

Cabinet. Sometimes we saw him passing in lonely majesty to his inner sanctum, with his eyes staring vaguely and his mind hovering over the Balkans or the Persian Gulf. He was above and beyond us. But McArdle was his first lieutenant, and it was him that we knew. The old man nodded as I entered the room, and he pushed his spectacles far up on his bald forehead.

"Well, Mr. Malone, from all I hear, you seem to be doing very well," said he in his kindly Scotch accent.

I thanked him.

"The colliery explosion was excellent. So was the Southwark fire. You have the true descriptive touch. What did you want to see me about?"

"To ask a favor."

He looked alarmed, and his eyes shunned mine. "Tut, tut! What is it?"

"Do you think, Sir, that you could possibly send me on some mission for the paper? I would do my best to put it through and get you some good copy."

"What sort of mission had you in your mind, Mr. Malone?"

"Well, Sir, anything that had adventure and danger in it. I really would do my very best. The more difficult it was, the better it would suit me."

"You seem very anxious to lose your life."

"To justify my life, Sir."

"Dear me, Mr. Malone, this is very—very exalted! I'm afraid the day of this sort of thing is rather past. The expense of the 'special mission' business hardly justifies the result, and of course in any case it would be only an experienced man, with a name that would command public confidence, who would get such an order. The big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there's no room for romance anywhere. Wait a bit, though!" he added, with a sudden smile upon his face. "Talking of the blank spaces of the map gives me an idea. What about exposing a fraud—a modern Münchhausen—and making him ridiculous? You could show him up as the liar that he is! Eh, Man, it would be fine! How does it appeal to you?"

"Anything—anywhere—I care nothing."

McArdle was plunged in thought for some minutes. "I wonder whether you could get on friendly, or at least on talking terms, with the fellow?" he said at last. "You seem to have a sort of genius for establishing relations with people,—sempathy, I suppose, or animal magnetism, or youthful vitality, or something. I am conscious of it myself."

"You are very good, Sir."



"There's Your Man, Mr. Malone! Now Off You Run!"

"So why should you not try your luck with Professor Challenger, of Enmore Park?"

I dare say I looked a little startled. "Challenger!" I cried. "Professor Challenger, the famous zoologist? Wasn't he the man who broke the skull of Blundell of 'The Gazette'?"

The news editor smiled grimly. "Do you mind? Didn't you say it was adventure you were after?"

"It is all in the way of business, Sir," I answered.

"Exactly. I don't suppose he is always so violent as that. I'm thinking that Blundell got him at the wrong moment, maybe, or in the wrong fashion. You may have better luck, or more tact in handling him. There's something in your line there, I am sure, and 'The Courier' should work it."

"I really know nothing about him," said I. "I only remember his name in connection with the police court proceedings for striking Blundell."

"I have a few notes for your guidance, Mr. Malone. I've had my eye on the professor for sometime." He took a paper from a drawer. "Here is a summary of his record. I give it you briefly:

"Challenger, George Edward. Born: Largs, N. B., 1859. Educ: Largs Academy; Edinburgh University. British Museum Assistant, 1892. Assistant Keeper of Comparative Anthropology Department, 1893. Resigned after acrimonious correspondence, same year. Winner of Crayston Medal for zoological research. Foreign member of—well, quite a lot of things, about two inches of small type,—Société Belge, American Academy of Sciences, La Plata, etc., etc. Ex-President Paleontological Society. Section H. British Association— So on! So on! Publications: 'Some Observations upon a Series of Kalmuck Skulls,' 'Outlines of Vertebrate Evolution,' and numerous papers, including 'The Underlying Fallacy of Weissmannism,' which caused heated discussion at the Zoological Congress of Vienna. Recreations: Walking; Alpine climbing. Address: Enmore Park, Kensington, W.

"There, take it with you. I've nothing more for you tonight."

I pocketed the slip of paper. "One moment, Sir," I said, as I realized that it was a pink bald head and not a red face which was fronting me. "I am not very clear yet. Why I am to interview this gentleman? What has he done?"

The face flashed back again. "Went to South America on a solitary expedition two years ago. Came back last year. Had undoubtedly been to South America; but refused to say exactly where. Began to tell his adventures in a vague way; but somebody started to pick holes, and he just shut up like an oyster. Something wonderful happened—or the man's a champion liar, which is the more probable supposition. Had some damaged photographs, said to be fakes. Got so touchy that he assaults anyone who asks questions, and heaves reporters down the stairs. In my opinion he's just a homicidal megalomaniac with a turn for science. That's your man, Mr. Malone! Now off you run, and see what you can make of him! You're big enough to look after yourself. Anyway, you are all safe,—Employers' Liability Act, you know." A grinning red face turned once more into a pink oval fringed with gingery fluff; the interview was at an end.

I WALKED across to the Savage Club; but instead of turning into it I leaned upon the railings of Adelphi Terrace and gazed thoughtfully for a long time at the brown, oily river. I can always think most sanely and clearly in the open air. I took out the list of Professor Challenger's exploits, and read it over under the electric lamp. Then I had what I can regard only as an inspiration. As a press man, I felt sure from what I had been told that I could never hope to get into touch with this cantankerous professor. But these recriminations twice mentioned in his skeleton biography could mean only that he was a fanatic in science. Was there not an exposed margin there upon which he might be accessible? I would try.

I entered the club. It was just after eleven, and the big room was fairly full, though the rush had not yet set in. I noticed a tall, thin, angular man seated in an armchair by the fire. He turned as I drew my chair up to him. It was the man of all others whom I should have chosen,—Tarp Henry of the staff of "Nature," a thin, dry, leathery creature who was full, to those who knew him, of kindly humanity. I plunged instantly into my subject.

"What do you know of Professor Challenger?"

"Challenger?" he gathered his brows in scientific disapproval. "Challenger was the man who came with some cock and bull story from South America."

"What story?"

"Oh, it was rank nonsense, about some queer animals he had discovered. I believe he has retracted since. Anyhow, he has suppressed it all. He gave an interview to Reuter's, and there was such a howl that he saw it wouldn't do. It was a discreditable