

The Snout

By Edward Lucas White

I

I was not so much conning the specimens in the Zoological Garden as idly basking in the agreeable morning sunshine and relishing at leisure the perfect weather. So I saw him the instant he turned the corner of the building. At first, I thought I recognized him, then I hesitated. At first he seemed to know me and to be just about to greet me; then he saw past me into the cage. His eyes bulged; his mouth opened into a long egg-shaped oval, till you might almost have said that his jaw dropped; he made an inarticulate sound, partly a grunt, partly the ghost of a howl, and collapsed in a limp heap on the gravel. I had not seen a human being since I passed the gate, some distance away. No one came when I called. So I dragged him to the grass by a bench, untied his faded, shiny cravat, took off his frayed collar and unbuttoned his soiled neckband. Then I peeled his coat off him, rolled it up, and put it under his knees as he lay on his back. I tried to find some water, but could see none. So I sat down on the bench near him. There he lay, his legs and body on the grass, his head in the dry gutter, his arms on the pebbles of the path. I was sure I knew him, but I could not recall when or where we had encountered each other before. Presently he answered to my rough and ready treatment and opened his eyes, blinking at me heavily. He drew up his arms to his shoulders and sighed.

“Queer,” he muttered, “I come here because of you and I meet you.

Still I could not remember him and he had revived enough to read my face. He sat up.

“Don’t try to stand up!” I warned him.

He did not need the admonition, but clung to the end of the bench, his head bowed wagglingly over his arms.

“Don’t you remember,” he asked thickly. “You said I had a pretty good smattering of an education on everything except Natural History and Ancient History. I’m hoping for a job in a few days, and I thought I’d put in the time and keep out of mischief brushing up. So I started on Natural History first and—”

He broke off and glared up at me. I remembered him now. I should have recognized him the moment I saw him, for he was daily in my mind. But his luxuriant hair, his tanned skin and above all his changed expression, a sort of look of acquired cosmopolitanism, had baffled me.

“Natural History!” he repeated, in a hoarse whisper. His fingers digging in the slats of the bench he wrenched himself round to face the cage.

“Hell!” he screamed. “There it is yet!”

He held on by the end iron-arm of the bench, shaking, almost sobbing.

“What’s wrong with you?” I queried. “What do think you see in that cage?”

“Do you see anything in that cage?” he demanded in reply.

“Certainly,” I told him.

“Then for God’s sake,” he pleaded. “What do you see?”

I told him briefly.

“Good Lord,” he ejaculated. “Are we both crazy?”

“Nothing crazy about either of us,” I assured him. “What we see in the cage is what is in the cage.”

“Is there such a critter as that, honest?” he pressed me.

I gave him a pretty full account of the animal, its habits and relationships.

“Well,” he said, weakly, “I suppose you’re telling the truth. If there is such a critter let’s get where I can’t see it.”

I helped him to his feet and assisted him to a bench altogether out of sight of that building. He put ‘on his collar and knotted his cravat. While I had held it I had noticed that, through its greasy condition, it showed plainly having been a very expensive cravat. His clothes I remarked were seedy, but had been of the very best when new.

“Let’s find a drinking fountain,” he suggested, “I can walk now.”

We found one not far away and at no great distance from it a shaded bench facing an agreeable view. I offered him a cigarette and we smoked. I meant to let him do most of the talking.

“Do you know,” he began presently. “Things you said to me run in my head more than anything anybody ever said to me. I suppose it’s because you’re a sort of philosopher and student of human nature and what you say is true. For instance, you said that criminals would get off clear three times out of four, if they just kept their mouths shut, but they have to confide in some one, even against all reason. That’s just the way with me now.”

“You aren’t a criminal,” I interrupted him. “You lost your temper and made a fool of yourself just once. If you’d been a criminal and had done what you did, you’d have likely enough got off, because you’d have calculated how to do it. As it was you put yourself in a position where everything was against you and you had no chance. We were all sorry for you.”

“You most of all,” he amplified. “You treated me bully.”

“But we were all sorry for you,” I repeated, “and all the jury too, and the judge. You’re no criminal.”

“How do you know,” he demanded defiantly, “what I have done since I got out?”

“You’ve grown a pretty good head of hair,” I commented.

“I’ve had time,” he said. “I’ve been all over the world and blown in ten thousand dollars.”

“And never seen—” I began.

He interrupted me at the third word.

“Don’t say it,” he shuddered. “I never had, nor heard of one. But I wasn’t after caged animals while I had any money left. I didn’t remember your advice and your other talk till I was broke. Now, it’s just as you said, I’ve just got to tell you. That’s the criminal in me, I suppose.”

“You’re no criminal,” I repeated soothingly.

“Hell,” he snarled, “a year in the pen makes a man a criminal, if he never was before.”

“Not necessarily,” I encouraged him.

“It’s pretty sure to,” he sighed. “They treated me mighty well and put me to bookkeeping, and I got my full good-conduct allowance. But I met professionals, and they never forget a man.”

“Now it don’t make any difference what I did when I got out, nor what I tried to do nor how I met Rivvin, nor how he put Thwaite after me.. No, nor how Thwaite got hold of me, nor what he said to me, nor anything, right up to the very night, till after we had started.”

He looked me in the eye. His attitude became alert. I could see him warming to his narrative. In fact, when after very little rumination he began it, his early self dropped from him with his boyhood dialect and the jargon of his late associates. He was all the easy cosmopolitan telling his tale with conscious zest.

II

As if it had been broad day Thwaite drove the car at a terrific pace for nearly an hour. Then he stopped it while Rivvin put out every lamp. We had not met or overtaken anything, but when we started again through the moist, starless blackness it was too much for my nerves. Thwaite was as cool as if he could see. I could not so much as guess at him in front of me, but I could feel his self-confidence in every quiver of the car. It was one of those super-expensive makes which are, on any gear, at any speed, on any grade, as noiseless as a puma. Thwaite never hesitated in the gloom; he kept straight or swerved, crept or darted, whizzed or crawled for nearly an hour more. Then he turned sharp to the left and uphill. I could feel and smell the soaked, hanging boughs close above and about me, the wet foliage on them, and the deep sodden earth mold that squelched under the tires. We climbed steeply, came to a level and then backed and went forward a length or so a half dozen times, turning. Then we stopped dead. Thwaite moved things that clicked or thumped and presently said:

“Now I’ll demonstrate how a man can fill his gasoline tank in the pitch dark if he knows the touch system.”

After some more time he said:

“Rivvin, go bury this.”

Rivvin swore, but went. Thwaite climbed in beside me. When Rivvin returned he climbed in on the other side of me. He lit his pipe, Thwaite lit a cigar and looked at his watch. After I had lit too, Thwaite said:

“We’ve plenty of time to talk here and all you have to do is to listen. I’ll begin at the beginning. When old Hiram Eversleigh died—”

“You don’t mean—” I interrupted him.

“Shut up!” he snapped, “and keep your mouth shut. You’ll have your say when I’ve done.”

I shut up.

“When old man Eversleigh died,” he resumed, “the income of the fortune was divided equally among his sons. You know what the others did with their shares: palaces in New York and London and Paris, chateaux on the Breton Coast, deer and grouse moors in Scotland, steam yachts and all the rest of it, the same as they have kept it up ever since. At first Vortigern Eversleigh went in for all that sort of thing harder than any one of his brothers. But when his wife died, more than forty years ago, he stopped all that at once. He sold everything else, bought this place, put the wall round it and built that infinity of structures inside. You’ve seen the pinnacles and roofs of them, and that’s all anybody I ever talked to has ever seen of them since they were finished about five years after his wife’s death. You’ve seen the two gate-houses and you know each is big even for a millionaire’s mansion. You can judge of the size and extent of the complication of buildings that make up the castle or mansion-house or whatever you choose to call it. There Vortigern Eversleigh lived. Not once did he ever leave it that I can learn of. There he died. Since his death, full twenty years ago, his share of the Eversleigh income has been paid to his heir. No one has ever seen that heir. From what I’ll tell you presently you’ll see as I have that the heir is probably not a woman. But nobody knows anything about him, he has never been outside these miles of wall. Yet not one of the greedy, selfish Eversleigh grandsons and grand-daughters, and sons-in-law and daughters-in-law, has ever objected to the payment to that heir of the full entire portion of Vortigern Eversleigh, and that portion has been two hundred thousand~ dollars a month, paid in gold on the first banking day of each month. I found that out for sure, for there have been disputes about the division of Wulfstan Eversleigh’s share and of

Cedric Eversleigh's share and I made certain from the papers in the suits. All that money, or the value of it, has been either reinvested or spent inside that park wall. Not much has been reinvested. I got on the track of the heir's purchases. He buys musical instruments any quantity and at any price. Those were the first things I made sure of. And artists' materials, paints, brushes, canvas, tools, woods, clay, marble, tons of clay and great blocks of superfine-grained marble. He's no magpie collecting expensive trash for a whim; he knows what he wants and why; he has taste. He buys horses and saddlery and carriages, furniture and carpets and tapestries, pictures, all landscapes, never any figure pictures, he buys photographs of pictures by the ten thousand, and he buys fine porcelains, rare vases, table silver, ornaments of Venetian glass, silver and gold filigree, jewelry, watches, chains, gems, pearls, rubies, emeralds and—diamonds; diamonds!"

Thwaite's voice shook with excitement, though he kept it soft and even.

"Oh, I did two years investigating," he went on, "I know. People blabbed. But not any of the servants or grooms or gardeners. Not a word could I get, at first or second or third hand, from them or any of their relatives or friends. They keep dumb. They know which side their bread is buttered on. But some of the discharged tradesmen's assistants told all I wanted to know and I got it straight, though not direct. No one from outside ever gets into that place beyond the big paved courtyards of the gate-houses. Every bit of supplies for all that regiment of servants goes into the brownstone gate-house. The outer gates open and the wagon or whatever it is drives under the archway. There it halts. The outer gates shut and the inner gates open. It drives into the courtyard. Then the Major-domo (I suppose that wouldn't be too big a name for him) makes his selections. The inner gates of the other gateway open and the wagon drives under the archway and halts. The inner gates close fast and the outer gates open. That's the way with every wagon and only one enters at a time. Everything is carried through the gate-house to the smaller inner courtyard and loaded on the wagons of the estate to be driven up to the mansion.

"Everything like furniture, for instance, comes into the courtyard of the green-stone gate-house. There a sort of auditor verifies the inventory and receipts for the goods before two witnesses from the dealers and two for the estate. The consignment may be kept a day or a month; it may be returned intact or kept entire; any difference is settled for at once upon return of what is rejected. So with jewelry. I had luck. I found out for certain that more than a million dollars worth of diamonds alone have gone into this place in the last ten years and stayed there."

Thwaite paused dramatically. I never said a word and we sat there in the rear seat of that stationary auto, the leather creaking as we breathed, Rivyin sucking at his pipe, and the leaves dripping above us; not another sound.

"It's all in there," Thwaite began again. "The biggest stack of loot in North America. And this is going to be the biggest and most successful burglary ever perpetrated on this continent. And no one will ever be convicted for it or so much as suspected of it. Mark my words."

"I do," I broke in, "and I don't feel a bit better than when we started. You promised to explain and you said I'd be as eager and confident as you and Rivvin. I acknowledge the bait, admitting all you say is true, and it doesn't seem likely. But do you suppose any recluse millionaire eccentric is going to live unguarded? If he is careless himself his household are the reverse. By what you tell of the gate-houses there are precautions enough. Diamonds are tempting if you like, but so is the bullion in the mint. By your account all this accumulation of treasure you imagine is as safe where it is as the gold reserve in the United States Treasury. You scare me, you don't reassure me."

“Keep your head,” Thwaite interrupted. “I’m no fool. I’ve spent years on this scheme. After I was sure of the prize I made sure of the means. There are precautions a-many, but not enough. How simple to put a watchman’s cottage every hundred yards on the other side of the road across from the wall? They haven’t done it. How simple to light the road and the outside of the wall? They haven’t done that. Nor have they thought of any one of the twenty other simple outside precautions. The park’s big enough to be lonely. And outside the wall is all dark, lonely road and unfenced, empty woods like this. They’re overconfident. They think their wall and their gate-houses are enough. And they are not. They think their outside precautions are perfect. They are not. I know. I’ve been over that wall ten times, twenty times, fifty times. I’ve risked it and I have risked man-traps and spring guns and alarm wires. There aren’t any. There isn’t any night patrol, nor any regular day patrol, only casual gardeners and such. I know. I made sure of it by crawling all over the place on my belly like an Iroquois Indian in one of Cooper’s novels. They are so confident of the potency of their wall that they haven’t so much as a watch dog, nor any dog of any kind.”

I was certainly startled.

“No dog!” I exclaimed. “Are you sure?”

“Dead sure!” Thwaite returned, triumphantly, “And sure there never has been a dog on the place.”

“How could you be sure of that?” I cavilled.

“I’m coming to that,” Thwaite went on, “I could not get anybody that ever belonged to the place to talk, but I managed to arrange to overhear two of them talking to each other; and more than once, too. Most of what they said was no use to me, but I overheard scraps I could piece together. There’s a cross-wall that divides the park. In the smaller division, into which the lodge gates lead, are the homes of all the caretakers and servants, of the overseers and manager and of the estate doctor; for there is an estate doctor. He has two assistants, young men, frequently changed. He is married like most of the retinue. There is a sort of village of them inside the outer wall, outside the inner cross-wall. Some of them have been there thirty-five years. When they get too old they are pensioned off and sent away, somewhere; far off, for I could not get a clue to any pensioner.

“The valets or keepers, whichever they are, and there are many of them, to relieve each other, are all unmarried except two or three of the most trusted. The rest are all brought over from England and shipped back usually after four or five years of service. The men I overheard were two of these, an old hand soon to finish his enlistment, as he called it, and go home, and the lad he was training to take his place. All these specials have plenty of time off to spend outside. They’d sit over their beer for two or three hours at a time, chatting on, Appleshaw giving points to Kitworth or Kitworth asking questions. I learnt from them about the cross-wall.”

“Never’s been a woman t’ other side of it since it was built,” Appleshaw said.

“I shouldn’t have thought it,” Kitworth ruminated.

“Can you imagine a woman,” Appleshaw asked, “standin’ him?”

“No,” Kitworth admitted, “I hardly can. But some women’ll stand more’n a man.”

“Anyhow,” Appleshaw added, “he can’t abide the sight of a woman.”

“Odd,” said Kitworth, “I’ve heard his kind are all the other way.”

“They are, as we know,” Appleshaw replied, “havin’ watched ’em; but he ain’t. He can’t endure ’em.”

“I suppose it’s the same way about dogs,” Kitworth reflected.

“No dog’d ever get used to him,” Appleshaw agreed, “and he’s that afraid of dogs, they’re not allowed inside the place anywhere. Never’s been one here since he was born, I’m told. No, nor any cat, either, not one even.”

Another time I heard Appleshaw say:

“He built the museums, and the pavilion and the towers, the rest was built before he grew up.”

Generally I could not hear much of Kitworth’s utterances, he talked so low. I once heard Appleshaw reply:

‘Sometimes nights and nights he’ll be quiet as anybody, lights out early and sleep sound for all we know. Again he’ll be up all night, every window blazin’, or up late, till after midnight. Whoever’s on duty sees the night out, nobody else’s business, unless they send an alarm for help, and that ain’t often; not twice a year. Mostly he’s as quiet as you or me, as long as he’s obeyed.

“His temper’s short though. Now he’ll fly into a rage if he’s not answered quick; again he’ll storm if the watchers come near him uncalled.”

Of long inaudible whispers I caught fragments.

Once:

“Oh, then he’ll have no one near. You can hear him sobbing like a child. When he’s worst you’ll hear him, still nights, howlin’ and screamin’ like a lost soul.”

Again:

“Clean-fleshed as a child and no more hairy than you or me.”

Again:

“Fiddle? No violinist can beat him. I’ve listened hours. It makes you think of your sins. An’ then it’ll change an’ you remember your first sweetheart, an’ spring rains and flowers, an’ when you was a child on your mother’s knee. It tears your heart out.”

The two phrases that seemed to mean most were:

“He won’t stan’ any interference.”

And:

“Never a lock touched till daylight after he’s once locked in.”

“Now what do you think?” Thwaite asked me.

“It sounds,” I said, “as if the place were a one-patient asylum for a lunatic with long lucid intervals.”

“Something like that,” Thwaite answered, “but there seems to be more in it than that. I can’t make all the things I hear fit. Appleshaw said one thing that runs in my head:

“Seem’ him in the suds give me a turn:’

And Kitworth said once:

“It was the bright colors alongside of it that made my blood run cold.”

And Appleshaw said more than once, in varying words, but always with the same meaning tone:

“You’ll never get over bein’ afraid of him. But you’ll respect him more and more, you’ll almost love him. You won’t fear him for his looks, but for his awful wisdom. He’s that wise, no man is more so.”

Once Kitworth answered:

“I don’t envy Sturry locked in there with him.”

“Sturry nor none of us that’s his most trusted man for the time bein’ is not to be envied,” Appleshaw agreed. “But you’ll come to it, as I have, if you’re the man I take you for.”

“That’s about all I got from listening,” Thwaite went on, “the rest I got from watching and scouting. I made sure of the building they call the Pavilion, that’s his usual home. But sometimes

he spends his nights in one or the other of the towers, they stand all by themselves. Sometimes the lights are all out after ten o'clock or even nine; then again they're on till after midnight. Sometimes they come on late, two o'clock or three. I have heard music too, violin music, as Appleshaw described it, and organ music, too; but no howling. He is certainly a lunatic, judging by the statuary."

"Statuary?" I queried.

"Yes," Thwaite said, "statuary. Big figures and groups, all crazy men with heads like elephants or American eagles, perfectly crazy statuary. But all well-done. They stand all about the park. The little, square building between the Pavilion and the green tower is his sculpture studio."

"You seem to know the place mighty well," I said.

"I do," Thwaite assented, "I've gotten to know it well. At first I tried nights like this. Then I dared starlight. Then I dared even moonlight. I've never had a scare. I've sat on the front steps of the Pavilion at one o'clock of starlight night and never been challenged. I even tried staying in all day, hiding in some bushes, hoping to see him."

"Ever see him?" I inquired.

"Never," Thwaite answered, "I've heard him though. He rides horseback after dark. I've watched the horse being led up and down in front of the Pavilion, till it got too dark to see it from where I was hid. I've heard it pass me in the dark. But I could never get the horse against the sky to see what was on it. Hiding and getting downhill of a road, close to it, don't go together."

"You didn't see him the day you spent there?" I insisted.

"No," Thwaite said, "I didn't. I was disappointed too. For a big auto purred up to the Pavilion entrance and stood under the porte cochère. But when it spun round the park there was nobody in it, only the chauffeur in front and a pet monkey on the back seat."

"A pet monkey!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "You know how a dog, a Newfoundland, or a terrier, will sit up in an auto and look grand and superior and enjoy himself? Well, that monkey sat there just like that turning his head one way and the other taking in the view."

"What was he like?" I asked.

"Sort of dog-faced ape," Thwaite told me, "more like a mastiff."

Rivvin grunted.

"This isn't business," Thwaite went on, "we've got to get down to business. The point is the wall is their only guard, there's no dog, perhaps because of the pet monkey as much as anything else. They lock Mr. Eversleigh up every night with only one valet to take care of him. They never interfere whatever noise they hear or light they see, unless the alarm is sent out and I have located the alarm wires you are to cut. That's all. Do you go?"

Rivvin was sitting close to me, half on me. I could feel his great muscles and the butt of his pistol against my hip.

"I come with you," I said.

"Of your own accord?" Thwaite insisted.

The butt of that pistol moved as Rivvin breathed.

"I come of my own accord," I said.

Afoot Thwaite led as confidently as he had driven the car. It was the stillest, pitchiest night I ever experienced, without light, air, sound or smell to guide anyone: through that fog Thwaite sped like a man moving about his own bedroom, never for a second at a loss.

"Here's the place," he said at the wall, and guided my hand to feel the ring-bolt in the grass at its foot. Rivvin made a back for him and I scrambled up on the two. Tip-toe on Thwaite's shoulders I could just finger the coping.

"Stand on my head, you fool!" he whispered.

I clutched the coping. Once astraddle of it I let down one end of the silk ladder.

"Fast!" breathed Thwaite from below.

I drew it taut and went down. The first sweep of my fingers in the grass found the other ring-bolt. I made the ladder fast and gave it the signal twitches. Rivvin came over first, then Thwaite. Through the park he led evenly. When he halted he caught me by the elbow and asked:

"Can you see any lights?"

"Not a light," I told him.

"Same here," he said, "there are no lights. Every window is dark. We're in luck."

He led again for a while. Stopping he said only:

"Here's where you shin up. Cut every wire, but don't waste time cutting any twice.

The details of his directions were exact. I found every handhold and foothold as he had schooled me. But I needed all my nerve. I realized that no heavyweight like Rivvin or Thwaite could have done it. When I came down I was limp and tottery.

"Just one swallow!" Thwaite said, putting a flask to my lips. Then we went on. The night was so black and the fog so thick that I saw no loom of the building till we were against its wall.

"Here's where you go in," Thwaite directed.

Doubly I understood why I was with them. Neither could have squeezed through that aperture in the stone. I barely managed it. Inside, instead of the sliding crash I had dreaded, I landed with a mere crunch, the coal in that bin was not anthracite. Likewise the bin under the window was for soft-coal. I blessed my luck and felt encouraged. The window I got open without too much work. Rivvin and Thwaite slid in. We crunched downhill four or five steps and stood on a firm floor. Rivvin flashed his electric candle boldly round. We were between a suite of trim coal-bins and a battery of serried furnaces. There was no door at either end of the open space in which we stood. I had a momentary vision of the alternate windows and coal-chutes above the bins, of two big panels of shiny, colored tiling, of clear brick-work, fresh-painted, jetty iron and dazzling-white brass-ringed asbestos, of a black vacancy between two furnaces. Toward that I half heard, half felt Rivvin turn. During the rest of our adventure he led, Thwaite followed and I mostly tagged or groped after Thwaite, often judging of their position or movement by that combination of senses which is neither hearing nor touch, though partly both.

Rivvin's torch flashed again. We were in a cement-floored, brick-walled passage, with a door at each end and on the side facing us doors in a bewildering row. In the darkness that came after the flash I followed the others to the right. Well through the doorway we stood still, breathing and listening. When Rivvin illuminated our environment we saw about us thousands of bottles, all set aslant, neck down, in tiers of racks that reached to the ceiling. Edging between them we made the circuit of the cellar, but found no sign of any door save that by which we had entered. A whispered growl from Rivvin, a nudge from Thwaite and we went back the full length of the passage. Again we found ourselves in a wine vault, the duplicate of that we had left, and with the same peculiarity.

Our curiosity overcame any prudence. Rivvin, instead of flashing his torch at intervals, kept the light steady, and we scrutinized, examined and whispered our astonishment. As in its fellow there was not in all this vault any spare space, the aisles were narrow, the racks reached the girders supporting the flat arches, every rack was so full that a holder empty of its bottle was scarcely findable. And there was not in all that great cellar, there was not among all those tens of thousands of bottles a magnum, or a quart or even a pint. They were all splits. We handled a number and all had the same label. I know now what the device was, from seeing it so often and so much larger afterwards, but there it seemed a picture of a skirt-dancer leading an alligator by a dog chain. There was no name of any wine or liquor on any bottle, but each label had a red number, 17, or 45 or 328, above the picture, and under it:

“Bottled for Hengist Eversleigh.”

“We know his name now,” Thwaite whispered. Back in the passage Rivvin took the first door to the left. It brought us to an easy stone stair between walls, which turned twice to the left at broad landings.

When we trod a softer footing we stood a long time breathing cautiously and listening.

Presently Rivvin flashed his light. It showed to our left a carpeted stair, the dull red carpet bulging up over thick pads and held down by brass stair-rods; the polished quartered oak of the molded door-jamb or end of wainscot beyond it; the floor-covering of brownish-yellow or yellowish brown linoleum or something similar, made to look like inlaid wood; and the feet, legs and thighs of a big stocky man. The light shone but the fraction of a second, yet it showed plain his knee-breeches, tight stockings on his big calves, and bright buckles at his knees and on his low shoes.

There was no loud sound, but the blurred brushy noise of a mute struggle. I backed against a window-sill and could back no further. All I could hear was the shuffling, rasping sounds of the fight, and panting that became a sort of gurgle.

Again the light flashed and stayed full bright. I saw that it was Thwaite struggling with the man, and that one of his big hands was on Thwaite’s throat. Thwaite had him round the neck and his face was against Thwaite’s chest. His hair was brownish. Rivvin’s slung-shot crunched horribly on his skull. Instantly the light went out.

Thwaite, radiating heat like a stove, stood gasping close by me. I heard no other noise after the body thudded on the floor except that on the carpeted stair I seemed to hear light treads, as it were of a big dog or of a frightened child, padding away upward.

“Did you hear anything?” I whispered.

Rivvin punched me.

After Thwaite was breathing naturally, he turned on his torch and Rivvin did the same.

The dead man was oldish, over fifty I should judge, tall, large in all his dimensions, and spare, though heavy. His clothing was a gold-laced livery of green velvet, with green velvet knee breeches, green silk stockings and green leather pumps. The four buckles were gold.

Thwaite startled me by speaking out loud.

“I take it, Rivvin,” he said, “this is the trusted valet. He would have yelled if there had been anybody to call. Either we have this building to ourselves or we have no one to deal with except Mr. Hengist Eversleigh.”

Rivvin grunted.

“If he is here,” Thwaite went on, “he’s trying to send the alarm over the cut wires, or he’s frightened and hiding. Let’s find him and finish him, if he’s here, and then find his diamonds. Anyway let’s find those diamonds.”

Rivvin grunted.

Swiftly they led from room to room and floor to floor. Not a door resisted. We had been curious and astonished in the wine-vaults; above we were electrified and numb. We were in a palace of wonders, among such a profusion of valuables that even Rivvin, after the second or third opportunity, ceased any attempt to pocket or bag anything. We came upon nothing living, found no door locked and apparently made the tour of the entire building.

When they halted, I halted. We were delirious with amazement, frantic with inquisitiveness, frenzied with curiosity, incredulous, hysterical, dazed and quivering.

Thwaite spoke in the dark.

"I'm going to see this place plain, all over it, if I die for it."

They flashed their torches. We were right beside the body of the murdered footman. Rivvin and Thwaite did not seem to mind the corpse. They waved their torches until one fell on an electric-light button.

"Hope those wires are underground," Thwaite remarked. He pushed the button and the electric lights came on full and strong. We were apparently at the foot of the back stairs, in a sort of lobby, an expanded passage-way out of which opened several doors.

We all three regarded the knobs of those doors. As we had half seen by flash-light on every door everywhere each door had two knobs, one like any door-knob, the other about half way between it and the floor. Rivvin opened one which proved to lead into a broom closet. He tried the knobs, Thwaite and I watching too. The lock and latch were at the upper knob, but controlled by either knob indifferently. They tried another door, but my eyes would roam to the dead body.

Rivvin and Thwaite paid no more attention to it than if it had not been there. I had never seen but one killed man before and neither wanted to be reminded of that one nor relished the sight of this one. I stared down the blackness of the stone stair up which we had come or glanced into the dimness of the padded stairway.

Then Rivvin, feeling inside the open door, found the button and turned on the lights. It was a bigish dining-room, the four corners cut off by inset glass-framed shelved closets, full of china and glassware. The furniture was oak.

"Servants dining-room," Thwaite commented.

Turning on the lights in each we went through a series of rooms; a sort of sitting-room, with card-tables and checker-boards; a library walled with bookcases and open book-shelves, its two stout oak tables littered with magazines and newspapers; a billiard room with three tables, a billiard-table, a pool-table and one for bagatelle; a sort of lounging room, all leather-covered sofas and deep armchairs; an entry with hat-hooks and umbrella-stands, the outer door dark oak with a great deal of stained glass set in and around it.

"All servants' rooms," Thwaite commented. "Every bit of the furniture is natural man-size. Let's go on."

Back we went along a passage and into a big kitchen beyond the dining-room.

"Never mind the pantries till we come down again," Thwaite commanded. "Let's go upstairs. We'll do the banqueting-hall after those bedrooms, and the writing rooms and study last. I want a real sight of those pictures."

They passed the dead flunkey as if he had not been there at all.

On the floor above Thwaite touched Rivvin's elbow.

"I forgot these," he said.

We inspected a medium-sized sitting-room with a round center-table, an armchair drawn up by it, and in the armchair a magazine and a sort of wadded smoking-jacket. Next this room was a bedroom and a bathroom.

“Mr. Footman’s quarters,” Thwaite remarked, staring unconcernedly at a photograph of a dumpy young woman and two small children, set on the bureau. “All man-size furniture here, too.”

Rivvin nodded.

Up the second flight of that back-stair we went again. It ended in a squarish hallway or lobby or room with nothing in it but two settees. It had two doors.

Rivvin pushed one open, felt up and down for the electric button and found it.

We all three gasped; we almost shouted. We had had glimpses of this gallery before, but the flood of light from a thousand bulbs under inverted trough-reflectors dazzled us; the pictures fairly petrified us.

The glare terrified me.

“Surely we are crazy,” I objected, “to make all this illumination. It’s certain to give the alarm.”

“Alarm nothing,” Thwaite snapped. “Haven’t I watched these buildings night after night. I told you he is never disturbed at any hour, lights or no lights.”

My feeble protest thus brushed away I became absorbed, like the others, in those incredible paintings. Rivvin was merely stupidly dazed in uncomprehending wonder, Thwaite keenly speculative, questing for a clue to the origin of their peculiarities, I totally bewildered at the perfection of their execution, shivering at their uncanniness.

The gallery was all of ninety feet long, nearly thirty wide and high. Apparently it had a glass roof above the rectangle of reflectors. The pictures covered all four walls, except the little door at either end. None was very small and several were very large. A few were landscapes, but all had figures in them, most were crowded with figures.

Those figures.

They were human figures, but not one had a human head. The heads were invariably those of birds, animals or fishes, generally of animals, some of common animals, many of creatures I had seen pictures of or had heard of, some of imaginary creatures like dragons or griffons, more than half of the heads either of animals I knew nothing of or which had been invented by the painter.

Close to me when the lights blazed out was a sea picture, blurred grayish foggy weather and a heavy ground-swell; a strange other-world open boat with fish heaped in the bottom of it and standing among them four human figures in shining boots like rubber boots and wet, shiny, loose coats like oilskins, only the boots and skins were red as claret, and the four figures had hyenas’ heads. One was steering and the others were hauling at a net. Caught in the net was a sort of merman, but different from the pictures of mermaids. His shape was all human except the head and hands and feet; every bit of him was covered with fish-scales all rainbowy. He had flat broad fins in place of hands and feet and his head was the head of a fat hog. He was thrashing about in the net in an agony of impotent effort. Queer as the picture was it had a compelling impression of reality, as if the scene were actually happening before our eyes.

Next it was a picnic in a little meadow by a pond between woods with mountains behind it higher up. Every one of the picnickers about the white tablecloth spread on the grass had the head of a different animal, one of a sheep, one of a camel, and the rest of animals like deer, not one of them known to me.

Then next to that was a fight of two compound creatures shaped like centaurs, only they had bulls’ bodies, with human torsos growing out of them, where the necks ought to be, the arms

scaly snakes with open-mouthed, biting heads in place of hands; and instead of human heads roosters' heads, bills open and pecking. Under the creatures in place of bulls' hoofs were yellow roosters' legs, stouter than chickens' legs and with short thick toes, and long sharp spurs like game roosters'. Yet these fantastic chimeras appeared altogether alive and their movements looked natural, yes that's the word, natural.

Every picture was as complete a staggerer as these first three. Every one was signed in the lower left hand corner in neat smallish letters of bright gold paint:

“Hengist Eversleigh”

and a date.

“Mr. Hengist Eversleigh is a lunatic that's certain,” Thwaite commented, “but he unquestionably knows how to paint.”

There must have been more than fifty pictures in that gallery, maybe as many as seventy-five, and every one a nightmare.

Beyond was a shorter gallery of the same width, end on to the side of the first, and beyond that the duplicate of the first; the three taking up three sides of the building. The fourth side was a studio, the size of the second gallery; it had a great skylight of glass tilted sideways all along over one whole wall. It was white-washed, very plain and empty-looking, with two easels, a big one and a little one.

On the little one was a picture of some vegetables and five or six little fairies, as it were, with children's bodies and mice's heads, nibbling at a carrot.

On the big one was a canvas mostly blank. One side of it had a palm-tree in splashy, thick slaps of paint and under it three big crabs with cocoanuts in their claws. A man's feet and legs showed beside them and the rest was unfinished.

The three galleries had fully three hundred paintings, for the smaller gallery contained only small canvases. Besides being impressed with the grotesqueness of the subjects and the perfection of the drawing and coloring, two things struck me as to the pictures collectively.

First, there was not represented in any one of all those paintings any figure of a woman or any female shape of any kind. The beast-headed figures were all, whether clothed or nude, figures of men. The animals, as far as I could see, were all males.

Secondly, nearly half of the pictures were modifications, or parallels or emulations (I could hardly say travesties or imitations), of well-known pictures by great artists, paintings I had seen in public galleries or knew from engravings or photographs or reproductions in books or magazines.

There was a picture like Washington crossing the Delaware and another like Washington saying farewell to his generals. There was a batch of Napoleon pictures; after the paintings of Napoleon at Austerlitz, at Friedland, giving the eagles to his regiments, on the morning of Waterloo, coming down the steps at Fontainebleau, and on the deck of the ship going to St. Helena. There were dozens of other pictures of generals or kings or emperors reviewing victorious armies; two or three of Lincoln. One that hit me hardest, obviously after some picture I had never seen or heard of, of the ghost of Lincoln, far larger than a life-size man, towering above the surviving notabilities of his time on the grandstand reviewing the homecoming Federal army marching through Washington.

In every one of these pictures, the dominant figure, whether it stood for Lincoln, Napoleon, Washington, or some other general or ruler; whatever uniform or regalia clothed its human

shape, had the same head. The heads of the fighting men in all these pictures were those of dogs, all alike in any one picture, but differing from one to another; terriers or wolf-hounds or mastiffs or what not. The heads of any men not soldiers were those of oxen or sheep or horses or some other mild sort of animal. The head of the dominant figure I then took to be invented, legendary, fabulous—oh, that's not the word I want."

"Mythological?" I suggested, the only interruption I interjected into his entire narrative.

Yes, mythological, he returned. I thought it was a mythological creature. The long-jawed head, like a hound's; the little pointed yellow beard under the chin; the black, naked ears, like a hairless dog's ears and yet not doggy, either; the ridge of hair on top of the skull; the triangular shape of the whole head; the close-set, small, beady, terribly knowing eyes; the brilliant patches of color on either side of the muzzle; all these made a piercing impression of individuality and yet seemed not so much actual as mythological.

It takes a great deal longer to tell what we saw on that third floor than it took to see it. All round the galleries under the pictures were cases of drawers, solidly built in one length like a counter and about as high. Thwaite went down one side of the gallery and Rivvin down the other, pulling them out and slamming them shut again. All I saw held photographs of pictures. But Rivvin and Thwaite were taking no chances and looked into every drawer. I had plenty of time to gaze about me and circulated at a sort of cantering trot around the green-velvet miniature sofas and settees placed back to back down the middle of the floor-space. It seemed to me that Mr. Hengist Eversleigh was a great master of figure and landscape drawing, color, light and perspective.

As we went down the duplicate staircase at the other corner from where we came up Thwaite said:

"Now for those bedrooms."

By the stair we found another valet's or footman's apartment, sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom, just like the one by the other stair. And there were four more between them, under the studio and over the lounging-rooms.

On the east and west sides of the building were "the" bedrooms, twelve apartments, six on each side; each of the twelve made up of a bedroom, a dressing-room and a bathroom.

The beds were about three feet long, and proportionately narrow and low. The furniture, bureaus, tables, chairs, chests-of-drawers and the rest, harmonized with the dimensions of the beds, except the cheval-glasses and wall-mirrors which reached the ceilings. The bathtubs were almost pools, about nine feet by six and all of three feet deep, each a single block of porcelain.

The shapes and sizes and styles of the furniture were duplicated all through, but the colors varied, so that the twelve suites were in twelve colors; black, white, gray and brown, and light and dark yellow, red, green and blue; wall coverings, hangings, carpets and rugs all to match in each suite. The panels of the walls had the same picture, however, repeated over and over, two, four or six times to a room and in every suite alike.

This picture was the design I had failed to make out on the labels of the bottles. It was set as a medallion in each panel of the blue or red walls, or whatever other color they were. The background of the picture was a vague sort of palish sky and blurred, hazy clouds above tropical-looking foliage. The chief figure was an angel, in flowing white robes, floating on silvery-plumed wings widespread. The angel's face was a human face, the only human face in any picture in that palace, the face of a grave, gentle, rather girlish young man.

The creature the angel was leading was a huge, bulky crocodile, with a gold collar about its neck, and a gold chain from that, not to the angel's hand, but to a gold fetter about his wrist.

Under each picture was a verse of four lines, always the same.

“Let not your baser nature drag you down.
Utter no whimper, not one sigh or moan,
Hopeless of respite, solace, palm or crown
Live out your life unflinching and alone.”

I saw it so often I shall never forget it.

The bathrooms were luxurious in the extreme, a needle-bath, a shower-bath, two basins of different sizes in each, besides the sunk pool-tub. The dressing-rooms has each a variety of wardrobes. One or two we opened, finding in each several suits of little clothes, as if for a boy under six years old. One closet had shelf above shelf of small shoes, not much over four inches long.

“Evidently,” Thwaite remarked, “Hengist Eversleigh is a dwarf, whatever else he is.”

Rivvin left the wardrobes and closets alone after the first few.

Each bedroom had in it nothing but the bed and on each side of it a sort of wine-cooler, like a pail with a lid, but bigger, set on three short legs so that its top was level with the bed. We opened most of them; every one we opened was filled with ice, bedded in which were several half-pint bottles. Every one of the twelve beds had the covers carefully turned down. Not one showed any sign of having been occupied. The wine-coolers were solid silver but we left them where they were. As Thwaite remarked, it would have taken two full-sized freight cars to contain the silver we had seen.

In the dressing-rooms the articles like brushes and combs on the bureaus were all of gold, and most set with jewels. Rivvin began to fill a bag with those entirely of metal, but even he made no attempt to tear the backs off the brushes or to waste energy on any other breakage. By the time we had scanned the twelve suites Rivvin could barely carry his bag.

The front room on the south side of the building was a library full of small, showily-bound books in glass-fronted cases all the way to the ceiling, covering every wall except where the two doors and six windows opened. There were small, narrow tables, the height of those in the dressing-rooms. There were magazines on them and papers. Thwaite opened a bookcase and I another and we looked at three or four books. Each had in it a book-plate with the device of the angel and the crocodile.

Rivvin did not find the electric button in the main hallway and we went down the great broad, curving stair by our electric candles. Rivvin turned to the left and we found ourselves in the banquet hall as Thwaite had called it, a room all of forty by thirty and gorgeous beyond any description.

The diminutive table, not three feet square, was a slab of crystal-white glass set on silver-covered legs. The tiny armchair, the only chair in the big room, was solid silver, with a crimson cushion loose in it.

The sideboards and glass-fronted closets paralyzed us. One had fine china and cut glass; wonderful china and glass. But four held a table service of gold, all of pure gold; forks, knives, spoons, plates, bowls, platters, cups, everything; all miniature, but a profusion of everything. We hefted the pieces. They were gold. All the pieces were normal in shape except that instead of wine-glasses, goblets and tumblers were things like broad gravy-boats on stems or short feet, all lopsided, with one projecting edge like the mouth of a pitcher, only broader and flatter. There were dozens of these. Rivvin filled two bags with what two bags would hold. The three bags were all we three could carry, must have been over a hundred and fifty pounds apiece.

“We’ll have to make two trips to the wall,” Thwaite said. “You brought six bags, didn’t you, Rivvin?”

Rivvin grunted.

At the foot of the grand staircase Rivvin found the electric button and flooded the magnificent stairway with light.

The stair itself was all white marble, the rails yellow marble, and the paneling of the dado malachite. But the main feature was the painting above the landing. This was the most amazing of all the paintings we had come upon.

I remembered something like it, an advertisement of a root-beer or talcum powder, or some other proprietary article, representing all the nations of the earth and their rulers in the foreground congratulating the orator.

This picture was about twenty feet wide and higher than its width. There was a throne, a carved and jeweled throne, set on an eminence. There was a wide view on either side of the throne, and all filled with human figures with animal heads, an infinite throng, all facing the throne. Nearest it were figures that seemed meant for all the presidents and kings and queens and emperors of the world. I recognized the robes or uniforms of some of them. Some had heads taken from their national coat of arms, like the heads of the Austrian and Russian eagles. All these figures were paying homage to the figure that stood before the throne; the same monster we had seen in place of Lincoln or Washington or Napoleon in the paintings upstairs.

He stood proudly with one foot on a massive crocodile. He was dressed in a sort of revolutionary uniform, low shoes, with gold buckles, white stockings and knee-breeches, a red waistcoat, and a bright blue coat. His head was the same beast-head of the other pictures, triangular and strange, which I then thought mythological.

Above and behind the throne floated on outspread silver wings the white-robed angel with the Sir Galahad face.

Rivvin shut off the lights almost instantly, but even in the few breaths while I looked I saw it all.

The three sacks of swag we put down by the front door.

The room opposite the banquet-hall was a music room, with an organ and a piano, both with keys and keyboards far smaller than usual; great cases of music books; an array of brass instruments and cellos and more than a hundred violin cases. Thwaite opened one or two.

“These’d be enough to make our fortune,” he said. “If we could get away with them.”

Beyond the music-room was the study. It had in it four desks, miniature in size and the old-fashioned model with drawers below, a lid to turn down and form a writing surface, and a sort of bookcase above with a peaked top. All were carved and on the lids in the carving we read:

**JOURNAL
MUSIC
CRITICISM
BUSINESS**

Thwaite opened the desk marked BUSINESS and pulled open the drawers.

In pigeon-holes of the desk were bundles of new, clean greenbacks and treasury notes of higher denominations; five each of fives, tens, twenties, fifties and hundreds. Thwaite tossed one bundle of each to me and Rivvin and pocketed the rest.

He bulged.

One drawer had a division down the middle. One half was full of ten-dollar gold pieces, the other half of twenties.

"I've heard of misers," said Thwaite, "but this beats hell. Think of that crazy dwarf, a prisoner in this palace, running his hands through this and gloating over the cash he can never use.

Rivvin loaded a bag with the coin and when he had them all he could barely lift the bag. Leaving it where it lay before the desk he strode the length of the room and tried the door at the end.

It was fast.

Instantly Rivvin and Thwaite were like two terriers after a rat.

"This is where the diamonds are," Thwaite declared, "and Mr. Hengist Eversleigh is in there with them."

He and Rivvin conferred a while together.

"You kneel low," Thwaite whispered. "Duck when you open it. He'll fire over you. Then you've got him. See?"

Rivvin tip-toed to the door, knelt and tried key after key in the lock.

There were at least twenty bulbs in the chandelier of that room and the light beat down on him. His red neck dew-lapped over the low collar of his lavenderish shirt, his great broad back showed vast and powerful.

On the other side of the doorway Thwaite stood, his finger at the electric button.

Each had his slung-shot in his left hand. They had spun the cylinders of their revolvers and stuck them in their belts in front before Rivvin began work on the lock.

I heard a click.

Rivvin put up his hand.

The lights went out.

In the black dark we stood, stood until I could almost see the outlines of the windows; less black against the intenser blackness.

Soon I heard another click, and the grate of an opened door.

Then a kind of snarl, a thump like a blow, a sort of strangling gasp, and the cushiony sounds of a struggle.

Thwaite turned on the lights.

Rivvin was in the act of staggering up from his knees. I saw a pair of small, pink hands, the fingers intertwined, locked behind Rivvin's neck. They slipped apart as I caught sight of them.

I had a vision of small feet in little patent leather silver-buckled low-shoes, of green socks, of diminutive legs in white trousers flashing right and left in front of Rivvin, as if he held by the throat a struggling child.

Next I saw that his arms were thrown up, wide apart.

He collapsed and fell back his full length with a dull crash.

Then I saw the snout!

Saw the wolf-jaws vised on his throat!

Saw the blood welling round the dazzling white fangs, and recognized the reality of the sinister head I had seen over and over in his pictures.

Rivvin made the fish-out-of-water contortions of a man being killed.

Thwaite brought his slung-shot down on the beast-head skull.

The blow was enough to crush in a steel cylinder. The beast wrinkled its snout and shook its head from side to side, worrying like a bull-dog at Rivvin's throat.

Again Thwaite struck and again and again. At each blow the portentous head oscillated viciously. The awful thing about it to me was the two blue bosses on each side of the muzzle, like enamel, shiny and hard looking; and the hideous welt of red, like fresh sealing-wax, down between them and along the snout.

Rivvin's struggles grew weaker as the great teeth tore at his throat. He was dead before Thwaite's repeated blows drove in the splintered skull and the clenched jaws relaxed, the snout crinkling and contracting as the dog-teeth slid from their hold.

Thwaite gave the monster two or three more blows, touched Rivvin and fairly dashed out of the room, shouting.

"You stay here!"

I heard the sound of prying and sawing. There alone I looked but once at the dead cracksman.

The thing that had killed him was the size of a four to six year old child, but more stockily built, looked entirely human up to the neck, and was dressed in a coat of bright dark blue, a vest of crimson velvet, and white duck trousers. As I looked the muzzle wriggled for the last time, the jaws fell apart and the carcass rolled sideways. It was the very duplicate in miniature of the figure in the big picture on the staircase landing.

Thwaite came dashing back. Without any sign of any qualm he searched Rivvin and tossed me two or three bundles of greenbacks.

He stood up.

He laughed.

"Curiosity," he said, "will be the death of me." Then he stripped the clothing from the dead monster, kneeling by it.

The beast-hair stopped at the shirt collar. Below that the skin was human, as was the shape, the shape of a forty-year-old man, strong and vigorous and well-made, only dwarfed to the smallness of a child.

Across the hairy breast was tattooed in blue,

"HENGIST EVERSLEIGH."

"Hell," said Thwaite.

He stood up and went to the fatal door. Inside he found the electric button.

The room was small and lined with cases of little drawers, tier on tier, rows of brass knobs on mahogany.

Thwaite opened one.

It was velvet lined and grooved like a jeweler's tray and contained rings, the settings apparently emeralds.

Thwaite dumped them into one of the empty bags he had taken from Rivvin's corpse.

The next case was of similar drawers of rings set with rubies. The first of these Thwaite dumped in with the emeralds.

But then he flew round the room pulling out drawers and slamming them shut, until he came upon trays of unset diamonds. These he emptied into his sack to the last of them, then diamond rings on them, other jewelry set with diamonds, then rubies and emeralds till the sack was full.

He tied its neck, had me open a second sack and was dumping drawer after drawer into that when suddenly he stopped.

His nose worked, worked horridly like that of the dead monster.

I thought he was going crazy and was beginning to laugh nervously, was on the verge of hysterics when he said:

“Smell! Try what you smell.” I sniffed.

“I smell smoke,” I said.

“So do I,” he agreed. “This place is afire.”

“And we locked in!” I exclaimed.

“Locked in?” he sneered. “Bosh. I broke open the front door the instant I was sure they were dead. Come! Drop that empty bag. This is no time for haggling.”

We had to step between the two corpses. Rivvin was horridly dead. The colors had all faded from the snout. The muzzle was all mouse-color.

When we had hold of the bag of coin, Thwaite turned off the electric lights and we struggled out with that and the bag of jewels, and went out into the hallway full of smoke.

“We can carry only these,” Thwaite warned me. “We’ll have to leave the rest.”

I shouldered the bag of coin, and followed him down the steps, across a gravel road, and, oh the relief of treading turf and feeling the fog all about me.

At the wall Thwaite turned and looked back.

“No chance to try for those other bags,” he said.

In fact the red glow was visible at that distance and was fast becoming a glare.

I heard shouts.

We got the bags over the wall and reached the car. Thwaite cranked up at once and we were off.

How we went I could not guess, nor in what directions, nor even how long. Ours was the only vehicle on the roads we darted along.

When the dawn light was near enough for me to see Thwaite stopped the car.

He turned to me.

“Get out!” he said.

“What?” I asked.

He shoved his pistol muzzle in my face.

“You’ve fifty thousand dollars in bank bills in your pockets,” he said. “It’s a half a mile down that road to a railway station. Do you understand English? Get out!”

I got out.

The car shot forward into the morning fog and was gone.

IV

He was silent a long time.

“What did you do then?” I asked.

“Headed for New York,” he said, “and got on a drunk. When I came round I had barely eleven thousand dollars. I headed for Cook’s office and bargained for a ten thousand dollar tour of the world, the most places and the longest time they’d give for the money; the whole cost on them. I not to need a cent after I started.”

“What date was that?” I asked.

He meditated and gave me some approximate indications rather rambling and roundabout.

“What did you do after you left Cook’s?” I asked.

“I put a hundred dollars in a savings bank,” he said. “Bought a lot of clothes and things and started.

“I kept pretty sober all round the world because the only way to get full was by being treated and I had no cash to treat back with.

“When I landed in New York I thought I was all right for life. But no sooner did I have my hundred and odd dollars in my pockets than I got full again. I don’t seem able to keep sober.”

“Are you sober now?” I asked.

“Sure,” he asserted.

He seemed to shed his cosmopolitan vocabulary the moment he came back to everyday matters.

“Let’s see you write what I tell you on this,” I suggested, handing him a fountain-pen and a torn envelope, turned inside out.

Word by word after my dictation he wrote.

“Until you hear from me again

Yours truly,

No Name.

I took the paper from him and studied the handwriting.

“How long were you on that spree?” I asked.

“Which?” he twinkled.

“Before you came to and had but eleven thousand dollars left,” I explained.

“I don’t know,” he said, “I didn’t know anything I had been doing.”

“I can tell you one thing you did,” I said.

“What?” he queried.

“You put four packets, each of one hundred hundred-dollar bills, in a thin manila clasp-envelope, directed it to a New York lawyer and mailed the envelope to him with no letter in it, only a half sheet of dirty paper with nothing on it except: ‘Keep this for me until I ask for it,’ and the signature you have just written.”

“Honest?” he enunciated incredulously.

“Fact!” I said.

“Then you believe what I’ve told you,” he exclaimed joyfully.

“Not a bit I don’t,” I asseverated.

“How’s that?” he asked.

“If you were drunk enough,” I explained, “to risk forty thousand dollars in that crazy way, you were drunk enough to dream all the complicated nightmare you have spun out to me.

“If I did,” he argued, “how did I get the fifty thousand odd dollars?”

“I’m willing to suppose you got it with no more dishonesty on your part,” I told him, “than if you had come by it as you described.”

“It makes me mad you won’t believe me,” he said.

“I don’t,” I finished.

He gloomed in silence. Presently he said:

“I can stand looking at him now,” and led the way to the cage where the big blue-nosed mandril chattered his inarticulate bestialities and scratched himself intermittently.

He stared at the brute.

“And you don’t believe me?” he regretted.

“No, I don’t,” I repeated, “and I’m not going to. The thing’s incredible.”

“Couldn’t there be a mongrel, a hybrid?” he suggested.

“Put that out of your head,” I told him, “the whole thing’s incredible.”

“Suppose she’d seen a critter like this,” he persisted, “just at the wrong time?”

“Bosh!” I said. “Old wives’ tales! Superstition! Impossibility!”

“His head,” he declared, “was just like that.” He shuddered.

“Somebody put drops in some of your drink,” I suggested. “Anyhow, let’s talk about something else. Come and have lunch with me.”

Over the lunch I asked him:

“What city did you like best of all you saw?”

“Paris for mine,” he grinned, “Paris forever.”

“I tell you what I advise you to do,” I said.

“What’s that?” he asked, his eyes bright on mine. “Let me buy you an annuity with your forty thousand,” I explained, “an annuity payable in Paris. There’s enough interest already to pay your way to Paris and leave you some cash till the first quarterly payment comes due.”

“You wouldn’t feel yourself defrauding the Eversleighs?” he questioned.

“If I’m defrauding any people,” I said, “I don’t know who they are.”

“How about the fire?” he insisted. “I’ll bet you heard of it. Don’t the dates agree?”

“The dates agree,” I admitted. “And the servants were all dismissed, the remaining buildings and walls torn down and the place cut up and sold in portions just about as it would have been if your story were true.”

“There now!” he ejaculated. “You do believe me!”

“I do not!” I insisted. “And the proof is that I’m ready to carry out my annuity plan for you.”

“I agree,” he said, and stood up from the lunch table.

“Where are we going now?” he inquired as we left the restaurant.

“Just you come with me,” I told him, “and ask no questions.”

I piloted him to the Museum of Archæology and led him circuitously to what I meant for an experiment on him. I dwelt on other subjects nearby and waited for him to see it himself.

He saw.

He grabbed me by the arm.

“That’s him!” he whispered. “Not the size, but his very expression, in all his pictures.”

He pointed to that magnificent, enigmatical black-diorite twelfth-dynasty statue which represents neither Anubis nor Seth, but some nameless cynocephalus god.

“That’s him,” he repeated. “Look at the awful wisdom of him.”

I said nothing.

“And you brought me here!” he cried. “You meant me to see this! You do believe!”

“No,” I maintained. “I do not believe.”

After I waved a farewell to him from the pier I never saw him again.

We had an extensive correspondence six months later when he wanted his annuity exchanged for a joint-life annuity for himself and his bride. I arranged it for him with less difficulty than I had anticipated. His letter of thanks, explaining that a French wife was so great an economy that the shrinkage in his income was more than made up for, was the last I heard from him.

As he died more than a year ago and his widow is already married, this story can do him no harm. If the Eversleighs were defrauded they will never feel it and my conscience, at least, gives me no twinges.