I had not seen Raffles for a month or more, and I was sadly in need of his advice. My life was being made a burden to me by a wretch who had obtained a bill of sale over the furniture in Mount Street, and it was only by living elsewhere that I could keep the vulpine villain from my door. This cost ready money, and my balance at the bank was sorely in need of another lift from Raffles. Yet, had he been in my shoes, he could not have vanished more effectually than he had done, both from the face of the town and from the ken of all who knew him.

It was late in August; he never played first-class cricket after July, when a scholastic understudy took his place in the Middlesex eleven. And in vain did I scour my Field and my Sportsman for the country-house matches with which he wilfully preferred to wind up the season; the matches were there, but never the magic name of A. J. Raffles. Nothing was known of him at the Albany; he had left no instructions about his letters, either there or at the club. I began to fear that some evil had overtaken him. I scanned the features of captured criminals in the illustrated Sunday papers; on each occasion I breathed again; nor was anything worthy of Raffles going on. I will not deny that I was less anxious on his account than on my own. But it was a double relief to me when he gave a first characteristic sign of life.

I had called at the Albany for the fiftieth time, and returned to Piccadilly in my usual despair, when a street sloucher sidled up to me in furtive fashion and inquired if my name was what it is.

"'Cause this 'ere's for you," he rejoined to my affirmative, and with that I felt a crumpled note in my palm.

It was from Raffles. I smoothed out the twisted scrap of paper, and on it were just a couple of lines in pencil:

Meet me in Holland Walk at dark to-night. Walk up and down till I come. – A. J. R.

That was all! Not another syllable after all these weeks, and the few words scribbled in a wild caricature of his scholarly and dainty hand! I was no longer to be alarmed by this sort of thing; it was all so like the Raffles I loved least; and to add to my indignation, when at length I looked up from the mysterious missive, the equally mysterious messenger had disappeared in a manner worthy of the whole affair. He was, however, the first creature I espied under the tattered trees of Holland Walk that evening.

"Seen 'im yet?" he inquired confidentially, blowing a vile cloud from his horrid pipe.

"No, I haven't; and I want to know where you've seen him," I replied sternly. "Why did you run away like that the moment you had given me his note?"

"Orders, orders," was the reply. "I ain't such a juggins as to go agen a toff as makes it worf while to do as I'm bid an' 'old me tongue."

"And who may you be?" I asked jealously. "And what are you to Mr. Raffles?"

"You silly ass, Bunny, don't tell all Kensington that I'm in town!" replied my tatterdemalion, shooting up and smoothing out into a merely shabby Raffles. "Here, take my arm—I'm not so beastly as I look. But neither am I in town, nor in England, nor yet on the face of the earth, for all that's known of me to a single soul but you."

"Then where are you," I asked, "between ourselves?"

"I've taken a house near here for the holidays, where I'm going in for a Rest Cure of my own description. Why? Oh, for lots of reasons, my dear Bunny; among others, I have long had a wish to grow my own beard; under the next lamppost you will agree that it's training on very nicely. Then, you mayn't know it, but there's a canny man at Scotland Yard who has had a quiet eye on me longer than I like. I thought it about time to have an eye
on him, and I stared him in the face outside the Albany this very morning. That was when I saw you go in, and scribbled a line to give you when you came out. If he had caught us talking he would have spotted me at once.”

“So you are lying low out here!”

“I prefer to call it my Rest Cure,” returned Raffles, “and it’s really nothing else. I’ve got a furnished house at a time when no one else would have dreamed of taking one in town; and my very neighbors don’t know I’m there, though I’m bound to say there are hardly any of them at home. I don’t keep a servant, and do everything for myself. It’s the next best fun to a desert island. Not that I make much work, for I’m really resting, but I haven’t done so much solid reading for years. Rather a joke, Bunny: the man whose house I’ve taken is one of her Majesty’s inspectors of prisons, and his study’s a storehouse of criminology. It has been quite amusing to lie on one’s back and have a good look at one’s self as others fondly imagine they see one.”

“But surely you get some exercise?” I asked; for he was leading me at a good rate through the leafy byways of Camp den Hill; and his step was as springy and as light as ever.

“The best exercise I ever had in my life,” said Raffles; “and you would never live to guess what it is. It’s one of the reasons why I went in for this seedy kit. I follow cabs. Yes, Bunny, I turn out about dusk and meet the expresses at Euston or King’s Cross; that is, of course, I loaf outside and pick my cab, and often run my three or four miles for a bob or less. And it not only keeps you in the very pink: if you’re good they let you carry the trunks up-stairs; and I’ve taken notes from the inside of more than one commodious residence which will come in useful in the autumn. In fact, Bunny, what with these new Rowton houses, my beard, and my otherwise well-spent holiday, I hope to have quite a good autumn season before the erratic Raffles turns up in town.”

I felt it high time to wedge in a word about my own far less satisfactory affairs. But it was not necessary for me to recount half my troubles. Raffles could be as full of himself as many a worse man, and I did not like his society the less for these human outpourings. They had rather the effect of putting me on better terms with myself, through bringing him down to my level for the time being. But his egoism was not even skin-deep; it was rather a cloak, which Raffles could cast off quicker than any man I ever knew, as he did not fail to show me now.

“Why, Bunny, this is the very thing!” he cried. “You must come and stay with me, and we’ll lie low side by side. Only remember it really is a Rest Cure. I want to keep literally as quiet as I was without you. What do you say to forming ourselves at once into a practically Silent Order? You agree? Very well, then, here’s the street and that’s the house.”

It was ever such a quiet little street, turning out of one of those which climb right over the pleasant hill. One side was monopolized by the garden wall of an ugly but enviable mansion standing in its own ground; opposite were a solid file of smaller but taller houses; on neither side were there many windows alight, nor a solitary soul on the pavement or in the road. Raffles led the way to one of the small tall houses. It stood immediately behind a lamppost, and I could not but notice that a love-lock of Virginia creeper was trailing almost to the step, and that the bow-window on the ground floor was closely shuttered. Raffles admitted himself with his latch-key, and I squeezed past him into a very narrow hall. I did not hear him shut the door, but we were no longer in the lamplight, and he pushed softly past me in his turn.

“I’ll get a light,” he muttered as he went; but to let him pass I had leaned against some electric switches, and while his back was turned I tried one of these without thinking. In an instant hall and staircase were flooded with light; in another Raffles was upon me in a fury, and, all was dark once more. He had not said a word, but I heard him breathing through his teeth.

Nor was there anything to tell me now. The mere flash of electric light upon a hail of chaos and uncarpeted stairs, and on the face of Raffles as he sprang to switch it off, had been enough even for me.

“So this is how you have taken the house,” said I in his own undertone. “‘Taken’ is good; ‘taken’ is beautiful!”
“Did you think I’d done it through an agent?” he snarled. “Upon my word, Bunny, I did you the credit of supposing you saw the joke all the time!”

“Why shouldn’t you take a house,” I asked, “and pay for it?”

“Why should I,” he retorted, “within three miles of the Albany? Besides, I should have had no peace; and I meant every word I said about my Rest Cure.”

“You are actually staying in a house where you’ve broken in to steal?”

“Not to steal, Bunny! I haven’t stolen a thing. But staying here I certainly am, and having the most complete rest a busy man could wish.”

“There’ll be no rest for me!”

Raffles laughed as he struck a match. I had followed him into what would have been the back drawing-room in the ordinary little London house; the inspector of prisons had converted it into a separate study by filling the folding doors with book-shelves, which I scanned at once for the congenial works of which Raffles had spoken. I was not able to carry my examination very far. Raffles had lighted a candle, stuck (by its own grease) in the crown of an opera hat, which he opened the moment the wick caught. The light thus struck the ceiling in an oval shaft, which left the rest of the room almost as dark as it had been before.

“Sorry, Bunny!” said Raffles, sitting on one pedestal of a desk from which the top had been removed, and setting his makeshift lantern on the other. “In broad daylight, when it can’t be spotted from the outside, you shall have as much artificial light as you like. If you want to do some writing, that’s the top of the desk on end against the mantlepiece. You’ll never have a better chance so far as interruption goes. But no midnight oil or electricity! You observe that their last care was to fix up these shutters; they appear to have taken the top off the desk to get at ‘em without standing on it; but the beastly things wouldn’t go all the way up, and the strip they leave would give us away to the backs of the other houses if we lit up after dark. Mind that telephone! If you touch the receiver they will know at the exchange that the house is not empty, and I wouldn’t put it past the colonel to have told them exactly how long he was going to be away. He’s pretty particular: look at the strips of paper to keep the dust off his precious books!”

“Is he a colonel?” I asked, perceiving that Raffles referred to the absentee householder.

“Of sappers,” he replied, “and a V.C. into the bargain, confound him! Got it at Rorke’s Drift; prison governor or inspector ever since; favorite recreation, what do you think? Revolver shooting! You can read all about him in his own Who’s Who. A devil of a chap to tackle, Bunny, when he’s at home!”

“And where is he now?” I asked uneasily. “And do you know he isn’t on his way home?”

“Switzerland,” replied Raffles, chuckling; “he wrote one too many labels, and was considerate enough to leave it behind for our guidance. Well, no one ever comes back from Switzerland at the beginning of September, you know; and nobody ever thinks of coming back before the servants. When they turn up they won’t get in. I keep the latch jammed, but the servants will think it’s jammed itself, and while they’re gone for the locksmith we shall walk out like gentlemen—if we haven’t done so already.”

“As you walked in, I suppose?”

Raffles shook his head in the dim light to which my sight was growing inured.

“No, Bunny, I regret to say I came in through the dormer window. They were painting next door but one. I never did like ladder work, but it takes less time than in picking a lock in the broad light of a street lamp.”

“So they left you a latch-key as well as everything else!”
“No, Bunny. I was just able to make that for myself. I am playing at ‘Robinson Crusoe,’ not ‘The Swiss Family Robinson.’ And now, my dear Friday, if you will kindly take off those boots, we can explore the island before we turn in for the night.”

The stairs were very steep and narrow, and they creaked alarmingly as Raffles led the way up, with the single candle in the crown of the colonel’s hat. He blew it out before we reached the half-landing, where a naked window stared upon the backs of the houses in the next road, but lit it again at the drawing-room door. I just peeped in upon a semi-grand swathed in white and a row of water colors mounted in gold. An excellent bathroom broke our journey to the second floor.

“I'll have one to-night,” said I, taking heart of a luxury unknown in my last sordid sanctuary.

“You'll do no such thing,” snapped Raffles. “Have the goodness to remember that our island is one of a group inhabited by hostile tribes. You can fill the bath quietly if you try, but it empties under the study window, and makes the very devil of a noise about it. No, Bunny, I bale out every drop and pour it away through the scullery sink, so you will kindly consult me before you turn a tap. Here’s your room; hold the light outside while I draw the curtains; it’s the old chap’s dressing-room. Now you can bring the glim. How’s that for a jolly wardrobe? And look at his coats on their cross-trees inside: dapper old dog, shouldn’t you say? Mark the boots on the shelf above, and the little brass rail for his ties! Didn’t I tell you he was particular? And wouldn’t he simply love to catch us at his kit?”

“Let’s only hope it would give him an apoplexy,” said I shuddering.

“I shouldn’t build on it,” replied Raffles. “That’s a big man’s trouble, and neither you nor I could get into the old chap’s clothes. But come into the best bedroom, Bunny. You won’t think me selfish if I don’t give it up to you? Look at this, my boy, look at this! It’s the only one I use in all the house.”

I had followed him into a good room, with ample windows closely curtained, and he had switched on the light in a hanging lamp at the bedside. The rays fell from a thick green funnel in a plateful of strong light upon a table deep in books. I noticed several volumes of the “Invasion of the Crimea.”

“That’s where I rest the body and exercise the brain,” said Raffles. “I have long wanted to read my Kinglake from A to Z, and I manage about a volume a night. There’s a style for you, Bunny! I love the punctilious thoroughness of the whole thing; one can understand its appeal to our careful colonel. His name, did you say? Crutchley, Bunny—Colonel Crutchley, R.E., V.C.”

“We’d put his valor to the test!” said I, feeling more valiant myself after our tour of inspection.

“Not so loud on the stairs,” whispered Raffles. “There’s only one door between us and—“

Raffles stood still at my feet, and well he might! A deafening double knock had resounded through the empty house; and to add to the utter horror of the moment, Raffles instantly blew out the light. I heard my heart pounding. Neither of us breathed. We were on our way down to the first landing, and for a moment we stood like mice; then Raffles heaved a deep sigh, and in the depths I heard the gate swing home.

“Only the postman, Bunny! He will come now and again, though they have obviously left instructions at the post-office. I hope the old colonel will let them have it when he gets back. I confess it gave me a turn.”

“Turn!” I gasped. “I must have a drink, if I die for it.”

“My dear Bunny, that’s no part of my Rest Cure.”

“Then good-by! I can’t stand it; feel my forehead; listen to my heart! Crusoe found a footprint, but he never heard a double-knock at the street door!”
“’Better live in the midst of alarms,’ ” quoted Raffles, “‘than dwell in this horrible place.’ I must confess we get it both ways, Bunny. Yet I’ve nothing but tea in the house.”

“And where do you make that? Aren’t you afraid of smoke?”

“There’s a gas-stove in the dining-room.”

“But surely to goodness,” I cried, “there’s a cellar lower down!”

“My dear, good Bunny,” said Raffles, ”I’ve told you already that I didn’t come in here on business. I came in for the Cure. Not a penny will these people be the worse, except for their washing and their electric light, and I mean to leave enough to cover both items.”

“Then,” said I, “since Brutus is such a very honorable man, we will borrow a bottle from the cellar, and replace it before we go.”

Raffles slapped me softly on the back, and I knew that I had gained my point. It was often the case when I had the presence of heart and mind to stand up to him. But never was little victory of mine quite so grateful as this. Certainly it was a very small cellar, indeed a mere cupboard under the kitchen stairs, with a most ridiculous lock. Nor was this cupboard overstocked with wine. But I made out a jar of whiskey, a shelf of Zeltinger, another of claret, and a short one at the top which presented a little battery of golden-leafed necks and corks. Raffles set his hand no lower. He examined the labels while I held folded hat and naked light.

“Mumm, ’84!” he whispered. “G. H. Mumm, and AD 1884! I am no wine-bibber, Bunny, as you know, but I hope you appreciate the specifications as I do. It looks to me like the only bottle, the last of its case, and it does seem a bit of a shame; but more shame for the miser who hoards in his cellar what was meant for mankind! Come, Bunny, lead the way. This baby is worth nursing. It would break my heart if anything happened to it now!”

So we celebrated my first night in the furnished house; and I slept beyond belief, slept as I never was to sleep there again. But it was strange to hear the milkman in the early morning, and the postman knocking his way along the street an hour later, and to be passed over by one destroying angel after another. I had come down early enough, and watched through the drawing-room blind the cleansing of all the steps in the street but ours. Yet Raffles had evidently been up some time; the house seemed far purer than overnight as though he had managed to air it room by room; and from the one with the gas-stove there came a frizzling sound that fattened the heart.

I only would I had the pen to do justice to the week I spent in-doors on Campden Hill! It might make amusing reading; the reality for me was far removed from the realm of amusement. Not that I was denied many a laugh of suppressed heartiness when Raffles and I were together. But half our time we very literally saw nothing of each other. I need not say whose fault that was. He would be quiet; he was in ridiculous and offensive earnest about his egregious Cure. Kinglake he would read by the hour together, day and night, by the hanging lamp, lying up-stairs on the best bed. There was daylight enough for me in the drawing-room below; and there I would sit immersed in criminous tomes weakly fascinated until I shivered and shook in my stocking soles. Often I longed to do something hysterically desperate to rouse Raffles and bring the street about our ears; once I did bring him about mine by striking a single note on the piano, with the soft pedal down. His neglect of me seemed wanton at the time. I have long realized that he was only wise to maintain silence at the expense of perilous amenities, and as fully justified in those secret and solitary sorties which made bad blood in my veins. He was far cleverer than I at getting in and out; but even had I been his match for stealth and wariness, my company would have doubled every risk. I admit now that he treated me with quite as much sympathy as common caution would permit. But at the time I took it so badly as to plan a small revenge.

What with his flourishing beard and the increasing shabbiness of the only suit he had brought with him to the house, there was no denying that Raffles had now the advantage of a permanent disguise. That was another of his excuses for leaving me as he did, and it was the one I was determined to remove. On a morning, therefore,
when I awoke to find him flown again, I proceeded to execute a plan which I had already matured in my mind. Colonel Crutchley was a married man; there were no signs of children in the house; on the other hand, there was much evidence that the wife was a woman of fashion. Her dresses overflowed the wardrobe and her room; large, flat, cardboard boxes were to be found in every corner of the upper floors. She was a tall woman; I was not too tall a man. Like Raffles, I had not shaved on Campden Hill. That morning, however, I did my best with a very fair razor which the colonel had left behind in my room; then I turned out the lady’s wardrobe and the cardboard boxes, and took my choice.

I have fair hair, and at the time it was rather long. With a pair of Mrs. Crutchley’s tongs and a discarded hairnet, I was able to produce an almost immodest fringe. A big black hat with a wintry feather completed a headdress as unseasonable as my skating skirt and feather boa; of course, the good lady had all her summer frocks away with her in Switzerland. This was all the more annoying from the fact that we were having a very warm September; so I was not sorry to hear Raffles return as I was busy adding a layer of powder to my heated countenance. I listened a moment on the landing, but as he went into the study I determined to complete my toilet in every detail. My idea was first to give him the fright he deserved, and secondly to show him that I was quite as fit to move abroad as he. It was, however, I confess, a pair of the colonel’s gloves that I was buttoning as I slipped down to the study even more quietly than usual. The electric light was on, as it generally was by day, and under it stood as formidable a figure as ever I encountered in my life of crime.

Imagine a thin but extremely wiry man, past middle age, brown and bloodless as any crabapple, but as coolly truculent and as casually alert as Raffles at his worst. It was, it could only be, the fire-eating and prison-inspecting colonel himself! He was ready for me, a revolver in his hand, taken, as I could see, from one of those locked drawers in the pedestal desk with which Raffles had refused to tamper; the drawer was open, and a bunch of keys depended from the lock. A grim smile crumpled up the parchment face, so that one eye was puckered out of sight; the other was propped open by an eyeglass, which, however, dangled on its string when I appeared.

“A woman, begad!” the warrior exclaimed. “And where’s the man, you scarlet hussy?”

Not a word could I utter. But, in my horror and my amazement, I have no sort of doubt that I acted the part I had assumed in a manner I never should have approached in happier circumstances.

“Come, come, my lass,” cried the old oak veteran, “I’m not going to put a bullet through you, you know! You tell me all about it, and it’ll do you more good than harm. There, I’ll put the nasty thing away and—God bless me, if the brazen wench hasn’t squeezed into the wife’s kit!”

A squeeze it happened to have been, and in my emotion it felt more of one than ever; but his sudden discovery had not heightened the veteran’s animosity against me. On the contrary, I caught a glint of humor through his gleaming glass, and he proceeded to pocket his revolver like the gentleman he was.

“Well, well, it’s lucky I looked in,” he continued. “I only came round on the off-chance of letters, but if I hadn’t you’d have had another week in clover. Begad, though, I saw your handwriting the moment I’d got my nose inside! Now just be sensible and tell me where your good man is.”

I had no man. I was alone, had broken in alone. There was not a soul in the affair (much less the house) except myself. So much I stuttered out in tones too hoarse to betray me on the spot. But the old man of the world shook a hard old head.

“Quite right not to give away your pal,” said he. “But I’m not one of the marines, my dear, and you mustn’t expect me to swallow all that. Well, if you won’t say, you won’t, and we must just send for those who will.”

In a flash I saw his fell design. The telephone directory lay open on one of the pedestals. He must have been consulting it when he heard me on the stairs; he had another look at it now; and that gave me my opportunity. With a presence of mind rare enough in me to excuse the boast, I flung myself upon the instrument in the
corner and hurled it to the ground with all my might. I was myself sent spinning into the opposite corner at the same instant. But the instrument happened to be a standard of the more elaborate pattern, and I flattered myself that I had put the delicate engine out of action for the day.

Not that my adversary took the trouble to ascertain. He was looking at me strangely in the electric light, standing intently on his guard, his right hand in the pocket where he had dropped his revolver. And I—I hardly knew it—but I caught up the first thing handy for self-defence, and was brandishing the bottle which Raffles and I had emptied in honor of my arrival on this fatal scene.

“Be shot if I don’t believe you’re the man himself!” cried the colonel, shaking an armed fist in my face. “You young wolf in sheep’s clothing. Been at my wine, of course! Put down that bottle; down with it this instant, or I’ll drill a tunnel through your middle. I thought so! Begad, sir, you shall pay for this! Don’t you give me an excuse for potting you now, or I’ll jump at the chance! My last bottle of ’84—you miserable blackguard—you unutterable beast!”

He had browbeaten me into his own chair in his own corner; he was standing over me, empty bottle in one hand, revolver in the other, and murder itself in the purple puckers of his raging face. His language I will not even pretend to indicate: his skinny throat swelled and trembled with the monstrous volleys. He could smile at my appearance in his wife’s clothes; he would have had my blood for the last bottle of his best champagne. His eyes were not hidden now; they needed no eyeglass to prop them open; large with fury, they started from the livid mask. I watched nothing else. I could not understand why they should start out as they did. I did not try. I say I watched nothing else—until I saw the face of Raffles over the unfortunate officer’s shoulder.

Raffles had crept in unheard while our altercation was at its height, had watched his opportunity, and stolen on his man unobserved by either of us. While my own attention was completely engrossed, he had seized the colonel’s pistol-hand and twisted it behind the colonel’s back until his eyes bulged out as I have endeavored to describe. But the fighting man had some fight in him still; and scarcely had I grasped the situation when he hit out venomously behind with the bottle, which was smashed to bits on Raffles’s shin. Then I threw my strength into the scale; and before many minutes we had our officer gagged and bound in his chair. But it was not one of our bloodless victories. Raffles had been cut to the bone by the broken glass; his leg bled wherever he limped; and the fierce eyes of the bound man followed the wet trail with gleams of sinister satisfaction.

I thought I had never seen a man better bound or better gagged. But the humanity seemed to have run out of Raffles with his blood. He tore up tablecloths, he cut down blind-cords, he brought the dust-sheets from the drawing-room, and multiplied every bond. The unfortunate man’s legs were lashed to the legs of his chair, his arms to its arms, his thighs and back fairly welded to the leather. Either end of his own ruler protruded from his bulging cheeks—the middle was hidden by his moustache—and the gag kept in place by remorseless lashings at the back of his head. It was a spectacle I could not bear to contemplate at length, while from the first I found myself physically unable to face the ferocious gaze of those implacable eyes. But Raffles only laughed at my squeamishness, and flung a dust-sheet over man and chair; and the stark outline drove me from the room.

It was Raffles at his worst, Raffles as I never knew him before or after—a Raffles mad with pain and rage, and desperate as any other criminal in the land. Yet he had struck no brutal blow, he had uttered no disgraceful taunt, and probably not inflicted a tithe of the pain he had himself to bear. It is true that he was flagrantly in the wrong, his victim as laudably in the right. Nevertheless, granting the original sin of the situation, and given this unforeseen development, even I failed to see how Raffles could have combined greater humanity with any regard for our joint safety; and had his barbarities ended here, I for one should not have considered them an extraordinary aggravation of an otherwise minor offence. But in the broad daylight of the bathroom, which had a ground-glass window but no blind, I saw at once the serious nature of his wound and of its effect upon the man.
“It will maim me for a month,” said he; “and if the V.C. comes out alive, the wound he gave may be identified with the wound I’ve got.”

The V.C.! There, indeed, was an aggravation to one illogical mind. But to cast a moment’s doubt upon the certainty of his coming out alive!

“Of course he’ll come out,” said I. “We must make up our minds to that.”

“Did he tell you he was expecting the servants or his wife? If so, of course we must hurry up.”

“No, Raffles, I’m afraid he’s not expecting anybody. He told me, if he hadn’t looked in for letters, we should have had the place to ourselves another week. That’s the worst of it.”

Raffles smiled as he secured a regular puttee of dust-sheeting. No blood was coming through.

“I don’t agree, Bunny,” said he. “It’s quite the best of it, if you ask me.”

“What, that he should die the death?”

“Why not?”

And Raffles stared me out with a hard and merciless light in his clear blue eyes—a light that chilled the blood.

“If it’s a choice between his life and our liberty, you’re entitled to your decision and I’m entitled to mine, and I took it before I bound him as I did,” said Raffles. “I’m only sorry I took so much trouble if you’re going to stay behind and put him in the way of releasing himself before he gives up the ghost. Perhaps you will go and think it over while I wash my bags and dry ’em at the gas stove. It will take me at least an hour, which will just give me time to finish the last volume of Kinglake.”

Long before he was ready to go, however, I was waiting in the hall, clothed indeed, but not in a mind which I care to recall. Once or twice I peered into the dining-room where Raffles sat before the stove, without letting him hear me. He, too, was ready for the street at a moment’s notice; but a steam ascended from his left leg, as he sat immersed in his red volume. Into the study I never went again; but Raffles did, to restore to its proper shelf this and every other book he had taken out and so destroy that clew to the manner of man who had made himself at home in the house. On his last visit I heard him whisk off the dust-sheet; then he waited a minute; and when he came out it was to lead the way into the open air as though the accursed house belonged to him.

“We shall be seen,” I whispered at his heels. “Raffles, Raffles, there’s a policeman at the corner!”

“I know him intimately,” replied Raffles, turning, however, the other way. “He accosted me on Monday, when I explained that I was an old soldier of the colonel’s regiment, who came in every few days to air the place and send on any odd letters. You see, I have always carried one or two about me, redirected to that address in Switzerland, and when I showed them to him it was all right. But after that it was no use listening at the letter-box for a clear coast, was it?”

I did not answer; there was too much to exasperate in these prodigies of cunning which he could never trouble to tell me at the time. And I knew why he had kept his latest feats to himself: unwilling to trust me outside the house, he had systematically exaggerated the dangers of his own walks abroad; and when to these injuries he added the insult of a patronizing compliment on my late disguise, I again made no reply.

“What’s the good of your coming with me?” he asked, when I had followed him across the main stream of Notting Hill.

“We may as well sink or swim together,” I answered sullenly.

“Yes? Well, I’m going to swim into the provinces, have a shave on the way, buy a new kit piecemeal, including a cricket-bag (which I really want), and come limping back to the Albany with the same old strain in my
bowling leg. I needn’t add that I have been playing country-house cricket for the last month under an alias; it’s the only decent way to do it when one’s county has need of one. That’s my itinerary, Bunny, but I really can’t see why you should come with me.”

“We may as well swing together!” I growled.

“As you will, my dear fellow,” replied Raffles. “But I begin to dread your company on the drop!”

I shall hold my pen on that provincial tour. Not that I joined Raffles in any of the little enterprises with which he beguiled the breaks in our journey; our last deed in London was far too great a weight upon my soul. I could see that gallant officer in his chair, see him at every hour of the day and night, now with his indomitable eyes meeting mine ferociously, now a stark outline underneath a sheet. The vision darkened my day and gave me sleepless nights. I was with our victim in all his agony; my mind would only leave him for that gallows of which Raffles had said true things in jest. No, I could not face so vile a death lightly, but I could meet it, somehow, better than I could endure a guilty suspense. In the watches of the second night I made up my mind to meet it halfway, that very morning, while still there might be time to save the life that we had left in jeopardy. And I got up early to tell Raffles of my resolve.

His room in the hotel where we were staying was littered with clothes and luggage new enough for any bridegroom; I lifted the locked cricket-bag, and found it heavier than a cricket-bag has any right to be. But in the bed Raffles was sleeping like an infant, his shaven self once more. And when I shook him he awoke with a smile.

“Going to confess, eh, Bunny? Well, wait a bit; the local police won’t thank you for knocking them up at this hour. And I bought a late edition which you ought to see; that must be it on the floor. You have a look in the stop-press column, Bunny.”

I found the place with a sunken heart, and this is what I read:

West-End Outrage
Colonel Crutchley, R.E., V.C., has been the victim of a dastardly outrage at his residence, Peter Street, Campden Hill. Returning unexpectedly to the house, which had been left untenanted during the absence of the family abroad, it was found occupied by two ruffians, who overcame and secured the distinguished officer by the exercise of considerable violence. When discovered through the intelligence of the Kensington police, the gallant victim was gagged and bound hand and foot, and in an advanced stage of exhaustion.

“Thanks to the Kensington police,” observed Raffles, as I read the last words aloud in my horror. “They can’t have gone when they got my letter.”

“Your letter?”

“I printed them a line while we were waiting for our train at Euston. They must have got it that night, but they can’t have paid any attention to it until yesterday morning. And when they do, they take all the credit and give me no more than you did, Bunny!”

I looked at the curly head upon the pillow, at the smiling, handsome face under the curls. And at last I understood.

“So all the time you never meant it!”

“Slow murder? You should have known me better. A few hours’ enforced Rest Cure was the worst I wished him.”

“You might have told me, Raffles!”

“That may be, Bunny, but you ought certainly to have trusted me!”