant, Carol Linescu, bane no good, und Ay wouldn't trust him. He bane asleep up in the hayloft now. My name bane Olaf Yensen."

And the coachman went ahead currying the sleek-looking Ajax II, who whinnied with pleasure as the currycomb slid over his glossy brown coat.

"All right, Olaf. Much obliged to you. Here, have a drink of this," said Holmes, with a grin, as he took from his hip-pocket a small bottle of whiskey, which he had thoughtfully provided for just such occasions as this, and offered it to Olaf.

"Thanks, Mr. Henderson. *Gesundheit!*" returned Olaf, taking a swig of the stuff.

"I heard down at the village this morning," Holmes continued, "as I came through, that the Earl had eleven very valuable diamond cuff-buttons stolen, and that the celebrated detective from London, Mr. Hemlock Holmes, is here now investigating the case. I wonder who swiped the shiners, anyhow."

"Oh, my! Oh, my!" and Olaf nearly choked on the whiskey as he spluttered in reply. "Ay know vere one of das cuff-buttons is, all right! Und Ay bet you das long-legged old fake Hemlock Holmes never finds it, either! He is a big bluffer. He doesn't do a single thing but stand around und talk sassy to us fellers at the castle, und since das Earl is half-stewed all the time, drinking das expensive vine mit Harrigan das butler, old Holmes, he finds it darned easy to pull das vool over das Earl's eyes, und make him believe he is earning das big fee he vill charge him! Ha, ha! He may snoop around here all he likes, but he'll never find das cuff-button, because Ay have got it hid in a goot hiding-place! Mr. Billie Budd, das gentleman from Australia, he took one pair of das cuff-buttons, und he gave one

of dem to me to hide for him, until das excitement blows over, und den I give it back to him, und he pays me a big reward for it, und he takes it in to London and sells it for many tousand moneys. He escaped yesterday afternoon when das big walrus of a police inspector from London tried to arrest him; und he's not far away, Ay bet you."

Holmes had very good control of his facial muscles, and didn't crack a smile while the unsuspecting Olaf dribbled out the whole thing to him, but I, hidden in the next stall, had a hard time suppressing a laugh when I heard Holmes criticized to his face after that fashion.

"Well, that's very interesting, Olaf, I'm sure," said Holmes ingratiatingly. "Would you mind telling me just where this diamond cuff-button is hidden, now?"

Olaf put his tongue in his cheek, and winking at the false race-track follower, replied:

"Vat you want to know for? Ay bane taking no chances mit it, so Mr. Budd, ven he comes back, vill get it safe, und pay me das big reward he promised me."

"Oh, well; you don't need to tell if you don't want to," replied Holmes carelessly. "By the way, hasn't this great racer here got something the matter with his left hind hoof? There seems to be a lump just above it."

And Holmes pointed to Ajax's hoof, which his quick and discerning eyes had noticed while Olaf was making his long speech. The shot must have struck home, for Olaf showed great emotion at once.

"Oh, no, nuttings at all, nuttings at all!" he cried nervously, his hands working convulsively and his face very red. "Das horse he vas born dat way! Dat's all!"

"He was, eh? It looks kind of funny to me, though," was Holmes's quick reply. "I know something about veterinary surgery, and maybe I can fix it up for you. Here, h'ist up there, Ajax!"

And before Olaf could prevent him Holmes had grabbed the horse's leg up between his own knees, whipped out his pocket-knife, and scraped away at the strange lump between the pastern and the hoof. He found it to be a lump of mud, which rolled out on the straw-littered floor of the stall, broke into pieces, and then disclosed to our wondering eyes one of the mysteriously stolen diamond cuff-buttons!

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" yelled Holmes at the top of his voice; "here's one of them, anyhow!"

And he grabbed up the glittering jewel from the floor, and confronted the astounded and frightened Yensen.

"So the horse was born with a diamond on his hoof, eh? That beats a baby's being born with a golden spoon in its mouth, as they say some of them are. But hold on a minute, O faithful confidant of the Australian crook. My name isn't really Dick Henderson. It's," and Holmes suddenly jerked off the false lump on his nose and resumed his natural tone of voice, "Hemlock Holmes, at your service! Now you, march!"

As he uttered these words, Holmes pulled out his revolver, covered the shrinking coachman, and motioned him toward the castle.

I now came out of my hiding-place in the next stall, and accompanied the strange procession into the castle: Yensen, holding his hands up, his face almost green with fright, in front; Holmes, with his drawn revolver pointed at him, immediately behind, and yours truly bringing up the rear, while the bulldog barked loudly at us from his kennel next to the stalls. As we marched along the garden-paths, Holmes demanded of his victim:

"Say, wasn't Thorneycroft out here at the stable to see you along with Billie Budd, Olaf?"

"Yes, he was, Mr. Holmes," answered the cowering Olaf.

"And they both made it up with you to hide the cuff-button, eh? Now tell me how you came to put it in such an outlandish place! Talk quick, now!" said Holmes.

"Ay had it hidden up in the hay-loft first, und Ay yust vas taking it out to admire it vile Ay curried das horse, ven Ay heard you coming along, und Ay got scared, und put some mud over it und shoved it under das horse's pastern as das nearest place Ay could tink of! Please don't hurt me now, Mr. Holmes. Ay never sviped anyt'ing before!" pleaded Olaf, as he cringed along toward the castle, every other moment looking around nervously behind him at Holmes's revolver.

"Except that you tried to steal Linescu's boots, according to his testimony," returned Holmes dryly just as we entered the rear door of the castle, and proceeded along the corridor toward the library. "But don't be afraid. We'll talk

about the proper retribution for your crime after all the rest of the cuff-buttons are found. Do you know anything about them?"

"Not a thing, Mr. Holmes,—not a t'ing. The only one Ay saw is das one you captured now," replied Olaf.

Holmes marched his captive into the library, where the Earl and Thorneycroft, who had been sitting down at the table going over some bills and other papers, jumped up in surprise at the sight of us; while Holmes informed them of his identity beneath the race-track disguise. Thorneycroft turned pale when he saw his recent accomplice, Olaf Yensen, in the hands of the avenging detective, and he had to grab the edge of the table to steady himself.

"Your Lordship, here is the first one of the diamond cuff-buttons recovered for you, with my compliments," said Holmes triumphantly, laying the gem on the table before the astonished Earl. "Your coachman is not really the thief,—only a receiver of stolen goods. Thorneycroft," he added, as he turned to the latter, "the game is up! I'm onto you! You stole the cuff-button and gave it to Olaf to hide for you, and William X. Budd knows where the rest are, and you probably do, too. Now make a clean breast of it, and avoid further trouble."

My partner seated himself in one of the leather easy-chairs, lit a cigarette, crossed his legs comfortably, and listened while the confused and guilty secretary tried to find his voice. The Earl sat down hard in another chair and listened with all his ears.



CHAPTER XI

"Er, er,—oh, this is terrible! Billie Budd stole 'em, not me. He came into my room early Monday morning, while I was dressing, and showed me the pair of cuff-buttons he said he had stolen during Sunday night, and gave me one to keep for him until he had a good chance to dispose of it. Then, right after I returned from calling on you to inform you of their loss, which was about half-past ten, he and I went out to the stables and he gave the other one to Olaf here to hide for him. Here's the one I have been keeping, Mr. Holmes," stammered Thorneycroft, as he took the second sparkling cuff-button out of his vest-pocket and laid it on the table beside the one recovered from Olaf. "When the village constables came up here to search us, I simply slipped the thing into the upper edge of my shoe until they had gone, and I've been carrying it here in my vest-pocket ever since."

And Eustace paused as he drew out his handkerchief and mopped his perspiring face.

"Then you had it right with you when you burst into my office in Baker Street to tell me of the loss, and your nervous excitement at the time was a fake,—you big stiff?" Holmes asked, blowing out a cloud of cigarette-smoke.

"Yes. I acknowledge with shame that I did. But it was that scoundrel Budd that burglarized His Lordship's room and stole the jewels originally, and the coachman and myself are both simply receivers of stolen goods, not robbers. O Your Lordship, this is awful," Eustace added, turning to the Earl. "I am a graduate and an honor man of Oxford University, as you know, and I surely must have been intoxicated when I let Budd entice me into his damnable scheme! The reason he took the jewels was because he had been losing heavily at cards in London recently, as he told me, and wanted to sell them to recoup his losses. I'll swear I didn't have a thing to do with the disappearance of the other nine cuff-buttons, because if I did, I'd tell you. That's all."

The Earl looked at Holmes sitting there puffing out smoke in a very *dégage* attitude, with the smile of triumph still on his eagle-like face, in spite of his absurd disguise, then he looked at the confused and embarrassed Thorneycroft standing at one side of the table, anxiously rubbing his hands, then he looked at the red-faced Olaf standing near him, and finally he looked at me sitting in

another chair, furnishing the calm and sober background for all this sensationalism,—as usual.

"Well, by Jove, I hardly know *what* to say, and that's the truth, Holmes," he remarked at length; "but the fact that my recreant secretary has just now voluntarily coughed up the second cuff-button without trying to hide it again in his shoe, as he might have done, inclines me to let him live this time. So I'll forgive you, Eustace, but don't you ever let it happen again, or I might forget myself so far as to have you blackballed from all of the London clubs you belong to," added the Earl, shaking his finger at Eustace.

"Thank you, Your Lordship, thank you!" cried the latter profusely, "I shall endeavor to deserve your consideration by doing my best to help you find the other cuff-buttons still missing."

"Keep the change, Eustace," said the Earl dryly. "Now, Holmes, what'll we do with this little stiff over here?"

And he pointed to the still trembling coachman, who stood fumbling his cap in his hands.

"Why, he looks harmless enough," commented Holmes; "I knew he didn't have brains sufficient to plan the robbery, but was merely Billie Budd's tool. So I think you might as well forgive him, too, Your Lordship, and thus get all the states' evidence they can turn for us. Thorneycroft," he added, turning to the secretary, "you accused Luigi Vermicelli, the Earl's valet, of having stolen the cuff-buttons, and you there, Olaf, accused your stable-partner, Carol Linescu, of the theft. I shall give your statements due consideration, and lay for the accused parties accordingly. Now, Watson, we'll get busy and see if we can't recover some more of the cuff-buttons before luncheon. It's only a little after nine now," looking at his watch, "and we have nearly three hours left. And, by the way, I believe I made a bet of five pounds with Billie Budd yesterday morning that I would find some of the cuff-buttons that same day. He won the bet, since I didn't find the heirlooms until to-day, but inasmuch as the aforesaid Budd is a fugitive from justice, I'll just confiscate the stakes and call myself the winner! Doc, hand over those ten pounds you've been keeping there."

I did so at once, glad to be relieved of the responsibility, and old Hemlock Holmes was about twenty-five dollars ahead by Budd's disappearance, although still nine diamond cuff-buttons behind!

"You may go back to the stables now, Olaf," said the Earl to the coachman; who beat it immediately, glad to get out of any further arraignment. "And you, Eustace, can get busy again with these darned bills we were auditing when Holmes came in with his news."

He took up the two glittering baubles, put them in his pocket, and drew up his chair again to the table, while Eustace resumed his former seat.

"Oh, say! I nearly forgot. We must celebrate a little on this!" the Earl suddenly cried, as he pounded his fist on the table.

"Harrigan," he called out, "bring up a bottle of my very best Burgundy, and set 'em up to Mr. Holmes and Doctor Watson, in honor of the glad return of my ancestor's historic cuff-buttons!"

The jovial butler seemed always to be within earshot whenever the Earl wanted him, and in a moment entered the library and ventured:

"The best Burgundy you have is the 1874 Beaune, Your Lordship. Shall I bring that?"

"Sure! P. D. Q.! I'm feeling a little dry again, anyhow," said the Earl, as he winked at us, while the still somewhat embarrassed Thorneycroft looked out of the window at the birds singing their spring songs among the trees.

Harrigan left the room, and in a few minutes returned from the cellar with a long dark bottle that seemed to hold the ruby-red sparkles of the sunset on the hills of eastern France imprisoned in its depths. He uncorked it, and deftly poured out three glasses of the ancient wine, one of which the Earl took up in his hand while Holmes and I each took one of the remaining two.

"Eustace, I'll have to cut you out of this, I'm sorry to say. Holmes, I drink to your swift and happy recovery of the other nine cuff-buttons. Prosit!"

At the welcome word of cheer we each put ourselves outside of the finest fermented grape-juice that had ever tickled my throat.

"Thanks. Now we'll get down to business again," said Holmes, full of renewed "pep," as he set down his glass on the table and turned to me. "Doc, let's go up to our room while I get this horrible suit of clothes off of me, and wash the red grease-paint off my face. Ta, ta, Your Lordship; see you later, with some more cuff-buttons, I expect."

And we both left the library and went upstairs, where Holmes rapidly changed his clothes and washed off the make-up in the lavatory nearby. When he stood before me again in civilized habiliments, he began:

"Doc, I'm going to jump onto this man Vermicelli, the valet. My deductions lead me to believe that he has another one of the jewels stowed away somewhere, and it's up to me to find it."

So we left our room and went down the stairway, hot on the trail of the slippery valet from Venice. As we rounded the foot of the stairway at the second floor, halfway down to the main scene of operations, Holmes's quick ear detected the sound of voices in a room nearby, though my slower ears couldn't hear a thing.

He put his finger to his lips, took me by the arm, and quietly stole along the corridor with me to the half-open door whence the subdued voices proceeded. Arriving there, we halted, while Holmes cautiously listened a moment, then put his head in at the door and coughed. He pushed the door open immediately and walked in, with me at his heels, determined not to miss any of it, whatever it was.

Seated in a rocking-chair by the window was the elderly figure of the Countess's bachelor uncle, J. Edmund Tooter, the retired tea and spice merchant from Hyderabad, India, holding his niece's Spanish maid, Teresa Olivano, on his lap. As we entered so unceremoniously the two of them ceased their billing and cooing, hastily relaxed the half-Nelson grip they had on each other, and faced us with considerable resentment showing in their faces, though Teresa didn't get off Tooter's lap, as I thought she would.

"Well, what do you mean by this impudent intrusion, Holmes?" demanded Tooter angrily. "I guess a man can hold his affianced wife in his lap if he feels like it, without having a cheeky detective walk in on him."

"Your what?" asked Holmes, with surprise.

"My affianced wife, I said. And it's none of your business, either, any more than it is my niece's, or the Earl's. We had planned to elope and get married in London this afternoon, but I suppose now you'll run around and tell everybody in sight what you know."

Tooter whispered something to Teresa, whereupon she gave him a parting kiss, flounced off his lap, and passed out of the room, with her head high in the air,

her black eyes snapping, and saying something that sounded like: "Impertinent loafers!" as she passed us.

Uncle Tooter arose from the rocker and stood by the window, where he seemed to be trying to slide something from his left hand into his left trousers-pocket, his right side being turned to us.

Holmes noticed the act, as did I, but said nothing of it for the moment.

"Well, Tooter, by George, I'm surprised at you," he commented sarcastically; "to think that at your advanced age,—and you must be pretty well up in the fifties,—you'd fall for the sweet-love-in-the-springtime stuff that gets the younger people, and that you'd engage yourself in marriage with a servant, too, and one who had previously refused you a couple of times. Of course, as you say, it's none of my business, but I'm used to having people tell me that; and furthermore, it comes within the line of my duty to intrude my nose into other people's business whenever I judge it to be warranted by the circumstances. Teresa has been accused by Natalie, the first chambermaid, of having stolen the diamond cuff-buttons——"

"Which is an infernal lie, and I can prove it!" shouted Tooter.

"And you have been accused inferentially by the Earl of possible guilt in connection with the theft also, owing to your occasional lapses from sobriety, which is rather a polite way of putting it," went on the unperturbed Holmes. "By the way, I'll just trouble you for that little package you slid into your left trousers-pocket there."

Tooter flushed with embarrassment, and refused point-blank.

"Watson, lock the door, and put the key in your pocket!" yelled Holmes.



CHAPTER XII

I locked the door at once, put the key in my pocket, and then stood with my back up against it, while Holmes stood in the center of the room, facing the flushed and uncomfortable Tooter, who remained by the window, with his left hand clutching the mysterious little package in his pocket.

"Now then, Tooter, I've got the goods on you, both figuratively and literally, so you might as well come across with it," urged Holmes. "I don't want to resort to forcible methods unless I am compelled to."

"I'm sorry, Holmes. I'd like to oblige you, but if this gets out about me carrying it around with me, I'm a goner."

"I guess you *will* be a goner. The idea of a man of your standing stooping to such a trick as that! You can't plead any lack of funds as an excuse for your regrettable error, either, as you are known to be well heeled."

"But think of the resulting notoriety, Holmes. I could never again be received in the best circles of London society, and I'm sure the King would cut me dead!"

"Well, I suppose it *would* hurt your standing there, Tooter; but you've got to take the consequences of your act. You're considerably old enough to know what you're doing, you know. Come on, now, give it up peaceably, or I'll forget myself and try jiu-jitsu on you."

But Uncle Tooter still refused to give up the little package, and Holmes, losing his patience, walked over to him and grabbed his left arm, while Tooter doggedly tried to wriggle out of his grasp. In a moment, Holmes, by a quick turn of his wrist, had forced the little package out of Tooter's hand, and it fell on the floor. Holmes immediately pounced on it, picked it up, and started to open it, but suddenly his jaw dropped, his face showed deep disappointment, and he angrily confronted Tooter.

"Say, what in thunder are you trying to pull off here, anyhow? This is a sample package of your confounded 'Tooter's Best Teas, Imported From Ceylon.' It's not one of the diamond cuff-buttons at all!" he cried.

"Well, who said it was, you elongated chump?" shouted the aroused Tooter. "I

don't know anything about the Earl's cuff-buttons. You've been hanging around here nearly two days now, and you haven't found any yet; and then you have the nerve to steal my tea sample!"

"Why, I just recovered two of the cuff-buttons a little while ago, one from Yensen, and one from Thorneycroft, and I supposed I was about to get back the third one from you," replied Holmes in angry perplexity; "you certainly talked as if you had one of the stolen gems there in your hand. What did you mean by agreeing with me that it would seriously hurt your social standing, when all you were trying to conceal was a tea-packet, huh?"

"Because I'm not supposed to be 'in trade,' that's why, Mr. Impudence. Any direct connection between myself and the tea industry, such as my bringing in this sample package to Teresa, so she could induce Louis the chef to use it in the castle, would at once bar me from further consideration as a retired gentleman by the London upper crust, into whose exclusive circles I have but recently wormed myself with such untiring pertinacity. Now, do you understand why I didn't want to show you the little package?"

Holmes scowled at the tea sample, as he turned it over in his hand, and cursed softly under his breath as he replied:

"I don't quite get you, Tooter. Everybody knows that you were born in obscurity, gradually worked your way up, and made all your money in the tea and spice business, so why in the deuce should they care if you take it into your head to be a salesman for your own teas at your nephew-in-law's residence?"

Tooter sighed deeply, shrugged his shoulders, answered:

"Well, that's the rigorous lesson I had to learn in the West End, Holmes. You are evidently not familiar with the customs and mental viewpoint of society people, or you would know that while it is permissible to acquire wealth by going out and working your head off for it, it is a most serious offense and an unforgivable *faux pas* if you are caught trying to drum up trade for your establishment after you have landed at the top of the social heap. You see, I am supposed to let my managers do that, while I confine myself to spending the coin that they make for me. I guess that's explaining it about as well as it could be."

And Tooter contemplated the scene outside the window, where the little green buds were just beginning to push themselves out on the tree limbs.

This explanation naturally didn't soothe Holmes to any great extent, as he had always despised society people and their ways, and the sudden shock of the disappointment, coming just after he had so successfully recovered the first two cuff-buttons, made him lose his temper entirely, particularly as he looked around and noticed me grinning at his sour expression. As a result, both his paternal English and his maternal French completely failed him in giving an outlet to his feelings, and he started to swear in German.

As the longer and heavier words of Teutonic profanity came from his lips, I quietly unlocked the door, and motioning to Uncle Tooter, we both tiptoed out of the room and started downstairs, leaving Holmes to his devotions. As I went down the stairway toward the library the last thing I heard him say was: "Schweinhund!" which sounds pretty bad.

Tooter and I walked in on the Earl and his secretary, and told them of the bad break Holmes had just made, which caused the Earl to lie back in his chair and roar, though Tooter was more concerned about the social disgrace of having been caught with the tea sample.

The Earl was an easy-going and good-natured cuss, without the narrow prejudices of his snobbish friends, and readily promised not to tell anybody about it. He also simply grinned when Tooter told him that Teresa had just promised to marry him, and said his revered uncle-in-law would have to assume the job of telling his niece that she would have to find a new maid.

In a few minutes Holmes rejoined us as if nothing had happened, and we forbore from kidding him about it.

"Well, the next victim I am going to jump onto is your valet, Your Lordship, and I think I'm going to strike pay dirt this time," were his first words. "Where is the rascal now?"

"He's over in my room, sorting out my clothes," said the Earl.

"All right. Come on, Watson, we'll nail him before he gets away from the scene of his crime."

Whereupon I accompanied Holmes across the corridor to the room back of the drawing-room, which was the Earl's.

Luigi was in there, engaged in laying out several suits of clothes on the bed. He looked up in surprise as we entered.

"Ah, Luigi, you haven't got any of the stolen cuff-buttons concealed up your sleeve there, have you? I would really hate to think that you had," remarked Holmes, grinning sardonically.

On hearing this thinly-veiled accusation Vermicelli's swarthy face got even blacker, if possible, than it generally was, and he snarled:

"No. I'm sick of hearing about them!"

"I'm afraid we can't take your unsupported word for that, though, Luigi. We'll have to frisk you. Now, then, stand still while Doc Watson goes through your pockets for the gems, or at least for some incriminating evidence."

And Hemlock pulled out his trusty six-shooter and covered the valet.

The latter got so scared at the sudden gun-play that he fell backward on the bed, right over one of the Earl's best suits, which made it easier for me to search him. I went through all his pockets without finding anything that we were after until I tapped his inside coat-pocket. Here I got hold of a small crumpled piece of paper, drew it out and read the following on it:

DEAR LUIGI: Meet me at Wuxley's feed store in the village at five p. m. to-day, and we'll go in to London and sell the pair of diamond cuff-buttons. Be on your guard against that Holmes fellow.

DEMETRIUS.

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha! a couple of times!" chuckled Holmes, grabbing the note from me and eagerly glancing over it. "I can tell at once that this note was written by a man who thinks he is going to meet the Earl's valet, but who is bound to be disappointed."

"Well, will you let me go now? You've got the note," said Vermicelli, with a scowl at Holmes's gun, with which the detective still covered him.

"You don't think I'm so soft as all that, do you? Let you go now, and thereby give you a chance to warn your Greek accomplice in the gardens that I've got his note? Not so that you could notice it, Luigi," scoffed Holmes. "Up into your own room you go, behind lock and key, until after five o'clock, while I quietly don your light green clothes, and disguised as yourself, go down to the guilty rendezvous at Brother Wuxley's feed store, and take the cuff-buttons away from him. I'll have the cooks send you up something at noontime, so you won't starve

in the meanwhile. Now march."

And Holmes flourished his revolver at the valet again.

Luigi didn't wait to be told a second time, but went up the stairs with considerable alacrity, while Holmes and I followed close behind. When we reached the fifth and top floor, we entered Luigi's room there, and the latter changed clothes with Holmes. As they were both of the same height and build, and were both of dark complexion, the second gardener would not recognize my partner that evening until he got up close to him, so Holmes was playing it rather safe.

"I think I'll just keep these valet's togs on, for the fun of it, and then I'll be all ready when five o'clock comes," said Holmes after we had locked Luigi in his room and were descending the stairs. "Gee, but I wish they'd put in an elevator in this darned old-fashioned castle! My legs are getting kind of tired running up and down five flights of stairs."

As we reentered the library, where the Earl, Tooter, and Thorneycroft looked up with surprise as they saw Holmes come back in Vermicelli's clothes, Lord Launcelot and Billie Hicks came in. They had been up in the billiard room for some time, and came down to see whether anything had developed in their absence. Upon being told that Holmes had recovered two of the cuff-buttons from Yensen and Thorneycroft, and was in a fair way to recover a third one from Xanthopoulos, they were greatly surprised.

"We left Inspector Letstrayed asleep on one of the billiard tables," said Launcelot, with a grin; "but I guess Holmes was able to get along pretty well without him. A little while ago I heard the first gardener, Blumenroth, swearing something fierce on the second floor. What was he doing up there, anyhow?"

"How do you know it was Blumenroth?" asked Holmes, as he nudged me.

"Because it was in German, and he's the only German here."

"Do you understand German yourself?"

"No."

"Then how do you know it was swearing?"

"Oh, I could tell by the tone of it."

"Well, if you couldn't understand the words, no harm was done. Say, fellows, how do I look in the valet's togs?" asked Holmes turning around as if he was in a tailor shop trying on a new suit.

"It fits you kind of quick under the shoulders, Holmes, but I guess it will do," said the Earl, with a critical eye.

"What are you wearing those valet's clothes for, anyhow?" exclaimed Hicks.

Holmes winked his crafty old wink, and replied:

"Along about five-thirty this evening you'll find out, after I return from a little date I have made down at the village. It's twenty-five minutes of ten now, and a number of things may happen in between, so just keep your eyes peeled."

"This detective stuff is just one darned disguise after another, ain't it, Holmes? A little while ago you were a race-track loafer, now you're a valet, and Heaven only knows what you'll be to-morrow," said Launcelot, as he curled up in the window-seat and lit a cigarette.

"Well, I don't mind it," was Holmes's reply. "Now, Watson, I'll need you again. I've had my eye on a certain party since my deduction-trance yesterday noon, and was waiting for her sense of shame to impel her to confess her part in the cuff-button robbery; but since she has not as yet done so, I shall be forced to resort to sterner measures. Come with me, and leave these fellows to kill time any way they like until we return."

And the old sleuth started to lead me out of the room.

"She, did you say? Is one of the women servants guilty also?" queried the Earl.

"Well, why not?" snapped Holmes. "I don't believe in this doctrine of feminine impeccability. But don't try to spill the beans by getting me to reveal my hand before I've played it now. Good-by, George."

We left the room, going upstairs to the second floor, where Holmes tapped lightly on the door of the Countess's room.



CHAPTER XIII

"Come in," called the Countess.

We entered.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit, and for the privilege of seeing you rigged up in the valet's clothes?" she asked,—a little coldly, I thought, as she motioned us to chairs, and laid down the French novel she had been reading.

"Only to my desire for a little information relative to your noble husband's cigars, Your Ladyship. It would greatly assist me in clearing up the mystery of the robbery. Never mind the disguise. I've worn worse," returned Holmes politely.

The Countess frowned.

"Why, have some of the Earl's cigars been stolen, too, as well as the cuff-buttons?" she asked.

"No; but they have something to do with them, though. Now, when was the last time that the Earl smoked a Pampango cigar, and where was he at the time?"

"Those wretched things from the Philippines,—with the terrible odor? He only smoked one this week, and that was Monday morning, just after breakfast, in his room. I made Harrigan take the box of them away and hide it, so he couldn't get any more."

"Ah," said Holmes, a smile gleaming on his eager face, "that was just the time when some of the diamond cuff-buttons disappeared. Now, where were you all during Monday morning?"

"Right here in my own room, of course, having Teresa arrange my hair. I had breakfast served to me in here, and didn't go downstairs till noontime."

"And when was the Earl's room swept out?" pursued Holmes.

"Really, Mr. Holmes, what funny questions you do ask!" said the Countess, smiling. "The Earl's room was swept out about half-past eleven that noon, as

soon as I came down and ordered Natalie to do it, after I saw the mess of cigar-ashes the Earl had left on the carpet."

"It's my business to ask funny questions, also to catch thieves, no matter how highly placed in society they are," said Holmes, rising from his chair. "Your Ladyship, you have now unwittingly given yourself away entirely. You stole at least one of the cuff-buttons, I am positive. Now, give it up before I publish it from the housetops."

And Holmes stood there, with arms folded, and regarded the Countess in a very grim and determined manner, while I stood at one side, my mouth open,—as usual.

The Countess turned white, then red, then pulled out her handkerchief and began to weep, which was disconcerting to the relentless Holmes.

"To think that I should be insulted so by a perfect stranger in my own home!" And the Countess wept some more. "What earthly connection is there between your silly questions about the Earl's cigars and the diamond-robbery, I should like to know?"

"Simply this," returned Holmes patiently, as the Countess wiped her tear-stained face with her handkerchief; "with the aid of my powerful microscope I was enabled to find that the specks of cigar-ashes adhering to the soles of your shoes that you wore Monday, the ones that I was compelled to take for evidence last night, and replaced in your room this morning, were from a Pampango cigar; and as you told me that the only time recently that the Earl smoked one of that brand was Monday morning, in his room, and that his room was swept out Monday noon, that proves conclusively that you were in his room during Monday morning. The fact that you also claimed to have been up here in your own room all during Monday morning shows that you had a strong motive for concealing your presence in the Earl's room at the time some of the cuff-buttons disappeared, which can only mean that you wished to cover up your theft. Is that clear enough?"

"I suppose so," remarked the Countess listlessly, rising and going over to her dresser at one side of the room, where she unlocked one of the drawers, took out the cuff-button Holmes was after, and handed it to him. "Here is your horrid old diamond cuff-button! I wish I had never seen it. I am not the thief, anyhow. That miserable fellow from Australia is the one that stole it, Billie Budd, and he gave it to me to hide for him until he could dispose of it safely. I did it for a joke on

George, as I never did like the hideous glaring things, even if they were a present from King George I to his ancestor. And that's all I know about it,—so there! Budd only gave me one of the cuff-buttons, and I don't know where the others are, and I can't say that I care very much, either. Now are you finished with me?"

"Entirely so, Your Ladyship, except to inform you that since breakfast this morning I have recovered two other cuff-buttons beside this one, from Thorneycroft and Yensen, and they both gave me the same song and dance that you did, about the wicked William Budd having been the author of their downfall. He seems to have had a whole lot to do with the robbery, and is also the man who assaulted your husband during Monday night when he entered his room to steal the last pair of the cuff-buttons, and was evidently frightened away before he could smouch the one in his left cuff, having taken the one in his right cuff. I am satisfied that you had nothing to do with the assault, but your action in receiving the one stolen gem from Budd, and then striving to throw the blame for it on your brother-in-law, Lord Launcelot, is reprehensible enough. I shall see what the Earl has to say about it."

And in a moment Holmes, bowing suavely, motioned me to follow him out of the room.

We came downstairs again, and Holmes tackled the Earl in the library.

"Well, Your Lordship, here's the third one of your bally cuff-buttons," he began, as he handed it to him. "And the name of the person who had it is——"

The voice grew inaudible to me as Holmes bent down and whispered the name into the Earl's ears.

At the shock of the revelation the Earl slid down in his chair until he seemed to be sitting on his shoulder-blades, feebly put one hand up to his brow, and exclaimed:

"What? My wife? Good Heavens! I say there, Harrigan, you may pour me out a glass of wine,—I mean a stiff bracer of brandy!"

In a moment the butler came running in with a bottle of the fire-water, and poured out a glass of it for the Earl, who grabbed it, and downed it at one gulp, then said:

"Now I feel somewhat restored, Holmes. Tell me how on earth you found out that she took it."

My marvelous partner told the gaping quintette,—composed of the Earl, Tooter, Thorneycroft, Launcelot, and Hicks,—how he had pried the third cuff-button out of Her Ladyship, and when he had finished the Earl rang for Donald MacTavish, the second footman, and sent him after the Countess. In a few minutes, Scotty had bowed the mistress of the castle into our presence, and she stood in the doorway, very cold and reserved.

"Well, Annabelle, what have you got to say for yourself?" demanded the Earl. "I've been robbed by my coachman, robbed by my secretary, and now, by thunder, I've even been robbed by my wife! And Holmes says that you claim that William X. Budd of Australia put you up to it! How about it, eh?"

"Well, George, you know I never did like those diamond cuff-buttons, and when Billie Budd came to me Monday morning with one of them, I thought it would be a good chance to play a trick on you. I didn't know that the others were going to be stolen too, and I thought you would have enough left. You have any number of regular pearl cuff-links, anyhow, that can be worn to society functions, and not as if you were an end-man in a minstrel show, which is all that those big, glaring diamond things are fit for! Mr. Holmes told me he had replaced all the shoes that disappeared last night, as he took them for the purpose of finding out where the stolen cuff-buttons were by his peculiar hocus-pocus methods, so you can't accuse me of having taken them too. I found *my* pair of shoes in a corner of my room when I returned there after breakfast. Now will you forgive me? Billie Budd is gone, so I don't suppose there will be any further trouble," the Countess concluded, gazing appealingly at her husband.

The others all looked up with surprise as she mentioned the return of the shoes, and then turned their eyes toward Holmes with mixed admiration and perplexity, while the Earl replied:

"Well, you may thank your lucky stars, Annabelle, that I am such an easy-going fellow as I am known to be, or else high life in London would be aroused by gossip of another divorce. I'll forgive you; but don't let it happen again."

"All right, George, thank you; but I still think that Launcelot is responsible for the disappearance of the other eight cuff-buttons." With which Parthian shot, the Countess of Puddingham left the room.

"Still got it in for Brother Launcie, eh?" grinned Holmes, as the Earl put the third gem in his vest-pocket. "Look here, I want to know the reason for this prejudice on her part."

"Well, I don't mind telling you," returned the Earl with a smile, as the accused Launcelot got very embarrassed. "My brother was greatly opposed to my marrying Annabelle, for social reasons, because of her proximity to the tea and spice business,—as I suppose you have become aware,—so naturally after we were married she hasn't looked on him with very much favor, to say the least. But *ich kebibble*," he added, as he straightened up in his chair.

"We've got back three out of the lost eleven gems, anyhow, so we'll all go down to the wine-cellar, and celebrate a little. Thorneycroft, I guess we have all those bills audited for payment, and checks made out for them, so I'll declare a holiday for you, and invite you down to share the drinks, since you didn't steal the third gem. Come along, gentlemen."

To which invitation we all responded by following the genial Earl down the corridor, through the kitchen,—where Louis and Ivan were quarreling about something or other, as usual,—and down the cellar-stairs to that mysterious region where Harrigan the butler held forth.



CHAPTER XIV

"Well, what'll you have, gentlemen?" asked Joseph the butler, always appearing at just the right moment. "We have Château Margaux, Chambertin, Beaune, Veuve Clicquot, Pommery, Amontillado, Chianti, Johannisberger, Tokay, and a number of others in the wines; Muenchener, Culmbacher, and Dortmunder in the imported beers; Coleraine whiskey, and——"

"Say, hold on a minute, till I get my breath, will you?" pleaded Holmes. "I think you may crack me a bottle of that Tokay over there. I have a weakness for the Hungarian wine."

Harrigan administered the Tokay to Holmes, and then turned to me:

"What'll you have, Doctor Watson?"

"Well, they all look alike to me," I replied, as I stood there rubbing my chin and sizing up the immense array of wet goods in bottles and casks that stretched along this part of the cellar,—on shelves and on the cement floor; "I guess I'll take a little of each."

"Shame on you, Doc, both for your indiscriminate taste and your too great thirst," chided Holmes, as everybody else laughed.

Harrigan was kept busy for a while uncorking and pouring out the libations, while we all drank to the recovery of the three cuff-buttons, and wished the old boy from Baker Street good luck in getting back the rest of them.

Uncle Tooter was just lifting up a glass of madeira to propose a new toast, when all of a sudden there came a terrible noise from the kitchen above us, a clatter of pots and pans, the overturning of a table, and the sound of angry voices.

"I guess Louis and Ivan must be breaking up housekeeping. Let's go up and see what the difficulty is," said the Earl.

And we all beat it upstairs to the kitchen. Arriving there, we found that the excitable French chef had treed his Russian assistant on top of a tall cupboard that ran along one side of the room, while various kitchen utensils strewn over the floor testified to a preliminary skirmish. As we entered the door leading from

the cellar stairs Ivan jumped down and ran out the rear door, while La Violette grabbed up a butcher-knife from a table and gave chase to him.

"For the love of Mike, now what?" exclaimed Holmes.

Following our leader we piled out the rear door after the two cooks. Running down the flight of stone steps to the rear lawn, the two started a grand chase along the brick walk leading to the stables; but Holmes's long legs were too much for them, and in a trice he had captured Louis and disarmed him, while Ivan hid behind a tree. Blumenroth, the gardener, digging up a flower-bed with a trowel nearby, put down his implement, and stared at the two cooks sardonically.

"O that miserable barbarian! I'll kill him yet!" shouted the enraged Louis, as we gathered round him. "He had the audacity to take my very best kettle to boil onions in, after I had told him repeatedly not to do so. I hate onions, anyhow; and besides, I was just going to use that kettle to prepare some peas in!"

"Oh, is that all? I thought maybe he tried to murder you," ventured Holmes, coolly testing the edge of the butcher-knife with his finger.

"Is that all? I should think it was enough," cried Louis. "What are you doing with Luigi's clothes on, by the way? Don't think that such a ridiculous disguise could fool *me*."

"Far be it from me to attempt to put over anything on such an astute person as yourself," replied Holmes suavely, while his observant eyes caught every movement of the recreant Galetchkoff, who dodged behind the tree every time the great detective looked in that direction. "Do you think it probable that your friend Ivan could be implicated in the theft of the diamond cuff-buttons, in addition to his crime with the onions?"

"Mr. Holmes," replied Louis earnestly, "that fellow Ivan is capable of anything. If I were you I'd search him right now. I remember now that I saw him put something back in his pocket very hastily a little while ago, when we were in the kitchen,—and he noticed me looking at him."

"Hum, this sounds interesting," muttered Holmes musingly. Then he called aloud: "Ivan, come over here, and Louis will forgive you for spoiling his best kettle with onions!"

The unsuspecting Ivan joined our little group there near an apple tree, about halfway from the castle to the stables; and Holmes instantly pulled out his

revolver, covered him with it, and bade me search him.

I did so, and in the Russian's hip pocket found the fourth cuff-button, glistening and shining as brilliantly as ever!

"Well, here you are, Holmes," I said, handing it to him. "This one was found in between finds, I guess."

The seven of us collared Ivan immediately, and I feared the Earl was about to do him bodily harm, when Holmes interposed with a plea for leniency, and for permission to let the assistant cook tell his story.

"That man William Budd, he took the cuff-button, and he gave it to me to hide for him," claimed Ivan; "so I am not the original thief; and I don't know a thing about the others."

The Earl eyed his second hash-mixer sardonically, while we gathered round him there under the apple tree, and said with a snort: "This stuff about Billie Budd and not yourself being the culprit is getting to be kind of a chestnut. You're the fourth person who has handed in that alibi so far, and I guess the Australian sport didn't have to get down on his knees to make you keep the stolen cuff-button for him, either. But inasmuch as the gem has been recovered in good condition, I suppose I can let you off, instead of having Monsieur La Violette chop you up for Hamburg steak,—a fate you richly deserve. Now beat it back into the kitchen, and don't let your boss there catch you using his favorite kettles again, to say nothing of keeping your hands off the ancestral cuff-buttons."

Ivan was released and Heinie Blumenroth went back to his gardening disgustedly; while we returned to the wine-cellar for a few more drinks, while the Earl lovingly patted his vest-pocket, where he had stowed away the four gems, all recovered that morning by my lucky as well as resourceful partner.

It was now half-past ten, and after we had helped to decrease for a quarter of an hour longer the visible supply of vinous, malt, and spirituous liquors in Normanstow Towers, Holmes suggested we go up to the fourth floor and shoot a few games of pool before luncheon.

Everybody readily agreed, and in a little while we were engaged in a game up there in the spacious billiard room, Letstrayed evidently having wandered away from his sleeping-quarters on top of one of the tables. Holmes "bust," and put three balls in the pockets. As he reached into the third pocket to take out the

pool-ball, his jaw dropped, and his face showed great surprise.

"Well, what do you know about that, fellows! Darned if here ain't the fifth diamond cuff-button!" And he held it up to view. "Now how in Tophet did that get into a pocket of the pool-table? I must freely confess that I hadn't expected it. Wait a moment, here comes somebody along the corridor."

In a minute more, the reddened and anxious face of Egbert Bunbury, the first footman, appeared in the doorway.

"Well, what's on your mind, Eggie? Nothing but hair, as usual!" inquired Holmes, as sarcastic as ever.

Egbert, however, didn't wait to reply when he saw who was inhabiting the billiard-room; but turned and ran for dear life back along the corridor.

Holmes brought his Marathon legs into play then, and soon captured the obese footman, who puffed like a porpoise in the firm and muscular grasp of the detective, who nabbed him just at the head of the stairs.

"Now, Eggie, the game is up for you as well as for the other four culprits, so you might as well begin to spill out your little narration of how it happened that you absent-mindedly left a valuable gem in a pool-table pocket," Holmes admonished, giving the gem to the Earl and jerking the perspiring footman into a more erect posture.

The Earl was contemplating his hireling, his face expressive of mixed emotions, the rest of us filling up the background as usual.

"Well, that man Billie Budd, 'e swiped the shiners, so 'e did," stammered Egbert, his eyes avoiding his master's, "and 'e prevailed hon me to 'ide one of them for 'im. Said 'e would reward me when 'e came back to dispose of them. But Hi didn't mean any 'arm by it, Your Lordship,—er, Mr. 'Olmes. The reason Hi lost the cuff-button in 'ere was because Hi was shooting a little game of pool by myself just now, with the thing in my 'and, so Hi could hadmire it, and when Hi made the last shot, it rolled away. Hi didn't know which pocket it went into, and just then Hi 'eard some one coming, so Hi beat it."

"Well, you can beat it again, Bunbury. Back to the woods for you! I'll sentence you to help Yensen clean out the horses' stalls for your theft," said the Earl.

The fat footman, glad to be rid of the inquisition, went downstairs in a hurry.

Our little party now returned to the billiard room and finished our game, also a few more, playing until Donald MacTavish, the second footman, came in and announced luncheon, it now being twelve o'clock. After luncheon, during which Holmes made several more cracks about the possible guilt of others in the diamond robbery, we adjourned to the library, and Holmes settled himself in the best chair, still wearing Luigi Vermicelli's light green livery, consulted his old chronometer again, and yawned.

"Well, it's still only a quarter of one. Hi! Ho! Hum! Nearly four hours yet before I am to go down to the village and grab the second gardener with his stolen pair of diamonds!" he remarked. Then turning to me, he added: "Doc, I believe the reaction is on me now. I haven't had a shot in the arm since yesterday morning. Have you got the dope-needle with you? No, that's right,—I have it here in my pocket."

And before I could prevent him, the hardened old "coke"-fiend had pulled out his famous needle and inoculated himself again in the arm with the poisonous cocaine, and right in front of all the five people in the library, too,—the Earl, Thorneycroft, Launcelot, Tooter, and Hicks,—who stared at him as if he were a dime-museum freak; which indeed he was, to a certain extent.

The seven of us managed to kill time some way or another that Wednesday afternoon, while the sun shone through the ancient windows, and the birds sang their springtime songs in the trees outside, the Countess having retired to the music room to hammer Beethoven,—or maybe it was Mendelssohn,—out of the piano.

I had grown considerably interested in a very romantic novel by Xavier de Montepin, and took no note of the passage of time until suddenly my unconventional partner jumped up and yelled:

"Arise and depart with me, John H. Watson, M. D.! The time now approaches when we shall accomplish the recovery of the sixth and seventh stolen piece of glass for His Nibs the Earl!"

And Holmes grabbed me by the shoulder so sharply that the book fell out of my hands.

"You don't need to throw a fit about it, anyhow," I grumbled, as I hastened to accompany him out of the castle and down the somewhat dusty road to the village of Hedge-gutheridge.

The darned village was three-quarters of a mile from Normanstow Towers, and I didn't feel like taking a tramp just then, but Holmes seemed to be in high spirits as we passed along the ancient and dilapidated main street of the village, sizing up the signs above the stores until we came to one that read:

| |
|----------------------------------|
| WILFRED WUXLEY FLOUR and FEED |
|----------------------------------|

It didn't look very inviting, being only a hundred feet away from the grimy railroad station by which we had first come here, with cinders blown all over it, and if the building had been back in the U. S. A. and I was a deputy state fire marshal, I would have ordered it torn down at once. Of course none of the constables were in sight anywhere, probably being asleep in some back room!

Holmes led the way into the feed store, and we met the proprietor, who strongly reminded me of Inspector Letstrayed and Egbert Bunbury by his general air of sleepy incompetence. It was now five minutes to five, and after Holmes had warned old man Wuxley of his identity beneath the valet's livery, we decided to hide behind one of the barrels of bran that stood on one side of the store, and there await the coming of Demetrius with his booty.

We didn't have long to wait, for he soon showed up in the doorway,—with his swarthy face and shifty eyes,—and asked Wuxley if Luigi had arrived yet to meet him. Suppressing a smile, Wuxley motioned him in, saying that Luigi was in a back room.

As he passed the bran barrels Holmes and I jumped out and nailed him, and Holmes exclaimed:

"Well, here I am, Mr. Xanthopoulos. We'll catch the next train in to London and sell the diamonds,—maybe!"

But the wily Greek was quicker than I thought he would be; he jerked loose as soon as he heard the tones of Holmes's well-remembered voice that had bawled him out at the inquisition the day before, and in a second had escaped by the back door, leaving Holmes with a shred of cloth out of his coat-tail held between his fingers.

We two gave chase at once; out of the rickety old back door of the feed store we sped, nearly breaking our necks in our stumble down the uneven steps that led to a weedy yard. There was a gate in the picket fence surrounding the yard, and through this we dashed madly after the swiftly retreating Demetrius, who led us down a narrow lane back of the stores fronting on the main street for several hundred feet, until we arrived at a small creek that paralleled the railroad tracks, —a stream that I had not noticed on the way out from London the previous

Monday.

As our ill luck would have it, Demetrius found a couple of dingy rowboats at the edge of the creek, and into one of them he jumped, grabbed the oars, and paddled himself down-stream at a pretty good clip. Holmes swore, both in English and French, but quickly grabbed the other boat, shoved me into it, and started to row after the gardener down the turbid and muddy waters of the creek, which was about sixty feet wide. As we rounded a sharp left bend in the creek, Holmes ran our boat in near the opposite shore and succeeded in hitting the side of Demetrius's boat with the prow of our own.

Demetrius yelled something unintelligible,—in his native Greek, I guess,—and the collision threw him overboard, on the outer side of his boat, whereupon he began to swim across the creek to the farther side.

"Come back here, or I'll throw this oar at you!" yelled Holmes, pulling it out of the row-lock, too excited to think of the revolver in his pocket, while I strove to row the boat as well as I could with the one remaining oar.

Owing to Holmes's gyrations with the other oar, our boat capsized too, and the three of us were now struggling in the cold, muddy water, which, fortunately, was only shoulder-deep. We found it quicker to wade out than to swim out, and as Demetrius scrambled up the opposite bank of the creek, Holmes was upon him, and grabbed him this time with an unbreakable grip.

"Here are the two cuff-buttons, Mr. Holmes," faltered the gardener, as he nervously fumbled at his vest-pocket and handed over the two gems, none the worse for the wetting they had received. "Please don't kill me now. Billie Budd made me and Vermicelli keep the cuff-buttons for him, after he said he stole them; and as he didn't come back yet, we thought we'd sell 'em ourselves. And I'm liable to catch pneumonia from all this, anyhow!"

"We'll see about that when we get back to the castle,—I've got seven of them now out of the eleven. Seven, come eleven!" said Holmes with a grim smile, as he put the two causes of Demetrius's downfall in his own pocket.

The strangely assorted trio now walked back to the castle, the few villagers we met at the edge of Hedge-guthridge staring at us in surprise on seeing our drenched and streaming condition.

The golden April sun was low in the western sky as we turned in at the castle

grounds, and I felt good and hungry, I can tell you, after all the excitement. After explaining what had happened to the gaping habitués of the castle, I hustled upstairs with Holmes, and we changed our wet clothes immediately, putting on dry ones, after advising Demetrius to do the same. I prescribed a hot drink of whiskey-punch apiece for us in order to ward off pneumonia; and by half-past six we were ready for dinner.

Everything passed off as well as before, and Holmes was effusively congratulated by the Earl for his recovery of the sixth and seventh diamond cuff-buttons, His Lordship deciding at length that the second gardener had been punished enough for his theft by being dumped into the creek. They all echoed Holmes's slogan of: "Seven, come eleven!" for the recovery of the four remaining gems; and after an evening spent in listening to Lord Launcelot play the mandolin, and to Uncle Tooter telling some more extravagant tales of his adventures in India, we retired at ten o'clock, and I soon fell asleep.

Then I dreamed that I was back in the United States, on a Mississippi River levee, throwing dice with several colored boys, who kept shouting: "Seven, come eleven!" when Hemlock Holmes came along and pinched us all for crap-shooting!



CHAPTER XV

Thursday morning, April the eleventh, found us none the worse for our wetting in the creek the afternoon before; and as Holmes and I were dressing in our room, he loudly boasted that before another day had passed he would succeed in finding the four remaining diamond cuff-buttons.

"Well, I hope so, Holmes; only I can't help thinking what a supreme chump that Earl is for keeping those five servants of his from whom you extracted the first seven cuff-buttons,—Yensen, Thorneycroft, Galetchkoff, Bunbury, and Xanthopoulos!" I said; "because at any time they are liable to steal the darned cuff-buttons again. Then there's Vermicelli, who was mixed up in the plot with the Greek, and the Countess herself!"

"What of it, Doc?" grinned Holmes, as he bent down to lace his shoes. "His Nibs can't very well fire *her*, can he? And as to the five servants whom he has so mercifully retained, that's *his* funeral, not ours. I was hired at an exorbitant fee to get back the cuff-buttons, and when I have done so my duties end. Handing out free advice to people who have not asked for it generally doesn't get you anything, I have observed."

I subsided, knowing from long experience how bull-headed Holmes was, and we went downstairs to breakfast, at which meal the Earl and Countess both did the honors to the assembled party. It developed then that Inspector Barnabas Letstrayed, in spite of his nap on the billiard-table the day before, had also bestirred himself in an eleventh hour attempt to find some of the cuff-buttons before Holmes dug them all up, and he told us how he had been all through the servants' rooms on the fifth floor, rummaging in their dressers and clothes-closets, and peeking under the beds, in a vain endeavor to unearth at least one of the stolen gems. He had also been down in the wine-cellar, on the theory that some of the servants might have gone down there to get drunk, and while in that condition might have dropped the gems, but there also he was doomed to disappointment.

"Cheer up, Barney, old boy; maybe I'll let you stand beside me when I nab the next thief, and you can thus share in the honor of apprehending him," said Holmes. Letstrayed, however, seemed to think that my partner was unjustly

putting something over on him in getting back so many of the cuff-buttons when he, Letstrayed, couldn't find one. After breakfast the Earl suggested that we take a walk about the grounds, which proved to be a pleasanter jaunt than the one we took at Holmes's insistence on Tuesday morning; for the grass had been dried by this time by the sunshine that had followed Monday's rain.

The nine of us, including the Countess, rambled around the wide-spreading lawn by twos and threes, and I contrived to draw Holmes past the stables and gardens back to the small patch of woods that adjoined the castle grounds at the rear, where we seated ourselves on a fallen tree-trunk.

"Now, look here, Holmes, I've just been thinking——" I began.

"What! Again?" interrupted Holmes, with a grin.

"Don't interrupt me, please," I said seriously. "I want you to dope out for me the process of reasoning you went through yesterday noon in the music room behind the locked doors. Some of the moves you have made are too many for me, and I seek enlightenment."

"Well, Doc," said Holmes, as he took out his pocket-knife, pulled a sliver of wood off the tree-trunk we were sitting on, and began to whittle it, "the red clay I found on Eustace Thorneycroft's shoes was pretty good evidence that he had been around the stable, where the only red clay in the neighborhood is located; so I disguised myself as the race-track loafer and pried his secret out of the none too bright Olaf Yensen, the coachman. Then I found cigar ashes of the peculiar Pampango brand, which I can always spot with a microscope, on the Countess's shoes, which proved that she had been in the Earl's rooms just after he had smoked a Pampango and before the room had been swept out, so I was able to nail *her* as one of the kleptomaniacs——"

"Yes, yes, I know that already," I hastened to say; "but what about your seizing Galetchkoff, Bunbury, and Xanthopoulos? You didn't seem to have any shoe-sole clues by which to follow there."

"Doc, when I can't get 'em any other way I pull off my feminine intuition, which I have inherited in large measure from my French mother, and I can always run 'em down with that! Now when we were chasing that Russian hash-mixer or biscuit-shooter out of the kitchen door closely pursued by Louis with the butcher-knife, your old Uncle Hemlock's intuition told him that there was another one of the guilty wretches who had cabbaged the cuff-buttons! Similarly

with the egregious Egbert when he put his retreating forehead in at the door of the billiard-room, just after I had picked the fifth diamond treasure out of the pool-table pocket; and also with the Mephistophelian valet Luigi, when I decided to pull the strong-arm stuff on him and search him for a note from an accomplice. Little old Intuition,—with a capital I,—told me that they were the ginks I was after."

And the accomplished old poser calmly whittled away at the sliver of wood in his hand.

"Aw, come off!" I replied. "I really thought you could hand me something more plausible than that, Holmes. Unquestionably you do show flashes of genius sometimes in recovering articles or in spotting criminals guilty of murder and so on, but at other times you're simply playing to blind, dumb luck, only your vanity is so enormous that you won't admit it. You want everybody to believe that you dope out all your problems with that wonderful deductive reasoning power that you get from injecting 'coke' into your arm, and sitting still with a pipe in your mouth! 'Intuition,' my eye! You might be able to tell that to Barney Letstrayed, but you can't tell it to me!"

And I disgustedly threw away another little sliver of wood I had picked off the tree-trunk.

Holmes merely laughed and said:

"I guess you're simply sore because I dumped you into the creek accidentally yesterday, Doc. The old saying has it that no man is a hero to his valet, but I guess I'm not a hero to my physician either. Cheer up though, Watson; when we get back to the little old rooms in Baker Street after this cuff-button fever is over, why I'll split up with you fifty-fifty on the reward I get from the Earl. How's that, eh?"

"Pretty good, I guess. But I would like some information on your deductions from the remaining four pairs of shoes,—Tooter's, Hicks's, Lord Launcelot's, and most important of all, Billie Budd's, the last of whom you publicly bawled out as a robber and thief at luncheon on Tuesday. How are you going to account for them,—huh?" I inquired.

"Now, Doc, you betray a reprehensible desire to anticipate the prescience of the Almighty in thus seeking to ascertain the future while we are still in the present tense, similar to the people who go to call on fortune-tellers, and the girls who

always read the last page of a novel first, to see how it comes out! But suffice it to say that I found both Pampango cigar ashes and the toilet-powder that the Earl uses on Budd's shoes; wine-stains on Uncle Tooter's shoes; flour on Hicks's shoes, and garden earth on Launcelot's shoes. I'll tell you more later."

Having given forth this cryptic information, Holmes arose, brushed off his trousers, and added that we'd better be getting back to the castle, or the Earl would be sending out a general alarm for us. And that's all I could possibly get out of him.

At the edge of the woods there was a considerable stretch of bare pebbly ground before we came to the rear lawn, and I stumbled over a fair-sized pebble, which gave me an idea.

"Holmes," I said, "I think I know the derivation of the name of the noble castle out in front there,—Normanstow Towers. You see they claim that the oldest part of the castle dates from the Norman Conquest, though the rest of it only goes back to about 1400, and if all these pebbles were here at the time of William the Norman, then this is the place where probably William the Norman stubbed his toe, as he was chasing around inspecting the castles he had set up to keep the Saxons in subjection, hence, Norman's toe,—Normanstow! How's that for etymology?"

"Watson, you ought to be shot for a joke like that,—darned if you oughtn't," replied Holmes with a smile.

We then continued our walk to the castle, where we turned in at the kitchen door at his request, all the rest of our party having reëntered the castle by the front door.

"Now here is where I will have a difficult job ahead of me, handling the touchy and sensitive supervisor of this hash-foundry, Watson," Holmes remarked as we entered the kitchen and said "Good morning" to Louis La Violette the chef; "for I have good reason to believe that he knows where a certain party has hidden one of the remaining cuff-buttons."

"Louis," he began, turning to that worthy, who was putting away the breakfast dishes, while Ivan, his assistant, sat in a corner picking out the stems from some hothouse strawberries; "I called to congratulate you on the uniform excellence of the repasts you have prepared since I have been an honored guest in this castle, and to say that I consider them absolutely Lucullan, not to say Apician, in their

delicious sumptuousness. Here, have a cigarette on me." And Holmes politely proffered to the chef his silver cigarette case,—the one that the Sultan of Zanzibar had given him three years before as a reward on a certain case.

La Violette swelled up like a pouter pigeon on hearing this taffy from the great detective, and bowed profoundly, his black eyes gleaming, as he took a cigarette and lit it.

"Thank you, Mr. Holmes. I always endeavor to do my best in the culinary line, with the help of Monsieur Harrigan, who serves the wines at the end of the dinners I prepare," replied he.

"You are both geniuses in your line," agreed Holmes, as we settled down in a couple of kitchen chairs, and I listened while he tried to pull the chef's leg for some cuff-button information; "and I can appreciate your cookery all the more, since I am half a fellow-country-man of yours. My mother was French, as Doctor Watson informed the world in one of my very first adventures."

"Ah! You don't say so! Why in the world didn't you tell me about it before? May I ask what your mother's maiden name was?" queried the pleased Louis.

"Le Sage. She was a direct descendant of the family of the great French author of the seventeenth century, Alain René Le Sage," answered Holmes.

"Well, well, well! I must treat on that," returned Louis, and he bustled around into the pantry, and got out a bottle of Bordeaux wine he had hidden there by the flour-bin for contingencies. "Here, just try some of this elegant wine from my native province of Guienne," he added, filling three glasses, which he offered one each to Holmes and myself.

"Fine, fine!" commended Holmes, as he smacked his lips. "By the way, Louis, what do you think about the four remaining diamond cuff-buttons still floating around? I have reason to believe they are still inside the castle, and that Billie Budd did not get away with them."

Louis put down his glass, and regarded Holmes peculiarly.

"Those cuff-buttons are not worrying me one single bit, and if I had taken any of the worthless gewgaws, which are hardly fit for a Latin Quarter masquerade ball, I would have assuredly soon become ashamed of having them in my possession and have returned them to the Earl. However," and Louis seemed to hesitate a moment, "if anybody else in Normanstow Towers still holds the gems, there is

no telling what may happen to them. I wish I could help you find the things; but when a Canadian gentleman who tells you he is half French, and used to live in that beautiful city of Quebec, comes and—and——"

Here Louis happened to notice Holmes watching him narrowly, and instantly realizing the horrible break he had made, got terribly embarrassed, and stammered out:

"Er, no, I mean, er—that is——"

But Holmes jumped up and didn't give him a chance to finish it.

"Ha, ha! The only Canadian in this neck of the woods is Mr. William Q. Hicks, of Saskatoon. I knew before that he stole one of the cuff-buttons, but now that you give yourself away and admit that *you* know of his theft also, you are in duty bound to tell me where he has hidden the darned thing. Come, Monsieur La Violette, I am more French than Hicks is, as my mother was born in France itself, while his was just a French-Canadian; so come across with your confidence, and rest assured that I will not misplace it by ever telling Hicks that you informed on him. The deadly flour-marks on the soles of his shoes indicated to my eagle eye, ably assisted by the magnifying glass, that Hicks had been loafing around in the pantry; which could only mean that he was having confidential relations with you, since the guests of an earl, from a far-off country, do not commonly come down from the drawing-room and associate with the chef in the pantry unless they have something very ulterior up their sleeve, —*n'est-ce pas?*"

Louis got more confused and embarrassed than ever, and was about to make some kind of answer when Donald MacTavish appeared in the doorway leading from the cellar, wiping his lips, and with a fatuous grin on his face.

"Oh, Scotty, Scotty! I am sure you'll never get to be a member of the W. C. T. U. when you carry on like that," said Holmes, noticing the footman's caught-with-the-goods expression. "Down in the Earl's wine-cellar again, sampling 'em up, eh?"

The second footman bowed awkwardly, and was about to pass into the dining-room when Holmes caught the glint of something sparkling in his left hand.



CHAPTER XVI

"Stop right where you are, MacTavish!" Holmes shouted commandingly, "and show me your left paw so I can see what you are trying to carry away with you. Something more valuable than the tinfoil off a wine-bottle top, I'll warrant!"

The footman looked around at me, then at Louis and Ivan, and finally at Holmes, whose threatening expression cowed him, and he shambled over and, with a deep-drawn sigh, gave up the eighth diamond cuff-button.

"Well, I was afraid that sooner or later something like this would happen," he remarked with downcast eyes, "and I would be jerked up sharp and the darned thing taken away from me. Blast that man Weelum Budd, anyhow! He came to me last Monday and talked me into hiding the shiner for him, so he could play it safe up in the drawing-room and I would have to take the blame for it if it was captured by you before he could get back!"

With undisguised pleasure my partner took the gem, holding it up so that Louis could view it plainly, and said: "But where has your base tempter been keeping himself these past two days, Donald? Have you had any secret communications with him? Better 'fess up, or it may go hard with you."

"Why, he came sneaking around here last night about nine-o'clock while you people were in the music room listening to Lord Launcelot play the mandolin, and he said he was boarding at the village inn under an assumed name——"

"And those rabbit-headed constables there couldn't recognize him!" growled Holmes, shaking his fist. "But did Budd tell you when he expects to collect the cuff-buttons from his dupes here and make a get-away!"

"Yes," replied Donald, "he said he would come for them to-morrow, Friday, morning, and he didn't seem to mind it when I told him that Mr. Hemlock Holmes had gotten back the first seven cuff-buttons, either; for he claimed he could swipe 'em all again, anyhow. Said that you were only a big bluff."

"Oh, I am, am I! Well, I can tell you that Mr. W. X. Budd, of Melbourne, Australia, will find to-morrow to be a darned unlucky Friday for him, all right. Now we'll just go into the library, where the Earl is probably indulging his great

taste for literature by reading the labels on the wine-bottles, and we'll tell him how his good man Donald fell from grace through the wiles of an Australian thief. So, front and center, Scotty; forward, march!"

With these words Holmes waved smilingly to Louis, the chef, as a sign of what his friend Hicks could expect when Holmes the detective should collar him for the ninth cuff-button, and then he and I accompanied the scared footman into the presence of the Earl.

"Well, now what?" inquired the noble master of the castle, putting down a copy of London *Punch* on the library table, and turning to inspect the arrivals. "Don't tell me that that little cuss from Balmoral Palace there has been caught with any of my ancestral gems on him!"

"But I *will* tell you, anyhow, George, because it's the sad and undoubted truth," answered Holmes, as he handed over the eighth missing bauble to His Lordship, took out a cigarette, and lit it. "The time is now 9:15 a. m., and I herewith present you with eight-elevenths of your stolen property, trusting to have the other three-elevenths recovered for you before the sun goes down. As the old Roman Emperor Titus, or somebody, used to say:

"Count that day lost whose low descending sun
Views from thy hand no diamond-capture done!"

"Eh, what? Well, by thunder, this is getting to be something fierce!" commented the Earl as he took the cuff-button from Holmes and stowed it away in his vest-pocket, "not the recovery of them, which I welcome, but the melancholy fact that I have been betrayed now by no less than, seven different people in whom I have reposed confidence,—my own wife, my secretary, my coachman, my second cook, my second gardener, and now by both my footmen! I wonder who is going to be the next guilty miscreant!"

And the Earl scratched his head with perplexity.

"Who did you think took them, anyhow? The horses out in the stables, huh?" inquired Holmes humorously. "But where is the rest of our recent little promenade party by this time? Watson and I got lost in the woods back there, and we lost sight of the others."

"Oh, they're up in the billiard-room, shoving the ivories around on the green tables," answered the Earl, rising and stretching himself.

"And with their heads containing about as much ivory as the billiard-balls, I suppose. Honestly, I never saw such a pack of gilded loafers in my life! Don't they ever try to improve their minds! It seems that you have some faint glimmerings of literary appreciation, since you read London *Punch* there, but those other ginks don't even read *that* much! Let's go up and inspect their playing, especially that of Mr. Hicks," Holmes concluded, winking meaningly at me, as we left the library and mounted the stairs.

Up on the fourth floor we entered the billiard-room where so much time was killed, and found Lord Launcelot, Hicks, Tooter, and Thorneycroft shooting a game of billiards, with old man Letstrayed, the so-called police inspector, fast asleep in one of the splint-bottomed chairs, as usual. Holmes picked up a cue, and playfully poked Letstrayed in the ribs with it.

"Wake up, Barney, and hear the birds sing!" he called out.

The sleepy inspector jumped up in surprise, while the other four men laughed and continued their game, and the Earl and I sat down as Holmes walked over and butted into the playing.

"Say, I don't think that Hicks is holding his cue just right, fellows," said he, grabbing that worthy's cue away from him and leaning over the table to try a shot himself. "Look,—this is the way to do it!"

"Aw, you're not holding it right yourself, Holmes," said Launcelot, who prided himself on his knowledge of billiards.

"Sneeze, kid, your brains are dusty. I guess I could shoot pool and billiards along with the world's experts when you were studying your A, B, C's! You see, I'm forty-nine years old, while you're barely thirty," replied the old boy, as sassy as ever.

"Hicks, I'm astonished at your playing," he continued in an authoritative tone; "why, a man so smart as to keep a diamond cuff-button hidden for three days while he confides in the Earl's chef down in the pantry should be able to play this intellectual game better than that!"

The Canadian's mouth opened, and his eyes bulged out with fright as he heard his recent deeds thus published to the assembled crowd, while all his audience showed astonishment as great as Hicks's.

"Now, look me in the eye, William Hicks!" Holmes went on, pointing his finger

at his victim, "and tell His Lordship the Earl if that isn't the actual truth I just spoke."

"Er—er, ah,—I guess it is. I can't see how you ever found it out, but that crook of a Budd he came to me with one of the gems, and induced me to keep it for him till he called for it," was the admission of the confused Hicks, who, with reddened face, sheepishly fished out the stolen cuff-button and handed it to the astonished Earl.

"And now Billie Hicks is a thief, too!" said the latter. "How the Sam Hill did you ascertain *that*, Holmes?"

"Well, if Mr. Hicks hadn't been so careless as to stand around in the spilled flour on the pantry-floor when he was foolishly confiding his little game to the chef, perhaps I wouldn't have been able to apprehend him now," replied Holmes, clearing his throat. "Are you awake there, Letstrayed? You see that's how it's done, examining the incriminating stains on the soles of the shoes. Not the daintiest job in the world, perhaps, but it brings the results, and that's the main thing. This now makes a total of nine of the Puddingham cuff-buttons I have unearthed, and I have promised myself that I shall bag the other two by to-night."

"Do you always keep the promises you make to yourself, Holmes?" said Launcelot, with a grin.

"You just bet your life I do,—every time! But as His Lordship has evidently filed a *nolle* in the case of The State vs. Hicks, we'll go on with the billiards, with that Canadian gentleman remaining still unchanged. Now shoot 'em up, fellows."

So saying, the cold-blooded old sleuth sailed into the game with the other four men, and I sat tight in one of the chairs and talked about the weather with Letstrayed, which was about the extent of the latter's conversational abilities, although every once in a while I could hear him say to himself under his breath: "Nine down—two to come!"

They played on at the billiard-table for over two hours, and then it was noontime, and the still abashed MacTavish, the footman, came in and announced luncheon.

The Earl led the way down to the dining-room, and after we had been seated, Holmes told Harrigan to pass the word out to La Violette in the kitchen that his

Canadian friend had confessed his share in the diamond robbery, but that Louis shouldn't worry about any possible indictment as an accomplice, and that he trusted that the green peas would be as good as ever, prepared under his able direction.

"Won't you try some of the Ceylon tea I brought in, Holmes?" asked Tooter. "I may as well advertise it all I can, now that you have exposed my secret salesmanship in the castle."

"No, thanks," said Holmes crisply, "I always prefer coffee, anyhow,—the stronger the better; and moreover, I am still more interested in what I thought that tea-packet was that you had upstairs when I intruded on your love-making."

"All right, suit yourself then, you old crab! I'm going right ahead with my plans for marrying Teresa Olivano anyhow, in spite of you and the Earl and your dodgasted cuff-buttons."

And Uncle J. Edmund Tooter said no more for the remainder of the luncheon.

When the meal was over, and Inspector Letstrayed seemed somewhat more overcome than usual, the party dispersed, and Holmes and I took a walk through the rooms on the first floor,—"just for fun," as he put it. It was then a little after one o'clock. As we were going through the kitchen, where the now subdued La Violette greeted us with a silent bow, Holmes's eagle eye caught sight of Uncle Tooter's coat-tail just disappearing behind the cellar-door. With a whispered warning to me and a quiet seizure of my arm, Holmes tiptoed after him, softly opened the cellar-door, and as Tooter's steps died away along the cement floor of the cellar, we went inside, locked the door, and I stationed myself on the top step, while Holmes went down.



CHAPTER XVII

Holmes quietly hid behind a large beer-barrel at the foot of the stairs, while I could hear old man Tooter rattling several bottles at the other end of the cellar, and talking to himself the while.

"Let's see: Here's the beautiful Amontillado wine from that lovely Spain that gave me my Teresa," muttered the aged dotard.

Then I heard the sound of something gurgling in his throat, evidently the Spanish wine that he had poured out, as there was always a good supply of glasses alongside the wine-bins.

"Now where in thunder did I put that diamond cuff-button?" came the voice of Tooter again, while I sat still on the top step of the cellar-stairs, just inside the door, from which point I could see the tip of Holmes's long, lean, aquiline nose peering out from behind the barrel below me.

"It isn't under the Muenchener barrel,—it must be under the Dortmunder," continued Tooter to himself, as I heard him laboriously heave over the barrel and paw around on the cement floor under it, in the space between the head of the barrel and the raised ends of the staves, "Ah! here it is,—the cute little diamond that that nutty George has been after, which I have been keeping since last Monday to oblige a fellow-sport, Billie Budd, but which I have decided must be taken out of the vulgar crude cuff-button and reset in an engagement ring for Teresa, since she is so dippy after historical relics!"

Then I heard a long-drawn sigh of relief, as Tooter drew himself a foaming steinful of the Dortmunder beer.

In a minute more he started back toward the stairs, and as he passed the barrel there at the foot of the stairs, Holmes suddenly jumped out and grabbed him with both hands, seizing the diamond cuff-button from him at the same instant.

"Ah! I've got you now, old wine-bibber! old diamond-thief! Look thou not upon the German beer when it is light yellow, or it shall surely get thee, sooner or later!" shouted Holmes in triumph, while Tooter was so surprised and scared he could hardly speak. "Watson, you can unlock the door up there now, and we'll

proceed to the Earl's usual place of business and disburse unto him his tenth stolen cuff-button. You fooled me all right yesterday morning, Tooter, but,—by the brainless cranium of Barnabas Letstrayed, I've certainly got the goods on you now!"

I unlocked the cellar-door and stepped out into the kitchen, where the French and Russian pancake-tossers stared in astonishment as Hemlock Holmes came marching up the cellar-stairs with a firm hand on Uncle Tooter's shoulder, and then columned left in a parade through the dining-room on the way to the library.

"At-ten-*shun*!" called out my partner. "Present cuff-button! Salute! Most noble Earl of Puddingham, here is your tenth and second last stolen gem!"

Thereupon Holmes laid the glittering thing in the Earl's hand, while that worthy fell back weakly in his chair and stammered:

"What? Is Uncle Tooter guilty too? Ye gods and little fishes! Up to the very last I had hoped that none of the disgrace of this robbery would rest upon his sturdy shoulders, but now I see that it has, anyhow. And I suppose he claims that Billie Budd made him do it, against his better nature, like all the other simps you have jerked up, eh?"

"Yes, Billie Budd was in on this too," replied Holmes, as he carelessly lit another coffin-nail and turning around, calmly blew the smoke in the face of Thorneycroft, who had just come in; "but the old gent didn't have to tell me that. I overheard him conversing to himself about it down in your worshipful wine-cellar, where he had the cuff-button hidden under a beer-barrel. If Tooter ever expects to get along well in the diamond-swiping business, he will certainly have to cut out the highly reprehensible habit of talking to himself, particularly when somebody else might be listening. I guess that's all, Earl, for the present, although if I were you I would keep these ten recovered cuff-buttons in some safer place than that dinky little jewel cabinet on your dresser, since a little bird recently informed me that the desperate William X. Budd, the author of all these atrocities, is about to visit Normanstow Towers to-morrow morning, and attempt to carry them all off for good. Be advised in time now, George."

And Holmes quietly pushed Uncle Tooter into a Turkish rocker back of him, and walked serenely out of the room, his cocky old head in the air, and with me trailing humbly along behind him, because it had become the usual thing with me.

"Watson," said he, when he had led me out through a side entrance onto the noble castle lawn, "something tells me that we should take a little stroll around these lovely flower-beds that Herr Blumenroth has been so assiduously taking care of. See, there's the old boy now, kneeling down by that geranium bed over there, while his bone-headed assistant, Demetrius What's-his-name, wheels the barrowful of fertilizer down from the shed behind the stables. Let's go over."

We joined the elderly and phlegmatic gardener, and after joshing him a little about the beauty of the plants he was growing, Holmes began to ask him some leading questions about whether Lord Launcelot hadn't been loafing around the flower-beds on the previous Easter Monday at a time when he naturally would be expected to be up in the billiard room, shooting his head off at his favorite indoor game.

Heinrich was not at all backward about informing on the Earl's junior brother, and I gathered from his very frank remarks that he, Heinrich, did not hold a very high opinion of the said Launcelot's intellectual abilities. It seems that the latter had been loafing around Blumenroth most of the day Monday, and several times the gardener had caught him monkeying with his trowel, trying to dig up one of the flower-beds in a very unscientific manner, which same monkeying had greatly exacerbated Heinrich's none too admirable temper.

"It looked as if he was trying to hide something under the ground, Mr. Holmes, like a dog burying a bone," said the gardener to us; "and after he had kept it up awhile, interfering with my work all the time, I could stand it no longer and told him loudly to beat it, which he did. As soon as he was gone, I quickly turned over all the earth in the flower-bed with my trowel, but couldn't find a thing, so I suppose the simp must have taken it away with him, whatever it was."

"Not caring at all whether it was one of the diamond cuff-buttons we have been after or not, eh? My, but aren't you the independent cuss, Heinie? Why didn't you tell me this last Tuesday morning, when I interrogated you, among all the servants, huh?"

"Because you simply asked me then what I knew about the stolen diamonds, and I told you quite truthfully that I didn't know who stole them, though I might have added, just as truthfully, that I didn't care a darn *who* stole them! Sufficient unto the job is the regular labor thereof, without helping quasi-detectives from London to do their work for them. I'm being paid by the Earl to take care of the gardens, and that only; while you're the guy that he's paying to find his cussed

old cuff-buttons for him. I wouldn't give a nickel for the whole lot of them, anyhow!"

And the gardener calmly turned his back on us, and went ahead with his spading up, while Demetrius spread the fertilizer.

"Gosh, that guy takes my breath away, he's so fresh! But then, we've got all the information out of him that we need, so come along, Watson."

Holmes then led me back to the castle, where we entered and proceeded along till we met Lord Launcelot idly fingering the keys of the piano in the music-room.

"Ah, good afternoon, Your Lordship," said Holmes suavely, as we entered the room and Launcelot faced about on the piano-stool toward us. "This thing called music is indeed a delightful surcease from the dull cares of the day, but finer still would be the resolution in young men of noble lineage to keep their lily-white hands off of property that is not listed on the tax-duplicate in their name, and to refrain from dishonest and secret contact with uncouth crooks from Australia, who induce them to forget their family pride and to conceal valuable gems from the eye of the law! In other words, to come right down to brass tacks, you stole one of the diamond cuff-buttons,—gol darn it!—and I want you to hand it back to me before I become so brutal as to seize you and take it away from you!"

Launcelot, however, did not avow his probable guilt so readily as his brother's revered uncle-in-law had done, but laughed right in Holmes's face as the latter concluded his little speech of accusation.

"Why, you old false alarm you,—do you think for a minute that you can bluff me like that? I didn't take any of the cuff-buttons. Go on and guess again. Maybe the cat took 'em, or maybe George walked in his sleep and threw them away down the road!" said he.

But his pleasantry was lost on Hemlock Holmes, who advanced a step toward him and, in menacing tones, demanded the instant return of the final cuff-button. At this point the door from the corridor opened, and old Uncle Tooter came in, without any present contrition for his recently confessed share in the robbery showing in his face.

"What's this stiff of a Holmes trying to hand you now, Launcie my boy?" he inquired, as Holmes turned and faced him angrily at the interruption and I held

myself ready for an emergency.

"Why, the old magnifying-glass-peeker says that I stole one of the Earl's cuff-buttons! Wouldn't that frost you? I've been trying to get it into his head that he's struck a snag here, but he can't see it that way," replied Launcelot, rising from the piano-stool and brushing off his trouser-legs.

"Well, he'll have to, anyhow—that's all," said Tooter, and he added, as he grabbed Holmes around the body with both arms: "Run like h—— now, Launcie, and I'll hold him until you're safe!"

Launcelot instantly ran out of the room at top speed, while Holmes and Tooter wrestled around for a moment; then the former jerked himself away and chased out into the corridor after me, and up the stairway, where I had started to pursue the recreant Launcelot.

"Here, get out of the way, Watson, and let somebody run that *can* run!" he yelled, as he overtook me, legging it up four steps at a time.

The two of us then chased Launcelot up flight after flight of the green-carpeted stairs, to the second, third, fourth, and fifth stories, while I nearly lost my breath as we came to the fifth and top floor and saw Launcelot disappearing through a trapdoor leading to the castle roof. Up the narrow little wooden ladder we bounced after him, through the trapdoor, and out onto the broad spreading roof of the ancient and venerable Normanstow Towers.

"Oh, gee! first down in the cellar, and then up on the roof! This detective business is getting my goat!" I panted, leaning against a chimney-top where I stood gasping for breath, while the indomitable Holmes pursued the fleeing Launcelot across the stone roof to the opposite side, and there cornered him finally in an angle formed by the battlemented wall surrounding the roof and a small tower about ten feet in diameter at its edge.

Launcelot was squeezed up against the gray stone embrasure at that place by Holmes, who quickly forced the eleventh and last diamond cuff-button out of his nerveless grasp, then turned triumphantly to me, his faithful but out-of-breath squire, while the spring breezes ruffled the sparse hair on his uncovered head, and the gentle afternoon sun shone down on as queer a scene as had ever taken place during our association,—crying:

"Well, here we are at last, Watson. We've got each and every one of the Earl's

diamonds now, and our labors are over, with a large part of County Surrey as the smiling audience for the finale of our little detective drama, as we stand up here sixty feet or more above the ground! Now let's go down and acquaint His Honor the Earl with the glad tidings before the wind blows all my hair off!"

He led the way back to the trapdoor, and down through it to the stairs, with Lord Launcelot following after us like a whipped cur.



CHAPTER XVIII

When we got down to the library, which seemed to be the Earl's usual hang-out, we found His Lordship sitting in a chair, with a book in his lap, but with his somewhat gloomy eyes gazing on the floor, and old Uncle Tooter, with his back turned to him, looking out of the window, as if they had just had a quarrel,—which was the case.

"Two o'clock on Thursday afternoon in Easter week and all is well, Your Lordship!" said Holmes triumphantly, with a smile over his mobile face that spread from ear to ear as he advanced and politely tendered the final diamond cuff-button to the Earl. "I have now the very great pleasure of presenting you with the last remaining stolen heirloom of the ancient House of Puddingham, thus recovering all the articles stolen from you on Easter Sunday night and throughout Easter Monday, which recovery is due to my herculean efforts, ably assisted from time to time by my old side-kicker, Doctor Watson. The only thing now remaining to be done is to seize Billie Budd when he comes up here in disguise to-morrow morning, and ship him into London with a ball and chain around his ankles."

The Earl arose and feelingly congratulated Holmes on the recovery of the gems, shaking hands with him warmly, and added:

"You will pardon me for not seeming more enthused over the event than I am, but Uncle Tooter and I have just had some words, the result of which is that he will leave this castle Friday afternoon with his bride-to-be, Teresa Olivano; and my six good pairs of diamond cuff-buttons will be sent in by express to the Bank of England, there to be placed in an iron-bound, steel-doored safety deposit vault, where no Billie Budds can break in and hypothecate them!"

"Yes, that's right," said Tooter, facing around in Holmes's direction; "and I can add that I am darned glad that I am not to be shadowed and dogged around by such a long-legged piece of impudence as you any longer. If a gentleman decides to play a trick on his nephew-in-law by hiding a worthless bauble for a few days, it's none of *your* business, and he should not be treated as if he was a hardened criminal for it. I am worth eight million pounds, and I don't have to take your sass, or the Earl's either, if I don't feel like it."

And the speaker cleared his throat and looked defiantly at me, as if I were responsible for all of Holmes's actions.

"Eight million pounds of what? Turnips?" said my unimpressed partner. "That doesn't cut any ice with me whatever! I only did my duty in going after the stolen gems in the most strenuous manner possible, and if you feel like putting on the gloves with me to have it out, I will meet you at any time at my rooms, 221-B Baker Street, in London, and then we'll see who's the better man."

And Hemlock lit another cigarette.

"Here, here! You don't have to fight about it, you know. I guess it's bad enough for Uncle Tooter to leave me to-morrow, without a threat of fisticuffs. Not that I care a hang about the social *mésalliance* he's committing in marrying the Countess's maid, but the fact of his implication in the robbery has me all cut up."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it, Earl, you'd better grab hold of something for support when I inform you that the person who had the eleventh and last cuff-button in his wrongful possession was none other than your beloved brother and heir, Lord Launcelot. Here he comes now. I guess he must have been so out of breath from that hard race up to the roof that he couldn't walk down again as fast as we could."

Here Holmes pointed to Launcelot, who came into the library just then with a frown on his face and with most of his recent defiant manner gone. The Earl sat down hard in his chair, put his hands over his face for a moment, and then hollered for help to his best friend,—the butler.

"O Harrigan, Harrigan!" he called, "pour me out a glass of the stiffest brandy you've got in the place, with a dash of absinthe in it! Help! Life-saving service quick!"

"Yes, yes; I'm coming!" shouted Harrigan, who came running in, and ministered unto the Earl's needs from the supply of potables that was always kept handy on the sideboard in the dining-room, so he wouldn't have to lose so much time going all the way down to the wine-cellar.

"And say,—pour out a glass or two, or a decanter or two, of the castle's best wine for the Honorable Mr. Holmes, who has just now recovered all my stolen diamond cuff-buttons, Joe. Give him a barrellful of it if he can stand it,—give him anything he wants!—only for the love of Mike let me try to forget that the

ancient honor of our noble House of Dunderhaugh and Puddingham has gone to pot in the unwelcome fact that my only brother and sole heir to the title, that shrimp of a Launcelot, has been mixed up in the robbery!"

The Earl yammered away at the butler for some time, while yours truly did not forget to help himself to the drinks while they were passing around, although I knew as a physician that they were not exactly the best thing for the lining of my stomach.

"Now then, Your Lordship, if you are sufficiently revived to talk business again, I would suggest that you give all those eleven recovered cuff-buttons, together with the twelfth and last one that the thieves didn't get, to me," said Holmes, "and I will keep them safely in my coat-pocket for you until you are ready to send them in to the bank in the city, protected the while by the revolver in my hip-pocket. I suppose you might as well forgive Launcelot as you forgave the others for their thefts, or rather for their receipt of stolen goods from Budd, as the main thing now will be to nab him, the author of the crime, when he comes to-morrow."

"Yes, I suppose so, Holmes," replied the Earl. "Come over to my room and I'll give you all the gems for safe keeping. Launcelot, you rummie, I'll forgive you, although I shouldn't; and I warn you and Uncle Tooter both not to interfere when Holmes arrests Budd to-morrow."

"All right, George. Thanks!" murmured Launcelot with downcast eyes, and Tooter also nodded assent.

When Holmes had got all the twelve gems stowed away in his right-hand coat-pocket, the Earl spoke of writing out a check for the twenty thousand pounds' reward he had promised him, but Holmes unexpectedly demurred,—saying he would wait until Billie Budd was captured first,—instead of grabbing feverishly for the coin, as I naturally thought he would.

"Well, there's nothing to do now but kill time until to-morrow when that scoundrel shows up in a spurious disguise," said Holmes, as he moved toward the door. "I move that we shoot several games of pool upstairs for the rest of this eventful afternoon."

"It ought to be about time now for old Chief Sleepy-eye to waddle in and ask about the stolen gems, after I've dug them all up, I guess."

"Old who, did you say?" inquired Thorneycroft with a smile.

"Why, old Chief Sleepy-eye,—that lethargic and comatose old piece of cheese that you call Letstrayed, of course. I suppose his ancestor must have got the name Letstrayed because he was let stray away from some asylum for the feeble-minded. Look, here he is now! Speak of the devil and he appears, darned if he don't!"

It was indeed the slow-moving and ponderous Inspector Barnabas Letstrayed that loomed up in the doorway and inquired about the cuff-buttons, while Holmes answered him very sharply:

"Wake up and come to life, old General Incompetence! All the eleven shiners have now been run down and captured before they could bite anybody, by me, you understand, me,—your ancient rival!"

"Well, er—ah, I suppose I shall have to send in a formal report to Scotland Yard about it, then, so the authorities will have official cognizance of the matter," said Letstrayed, as he scratched his somewhat thick head.

At this moment, the bell rang, and Egbert the first footman, answering it, brought in a telegram from Scotland Yard, which Letstrayed had just mentioned, and handed it to him. Holmes snatched it out of his hand, tore it open, and hastily read it to the crowd:

INSPECTOR BARNABAS LETSTRAYED,
NORMANSTOW TOWERS, SURREY,

Have you found Puddingham's cuff-buttons yet?
Answer.

O. U. DOOLITTLE,
CHIEF OF SCOTLAND YARD.

"Wouldn't that knock the specs off your grandmother's nose?" sneered Holmes.

He hurriedly scrawled a reply, which he gave to the waiting messenger outside the front door, while Letstrayed fumed and stammered in protest.

This was the sarcastic message my partner sent back to London:

O. U. DOOLITTLE (well-named),
CHIEF OF SCOTLAND YARD, LONDON,

No, of course not. How could he, when I grabbed
them all? Now roll over and go to sleep again.

HEMLOCK HOLMES.

We all gave it up, and willingly joined the masterful dictator of the castle in the billiard-room on the fourth floor, where we played pool and billiards until the evening shadows fell and Donald the second footman came in and announced dinner.

The dinner passed off without excitement, except for the Earl's rising and proposing the health of Hemlock Holmes, which was responded to enthusiastically by all present except Letstrayed, who insisted on saying "we" instead of "you" when speaking to Holmes about the credit for the recovery of the gems. After dinner we adjourned to the music room, where the Countess Annabelle entertained us as on the evening before, playing a number of selections on the piano, including one little song entitled, "Once I Loved A Spanish Maid," which she repeated a couple of times with the evident purpose of kidding her uncle about his forthcoming marriage with her maid Teresa.

The next morning dawned bright and clear, with the sun shining warmly, and after breakfast we took a walk around the lawn in the rear of the castle, where Holmes claimed that intuition told him that Billie Budd would appear. It got around to a quarter after nine, and while we were chinning with Blumenroth the gardener and Yensen the coachman, I noticed a farmer dressed in a suit of blue overalls and a wide-brimmed straw hat come strolling along the graveled

driveway that led back to the stables. He was a harmless-looking fellow, with bushy gray whiskers and old-fashioned spectacles, and he came up and addressed us in a somewhat squeaky voice, which aroused Holmes's suspicions at once.

"I say, gentlemen, could you tell me who has charge of His Lordship's hay in the stables? My name is Samuel Simmons, a farmer down the road a piece, and I would like to buy a ton or two of his hay, if he doesn't want too much for it."

And the alleged farmer took off his old straw hat and fanned himself with it after his long walk.

"Well, Sam, the guy who has charge of it is the coachman over there, that fat little fellow with the red face standing under the peach tree," replied Holmes in a well modulated tone, but with his eyes glittering with suppressed excitement. "And I suppose the Earl would sell you part of it, as I have good reason to know, to my cost, that he has more of it up there in the loft than he needs, and I think that you do, too. Weren't you up in the hayloft last Tuesday afternoon, Sam? Sure you were, and what's more, your name then was William X. Budd or I'm a Chinaman!"

And Holmes yelled out as he lunged at the so-called Samuel Simmons and pulled away his false whiskers, thereby disclosing to my astounded eyes the well-remembered face of Budd the crook.

Budd waited not a second, but put his speedy limbs into action down the driveway toward the open road a blazed sight faster than he came in, his spectacles and straw hat falling to the ground, while Holmes and I took after him as rapidly as we could.

"Hey! head him off! head him off there, somebody, for the love of Heaven!" shouted Holmes.

Our hopes were rewarded by Harrigan the butler, who came running out of a side entrance of the castle and made a flying leap at Budd from the side, just as the latter passed him.

Harrigan seized the runner around the knees, and they both came with a crash to the ground (making as fine a football tackle as I ever saw), where they rolled and wrestled, the butler on top.

Holmes and I ran up to them, and we soon got a pair of handcuffs,—which

Holmes always carried with him,—around Budd's wrists and jerked him to his feet, while Harrigan arose and brushed off his clothes, just in time to meet the Earl, who hastened out of the castle and came over and clapped the butler on the back, shaking hands with him effusively.

"By Jove, Harrigan, you're a prince! Accept my heartiest thanks for the good work you did in capturing that scoundrel. I saw the whole thing from one of the windows, and knew right away that it must be Budd, in spite of the farmer's disguise," chortled the Earl. "Go inside and pour yourself out a glass of the best wine in the place on me!"

Harrigan left us with a grin, while Budd, handcuffed in Holmes's grasp, stood and scowled at us and ground his teeth with rage as the great detective said:

"We've got him at last, Your Lordship, and he'll certainly get all that's coming to him now. Just go inside and telephone down to the village to send up two of their constables, in order that he may be escorted into London in a manner befitting the enormity of the crime he has committed."

But as the Earl turned away to reënter the castle, the desperate Budd made another attempt to escape, and succeeded in breaking away from Holmes. Down the driveway he tore at a mile a minute or so, holding his manacled hands up before him, while Holmes for a moment seemed to be dying of heart failure, judging by the appearance of his face.

"Great guns!" he yelled, and a couple of other expletives as well, as he ran after the fugitive again; "he mustn't get away now, after all the trouble we've had to get him!"

But Budd developed remarkable speed, and there was no one now to head him off by a flank movement. But suddenly Holmes spied a farmer driving a small wagon with a single horse along the road out in front.

"Here! your horse and wagon are commandeered in the name of the law!" he shouted, jumping into the wagon and jerking the reins away from their astonished owner. Then he whipped up the horse after the fleeing Budd, who was making a large cloud of dust behind himself down the road toward the village. In a minute or two, the Earl and I, standing on the front lawn, saw Holmes and the farmer overtake Budd, with their horse galloping, and the wagon tearing along most of the time on three wheels. Leaping out of the wagon at just the right moment, my resourceful partner landed squarely on the back of Budd,

and bore him to the ground in a cloud of dust and execrations, while the farmer, stopping his panting horse, got out and assisted Holmes to tie up Budd's ankles with a piece of rope that he fortunately had with him in the wagon. Then they lifted the now powerless crook into the wagon, and drove more slowly back to the castle, while Holmes explained the situation to the farmer.

"Well, I guess we might as well use this conveyance to take Budd down to the railroad station ourselves," said Holmes, as the wagon stopped in front of us, and he patted his coat-pocket where he had the dozen cuff-buttons. "Those constables would probably take a year getting out here anyhow, and I can also take your twelve cuff-buttons that caused all the trouble into London with me, instead of your waiting to send them by express. I'll take 'em to the Bank of England all right, get a receipt from the safety deposit department there, and mail it to you; and you can mail me your check for the twenty thousand pounds reward. You know my address, 221-B Baker Street. I can't stand on ceremony now, as I want to get this fellow Budd into the hands of the jailer P. D. Q., before he pulls off another attempted escape, so I'll just ask you to say good-by to Her Ladyship the Countess for me, and give my regards to Joe Harrigan, Louis La Violette, and Heinie Blumenroth,—the only three among the servants who showed any brains,—and my prayers for brains for all the others. Ta, ta! George! You're a pretty good fellow yourself!"

"Good-by, Holmes, and my best congratulations for capturing that man Budd the second time. I'll mail you the check right away, so you'll get it this afternoon in town."

And the Earl waved his hand at us, as I climbed into the wagon and joined Holmes on our farewell trip. Halfway down to the village, I took my handkerchief, at Holmes's command, and made a gag out of it to tie in Budd's mouth, to prevent the flow of a very profane line of talk that he inflicted on the atmosphere.

The farmer's name was Henry Hankins, and Holmes gave him a ten-pound note for his trouble in helping to recapture Budd. At the village, the three of us lifted the bound, gagged and shackled Budd out of the wagon and into a passenger coach on the 9:50 train for London, where Holmes silenced all excited inquirers by calmly showing them his card, at which every one drew back abashed, some even taking off their hats at sight of the celebrated name.

In a half-hour's time we arrived at the station in London, and when Budd was

lifted out onto the platform, he showed his still impenitent desperation by actually trying to escape a third time, handcuffed and with his ankles tied as he was, by hopping along, both feet together.

We collared him soon, though, and bundled him into a cab for Scotland Yard, where, upon his arrival, the scoundrel again caused a rumpus by jumping and twisting around when they went to put him into a prison-cell, so that it required the combined efforts of four fat policemen to hold him down.

"Gosh! I feel as if I could sleep for a year, after all that excitement out at Normanstow Towers!" sighed Holmes, as he mopped his forehead on arriving finally at our old rooms on Baker Street, about a quarter after eleven that Friday morning.

"Same here, Holmes. You have nothing on me in that respect," I said, as I threw off my coat and put on my well-worn lavender smoking jacket, preparatory to sitting down in my old chair and enjoying a good, quiet, peaceful smoke before luncheon, far from the madding diamond-thieves' ignoble strife.

After luncheon, served by our old reliable landlady, Mrs. Hudson, who still did business at the old stand unmoved by the shame that had recently come to the noble House of Puddingham, we played chess until two o'clock, when the mail-carrier brought us an envelope addressed to Holmes, with an earl's coronet engraved on it. Tearing it open, Holmes found it to be a short note from our late host and friend the Earl, with a thin, pale blue check for twenty thousand perfectly good pounds sterling enclosed with it, drawn on the Bank of England, filled out in Thorneycroft's handwriting, and signed, as per the nobiliary custom, with simply the one word: "Puddingham."

"And the date of the check is April 12, 1912, Watson. And now I'm going to keep my promise I made to you out in the woods yesterday morning back of the castle," smiled Holmes, "I split with you fifty-fifty. When I go down to the bank now to deposit this check, I'll write you one of mine for ten thousand pounds, and you can come along to endorse it, deposit it to your credit, and we'll leave the Earl's diamond cuff-buttons at the safety deposit vault, mailing him the receipt for them from there."

"Holmes, you're certainly a gentleman and a scholar," I said. "Thanks."

On our return from the bank, after a few more games of chess, we had an early dinner and retired to a much needed rest, in our bedroom adjoining the

celebrated sitting-room, but I couldn't get the case out of my head, and inquired:

"Say, Holmes, old boy, how was it you didn't grab Launcelot first instead of last, when you got all the evidence at once?"

Holmes had a grouch on just then,—for some reason or other,—and he answered me by throwing one of his shoes in my direction, which I hastily dodged by shoving my head under the bedclothes as he growled:

"Didn't you just make the equivalent of fifty thousand Yankee dollars for three or four days' work, the most of which I did, Watson? For the love of Pete, stow it away in your historical records somewhere and forget it! Dry up and lemme go to sleep now, or I'll climb out there and settle your hash for good!"



Transcriber's corrections

- [p. 19](#): few things in our suit-case[suitcase].
- [p. 38](#): down in your little red notebook[note-book] that at precisely"--here
- [p. 59](#): "Demetrius Xanthopoulos[Xanthapoulos]. I am the second
- [p. 97](#): das races," replied[relied] Olaf, as he scratched his
- [p. 137](#): But Hi didn't mean any 'arm by it, Your[your] Lordship,—er, Mr. 'Olmes.
- [p. 158](#): time is now 9:15 a. m.[A. M.], and I herewith present you with
- [p. 179](#): coat-pocket[coatpocket] for you until you are ready to send

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