

CHAPTER IX

TONIO saw him off by the 5.55 at the Gare Saint-Lazare. The intervening hours had been devoted to a serious discussion of immediate plans. It would have been splendidly romantic to leave Tonio, the occupant of his magnificent hotel suite, in charge of embarrassing correspondence. It would have gratified his sense of the elfin, the grotesque. But the elfin and the grotesque faded unpleasantly at the sign of danger. Diana was dangerous. Although she might be convinced that the vendor of monkeys was a British Grenadier, she would not cease to wonder why Buddy should employ as confidential secretary a comic little object who didn't wear a shirt. On her next meeting with Tonio, whether occasioned by chance, which was probable, or by design, which was more than possible—for Diana's methods were direct, and there were many things less unlikely than her calm intrusion on Tonio's privacy in the suite—she would certainly try to wrest from him the key to Atherton's mysterious behaviour. Romance must be sacrificed to common sense.

Far better to keep Tonio by his side, so that from the start he could train him in the way he should go. He clung instinctively to the newly found companionship of the faithful little man. He had not yet grown accustomed to the inevitable loneliness of the impostor. To Tonio he could talk of

common experiences and many adventures. Besides, he saw things from Tonio's point of view—the touch of the artist within him giving him its vision. Tonio, too, would feel a greater loneliness than before, after this sudden change in his fortunes. He wouldn't have the remotest idea of dealing with the fantastic position of the original absurd scheme. He would be miserable. And only God knew when he himself would be back in Paris, able to relieve him from his nebulous responsibilities.

So Buddy had made new plans. Tonio, amply provided with funds, must fend for himself that night, on the morrow must provide himself with shirts, socks, ties, suit-cases, and taking the four o'clock train from the Gare du Nord must arrive the next evening at Victoria. He would find a room booked for him at the Grosvenor Hotel.

Just as Buddy was stepping into the train, Tonio caught his arm.

“Do you mind, Buddy, if I cut my hair?”

Buddy grinned at him uncomprehendingly.

“Yes. For my profession it is good. It is easy to draw in the papers. It is publicity. But for a waiter, or a valet, or a private secretary”—he wagged a finger in front of him—“no, I should like to dressa the part. You would permit me—yes?”

His eyes were so pathetically eager that Buddy had no heart for laughter. He had been wondering what he should do with this conspicuous Zulu white *coiffure* attending him all over the world. He said seriously:

“Perhaps from that point of view it would be just as well, dear old chap. But aren't you robbing yourself of your individuality?”

“In this new life, to whom, except to you, am I individual? And you don't love me for my beautiful hair.”

"No," laughed Buddy, squeezing his arm. "I love you for your beautiful heart."

"So I cut my hair and keep my heart fixed as it is?"

"Just that," cried Buddy, and he clambered up the steep steps into the train.

The train started. Buddy leaned back in his seat and smoked a cigar. Once more there was a respite from Fear. Life, spiritually uncomfortable, precarious, dangerous, yet had its compensations. At any rate, he had rescued one sweet and simple human being from the abyss. If to money was due the miracle of raising Tonio from the dead, it didn't matter how criminally that money had been obtained. That miracle alone justified any crime.

His thoughts went back once more to his own dreadful period of privation, to the little conjurer's selfless devotion. And that mercenary little bitch, Julietta! Even she was all pity and kindness. But for Tonio and Julietta he would most certainly have died; if not of pneumonia, at any rate of starvation.

He remembered Tonio coming into his room one day during his convalescence brandishing a white bottle filled with some repulsive brown liquid.

"Ah, Buddy, the doctor has just prescribed this. It will do you much good. Julietta bringa in a glass."

And, without even perceiving a flicker of a hand, he became aware of bubbling champagne poured out from a gold-necked bottle.

"I practise the trick on you. It is good. No?"

Yes. With Tonio as a screen, God had tempered the wind to the conscience of the shorn lamb. Damned good of God, thought Buddy.

Two days after his arrival in London, at half-past eleven in the morning, he found himself with Tonio, *fidus Achates* in perpetuity, at the railway station of

Ringwood in the New Forest. A car from the local garage awaited them. It was a mournful, misty, clammy December day. It had rained all night, and, before nightfall, it would rain again.

"It seems to me," said Buddy, as the car drove off, "that I hate this part of the country more than ever."

"In summer it must be beautiful," said Tonio.

"Might as well say, 'This is a beastly, filthy life here below, but think how lovely it'll be in heaven'."

Tonio shrugged his shoulders. "And why not?"

"It takes a thundering lot of religion to get real comfort out of the prospect," said Buddy.

Tonio smiled. "We will not argue about religion. I am a good Catholic. I believe what my mother and father and the priests taught me to believe. We used to talk about it long ago—you remember? But now to me, even in winter, all this is heaven."

He took off his soft, black felt hat, for the air in the closed car was warm. Buddy regarded him sidelong. His close-cropped, grizzled head, his emaciated features, the result of privations, which accentuated the luminosity of his dark eyes, gave him the ascetic appearance of a monk. There was even a little baldish patch on the top of his crown, which might have been a tonsure.

Either by natural delicate intuition, or through the born showman's instinct, he had, in his own words, dressed for the part. As a scholar's confidential private secretary recommended by a Faculty of Scholars, he was perfect both in dignified austerity of attire and in simplicity of manner. To Buddy's great relief, Bronson had received him, without an eyelid's flicker of surprise, magnanimously discounting unfortunate foreign peculiarities, as the sort of person Sir Atherton was justified in having about him. The title of Professor, on which Buddy insisted,

greatly impressed Bronson. Tonio took it as a matter of course. As Professor Gaffarelli he had worked professionally for years. In those days, if any cunning, semi-witted person asked him of what he was professor, he would reply, "Of the art of prestidigitation. I give you lessons. My fee is fifteen dollars for an hour."

The car drove on through dripping pines, on moist roads between hedges that bounded misty fields wooded with forlorn black skeletons of trees, or along walls that, reinforced by thick evergreens, sheltered great country houses from profane eyes. In spite of the depression of a leaden sky and the omnipresent ooze of dank foliage, Buddy's heart fluttered with insular pride. Here was proclaimed at any rate the sacred privacy of the Englishman. Little like it in America, land of instinctive publicity.

Tonio broke the silence and said:

"Do you know what I think, Buddy? If I were up high—not too high—in an aeroplane, I think I should look down and see all this England laid out—how you say?—like patterns in a garden."

Buddy glowed. Tonio was shrewd, the very last fag end of a fool.

"England's a small country, my friend. And it has had a thousand years of civilization. It has had to be careful of its land. It can't afford wide, open spaces as you've got in America."

"That must be the reason," said Tonio.

The chauffeur sounded a warning horn. The car slowed down. They were between parallel walls each overtopped by evergreen underbrush and stark trees. On the left, a little way ahead, Buddy saw the pair of columns of an entrance gate. Prancing and kicking and shying in the road, some few yards from the gates, head on more or less to the car, was a young,

high-spirited horse ridden by as gallant a looking fellow—a man about his own age—as Buddy had ever seen. The chauffeur drew up to the roadside, stopped the car, cut off the engine. The full-blooded horse continued to play the devil. It reared, it kicked, it swerved towards the wall. It did everything in a horse's bag of vicious tricks except buck, which its poor fool ancestors had not taught it how to do. Its obvious aim was to rid itself of the man on its back and then bolt hell-for-leather. Buddy, who had known much about horses in his fruitful years, saw that the man was evidently trying a vicious, half-broken colt. He stepped stealthily out of the car, with the vague idea of rendering assistance in case of necessity. But he could only regard with admiration the man's perfect horsemanship. The horse reared again. The rider let the reins fall loose, swung his crop behind him and brought it down between the horse's ears. The horse dropped to its feet, shook its head for the astonished fraction of a second, then, under a rain of blows, started up the road at a controlled gallop.

Buddy re-entered the car, which moved on.

"The fellow can ride," he said to Tonio.

"What a difference there can be in the lives of people," the little man said reflectively. "The only thing I have ever ridden was a pig on a merry-go-round."

The car proceeded not fifty yards further, and stopped at a pair of iron gates behind forlorn stone pillars on the other side of the road. An elderly, shabby man in gaiters emerged from a small lodge and opened the gates. He touched his cap as the car swung through into the avenue of leafless trees. A turn brought Buddy into sight of the house, before which the road forked into a circular carriage drive.

It was a weather-stained, late-Georgian, ugly

building, lying in a hollow, some good way below the level of the main road. There were many trees around it; on the north side a screen of funereal firs. The flower-beds, box-hedged, lay in winter desolation of mould. It was a small house, of an architecture so pretentious as to render it mean. Buddy hated it at first glimpse. The car drew up before the grand entrance, shallow, columned and pedimented. At the door stood a decent elderly woman in black dress and black apron. As Buddy alighted she said respectfully:

"I hope I see you well, Sir Atherton."

"Quite well, Mrs. Putterill, thank you," said Buddy who, in his astute way, had gathered necessary information from Bronson. "And this gentleman," as Tonio got out of the car, "is Professor Gaffarelli. Go in, my dear Tonio."

Tonio entered the house, followed by the house-keeper. Buddy lingered to give instructions to the chauffeur. He must wait to take them back to Ringwood for the late afternoon train. The chauffeur touched his cap. Then, before Buddy could turn, he smiled and jerked a thumb.

"He'll be breaking his neck one of these days, Sir Atherton."

"Who?" asked Buddy, his mind wholly occupied by his first impressions of Newstead Park.

"Why, the Squire, Mr. Flower."

"Oh—oh, of course," said Buddy. "It was a vicious young brute he was riding. Well, the 5.20 back to London."

He pushed back his hat, and stood for a while on the threshold of his house, a very greatly astonished man. That clean-run, good-looking fellow, that superb horseman was Horatio Flower, the husband of Muriel. She had forsaken him for Atherton. Mary pity

women, he thought, in his puzzlement. They were led, by God knows what, to do the most astounding things. Why should she leave this perfectly sound fellow—his soundness leaped to the eyes: one glance was enough—why had she left him for Atherton, Atherton, the dry, pedantic stick of a man? This was not only his own possibly prejudiced conception of Atherton. It was the considered judgment of Diana that had been drummed most disagreeably into his head for the past few days. Wherein lay Atherton's sexual fascination? Of course he had the advantage of outward appearance. Buddy, his double, had always prided himself on fairly good looks and an air of distinction. Yes, the outside of the twins might correspond, but the insides of them, all that goes to make personality, individuality, urbanity, amiability, sympathy, lunacy, the love of life, the love of laughter, the love of idiot things, were as remote each from the other as the soul of Bacon was from that of Rabelais.

Bacon. An intellectual fixed star for all time; but in private life a fellow of filthy moral habits and a callous, financial crook. Why the parallel occurred to him he could not imagine. But there it stood. He must preserve the illuminating idea for further consideration. His present concern was to clear up, as well as he could, Francis Atherton Bacon Drake's private affairs. Yet, he thought as he turned into the entrance hall where Mrs. Putterill and Tonio were patiently awaiting him, there must be something wrong about a woman who could run away from such a gallant-looking fellow as Flower. He loved Horatio Flower at first sight—a man after his own heart. He sighed. Mrs. Putterill asked:

“At what hour would you like to lunch, Sir Atherton?”

He turned to Tonio.

"One o'clock suit you?"

Tonio acquiesced. Anything would suit Tonio. He was living in Wonderland. He had not yet successfully reconciled the down-and-out Buddy of the seedy clothes with this *grand seigneur* who lived in palace hotels, luxurious London flats, vast houses in the country, with motor-cars, servants, all the great things of life at his careless command. The only point of reconciliation lay in the fact that, in spite of this change in fortune, Buddy remained the same warm-hearted, loyal, fantastically incomprehensible Englishman that ever he was, with always that compelling touch of 'distinction, the touch, in his little mannerisms and courtesies, of the aristocrat.

This conception of himself that had entered the soul of Tonio was a million miles away from Buddy's most fleeting and casual conjecture.

"There are good fires in all the rooms, except the bedrooms," said Mrs. Putterill. "I didn't think you'd want them there."

"Of course not. Lunch, then, at one, Mrs. Putterill."

She retired like a black ghost, through a green baize door at the end of a passage. Buddy stood with Tonio in a strange house, with the plan of which he must seem to be familiar.

"Let me show you round—the *tour de propriétaire*," he said, with a wave of the hand.

He felt a moment's unregenerate regret that he had brought Tonio. Solitary investigation would have been simpler. Tonio was shrewd. It might be a bit of a strain to explain satisfactorily a possible ignorance of details in the house's floor plan. But yet—Tonio's companionship was dear to the man self-condemned to great loneliness. Bronson had been impressed by the command that his flying visit to

London must remain secret. To all the English world he must be still in Paris. In London, whithersoever he went, Fear attended him, like the Black Care behind the rider in Horace. Tonio was a godsend. He could talk to Tonio, Tonio could talk to him. And Tonio was a man who had educated himself in all sorts of queer ways.

After all, he only had to open one door after another in a lordly way, and proclaim its significance. The plan of the house was of Georgian simplicity. There were three rooms on the entrance floor, opening into the central hall. Two on the right. One on the left, much of the space corresponding to the room on the other side being taken up by a pretentious staircase which obviously led to the drawing-room on the first floor. The room by the staircase was the dining-room with old, red turkey carpet and heavy mid-Victorian furniture. It had red walls and a few dingy oil portraits of departed members of some alien family. A depressing room. The windows looked out on the front. The room opposite the staircase was nondescript and forlorn. In the days when the house was inhabited by a family this was the den reserved for the master. The other room, once the morning-room, Atherton used as his library. Here there was more comfort and individuality. There were well-filled book-cases, a few good prints, comfortable chairs, a broad and well-appointed writing-table and a deep modern fireplace under whose brick arch a fire blazed cheerfully. In a panel between two book-cases, an iron safe was sunk into the thickness of the wall.

"This," said Buddy, "is my library."

Upstairs they came to the spacious drawing-room to which Georgian architects sacrificed the many amenities of a modern dwelling.

"This," said Buddy, looking around him and

shivering in the cold of chintz-covered, characterless furniture, in spite of a fire which burned in an old-fashioned grate, "is the great salon on what you call the *piano nobile*. As you see, it has six windows and runs the whole width of the beastly house. I hate it. I can truly say that I have never spent a quarter of an hour alone in this room in my life."

"But," said the awed Tonio, "it is a magnificent room."

Buddy shrugged his shoulders. "Since when do you think I've been in love with magnificence?"

They returned to the library. Tonio instinctively drew near the fire, and warmed his crooked hands. Buddy smiled. Tonio was driven to the glow by the deathly cold, depressing, clammy atmosphere of the place. No fault could be found with Mrs. Putterill, who evidently, with the help of a maid whom he had seen flitting through the baize door into the dining-room, kept the house in good and dry order. The fault lay in the low position of the house itself, in the gloom of depressing trees that cut off from the main rooms what light a miserable December day could offer, in the awful chill of the vast and unheated hall, in the draughts which this reservoir of cold air sent cutting through every open door, every space between door and carpet, every keyhole.

It was a horrible house, Buddy decided. His thoughts flew back to American terminology. What an advertisement: "Ideal Mortuary Home. Central Refrigerator. Telephone, Mould & Mildew, Expert Morticians, MAUSoleum 1234."

"The damned place gives me the creeps," he said. "That's why I'm going to sell it."

For the first time he felt himself in sympathetic touch with the Athertonian circle. Every member of it—Bronson, Edgar Fry, Selous, Diana, Muriel—

all had commended, either explicitly or implicitly, his proposal. But why had Atherton originally bought the place? Judging by the mid-Victorian furniture, he must have bought it lock, stock and barrel. Was it from ancestral workings in the blood, which led him blindly to reconstitute himself in landed estate, and thus regain the position of his forefathers thrown away by Sir Michael, beloved yet profligate progenitor? If so, why hadn't he married in the ordinary humdrum way and begotten an heir to the revived glories of the house of Drake? If he had estimated the worth of a Cora Blenkinsop at £7,000, and was prepared to face divorce proceedings and social upheaval for the sake of Muriel Flower—with the inference that these two women, at any rate, had looked on him lover-wise—surely he could have cast his handkerchief, his baronet's escutcheon of the Bloody Hand embroidered in the corner, at the feet of the assembled maidens of his acquaintance, in the certainty that one of them would have rapturously picked it up.

The more he thought of Atherton, the greater enigma did he become.

While engaged in these speculations he idly scanned the books in the shelves. Tonio stood silent, warming himself, his back to the fire. Buddy came across a block of Italian literature in beautiful bindings. He drew out a volume of an eighteenth-century edition of Boccaccio, exquisitely though immorally illustrated. He summoned Tonio:

"You must browse about here for a bit. I've business to see to."

His business was the safe. Its key or keys belonged to the awful bunch worn by Atherton, one of his heritages of discomfort. An obvious Yale lock facilitated his selection.

The safe door swung open and disclosed a mass of papers docketed in Atherton's orderly way, a large steel despatch-box, a miniature safe in itself, an ordinary door-key and a half-used cheque-book.

This cheque-book was the first thing he looked at. It was nearest his hand. He opened it carelessly, thinking it was issued by a local bank for the purpose of paying petty local expenses. But to his surprise it showed an account with a City branch of a London Bank, different from the one of which he was now a customer.

A curious omission in the carefully kept counterfoils struck even Buddy's casual eye. The date was on each, the credit balance brought forward, the amount of the cheque, then balance after deduction. But not one of the counterfoils bore a name. The cheques, of which more than half remained, were payable to "Bearer." Buddy sat down by the writing-table, somewhat puzzled, and turned over the counterfoils. The dates ran at fairly long intervals. The amounts were for round sums, from £100 to £500. The credit balance on the last counterfoil was £956 17s. 8d. Here and there on the counterfoils were notes of credit in odd money, presumably dividend payments. It was a disturbing cheque-book. Why payable to "Bearer" instead of "Order"? Atherton was the last man in the world to disregard the elementary precautions of banking credit without strong reasons. For, in spite of his long residence in America where the cheque system differs from that in England, he remembered this: that a crossed cheque can only be paid from the bank account of the drawer into that of the payee; that an uncrossed cheque to "Order" can only be paid across the counter if endorsed by the payee; that a "Bearer" cheque, so long as the signature is genuine, is paid over the

counter to anyone who presents it. A "Bearer" cheque might be made out to "New" or "The Archangel Gabriel" and it would not concern the cashier of the bank, nor the manager of the bank, nor the hierarchy of directors. Thus it became obvious to Buddy, who did not lack ordinary intelligence, that these round-sum payments made to a blank line in the counterfoil must be made to one individual person who would not have to sign his or her name on the back of the cheques. It was the way of the blackmailer. Buddy remembered the vulgar letter in block capitals.

• Yes, that horrible, half-exhausted cheque-book stank of blackmail. Atherton couldn't have the horrible creature, male or female, presenting his "Bearer" cheques at his bank in Hanover Square, where he was a familiar figure of social, political and moral importance. He must send him or her to the branch, Lothbury, E.C., of another bank where, save for identification of signature, he was a sheer impersonality.

Buddy swore deep and silent. Were unsuspected waters about to encompass him?

He returned to the safe and took from it the armful of docketed papers and threw them on the table.

Tonio turned from fascinated dipping into the Boccaccio with whom he was entirely unacquainted.

"Can I help? Am I not your secretary? Let me."

Buddy smiled and waved an indulgent and repressive hand

"Not yet, old chap. You have a good time while you can. Possibly there's a hell of a time coming."

The little man started. He was sitting on an old oak coffin-stool, the beautiful volume on his knees.

"True?"

"As true, my dear man, as anything in this unvarnished world."

Tonio, not attuned to paradox, but reassured by Buddy's smile, resumed his first perusal of the immortal story of the Nightingale. Buddy went through the papers.

For one on edge to discover elements of mystery, crime, romance, they afforded disappointment. As their outer endorsements proclaimed, and as their casual examination proved, they were all concerned with negotiations for the purchase of Newstead Park, and its subsequent upkeep. Among them was a plumber's receipted bill for £1 6s. 3d. Of the contents of the safe there remained only the despatch-box which could hold any further item of interest. This was closed by two spring locks. On his detested bunch hung no corresponding keys. This was puzzling.

There was an oak chest, quite a good, early seventeenth-century oak chest, with a cushion on top of it, standing under one of the windows. He opened it. It was stacked with manuscripts and typescripts. He drew out one at random. It was a manuscript neatly bound in stout pliable paper. On the outside was inscribed, in Atherton's handwriting, "Plotinus—His Accomplishment and Failure."

He dug deep and fished out another carefully bound clump of pages, this time in typescript, "Socrates and Socialism. An address delivered to the Middlehampton Conservative Club, by Sir Atherton Drake, Bart." Luckily there was no date. He called:

"Tonio."

The little Italian abandoned his Boccaccio and crossed to his employer, who thrust the typescript into his hands.

"You see what a hell of a fellow I am!"

It were best to take the bull by the horns, to accustom

Tonio to the conception of a Buddy Drake^s as a personage of Athertonian importance. He left his confidential secretary turning over the incomprehensible pages. Then his eye struck a thin row of slim volumes elegantly bound in green crushed morocco. Below the titles ran the name of the author, "Atherton Drake." He drew one from the shelves, "Phaon," and handed it to Tonio, who glanced at it reverently.

"Did you really write this, Buddy?"

Buddy clapped him on the shoulder and laughed.

"No. It was another fellow of the same name."

He put back the volume and returned to his digging in the trunk, while Tonio resumed his Boccaccio.

His search revealed nothing of personal interest, the papers, however, must be removed before the sale of the house. The packing would provide Tonio with elegant occupation.

He went upstairs and discovered Atherton's austere bedroom in which, after careful search, he found nothing beyond toilet odds and ends and a few old suits of country clothes. These he must tell Bronson to regard as perquisites. Other bedrooms were vaguely furnished, and their drawers were bleakly void. He went down to the warm library, shivering with the damp and cold of the cheerless house.

Mrs. Putterill came in. Could she telephone for Mr. Smithers, who was anxious to see him about various affairs? He remembered the name. Smithers was the local builder and contractor.

"Smithers," said Buddy, "is the last person in the world I want to converse with. I can't stand him to-day."

She pleaded a leaking roof in the lodge.

"Putterill says——"

"Why can't he say what he wants to say to Smithers

direct? He and Smithers can arrange things between them."

"If you'll let him do that, Sir Atherton," she replied, somewhat taken aback, "why, it'll be quite all right."

From her obvious surprise, he gathered that Atherton was not in the habit of delegating authority. Mrs. Putterill looked for fussiness and met lofty scorn of detail. He regarded her sternly.

"Of course Smithers knows that I'm not going to pay a hundred pounds for a few loose slates."

"I think you can trust Putterill, Sir Atherton."

"I hope so," said Buddy. "Meanwhile have we got downstairs a good packing-case or two? I'm having these papers sent up to London."

There were packing-cases. Putterill would bring them up after lunch.

"Tonio," said Buddy, "this is how you'll begin your secretarial duties."

"It's about time I begin to earn my salary," replied Tonio.

They lunched—by no means badly: scrambled eggs, roast chicken and sausages, apple-dumplings, a bottle of champagne, good coffee and old brandy.

The lonely key which Buddy had found in the safe had turned out to be the key of the cellar, which no one, as he surmised, but the master must open. He had descended, accompanied by Mrs. Putterill, and made his choice of bottles. It was a well-stocked cellar. He sighed at the thought of its abandonment to the possibly vulgar.

Here again was a sign of Atherton's incomprehensibility. He could live in this hideously furnished house, apparently with pleasure; he could devote his intellectual energies to the austerities of transcendental philosophy; he could insist on personal control of every farthing of his income; he could have the

reputation, as Diana flamboyantly proclaimed, of dry-as-dust priggishness, of unemotionality, even of hardness of heart, of inability to recognize a joy of life even when it insisted on staring him in the face; and yet—and yet—there was Cora Blenkinsop, there was Muriel herself, and, to come down to lower appetites, there was the delicate cuisine of Mrs. Bronson, the excellent plain cooking of Mrs. Putterill, and lastly—matter of psychological significance—there was an excellent selection of varied liquors in the small cool cupboard of the Park Lane flat, and there was this perfect cellar here of choice vintages. Buddy recalled the saying long ago of some wise and distinguished friend of his father's, "No bad man could love good wine."

Atherton was an enigma. Also, all the more in this respect, Diana had never pretended to credit him, Buddy, with so dainty and human a quality as connoisseurship either in vintage or in gastronomy.

Buddy ate his eggs, pondering these matters. What could be the answer to the enigma? Apart from his scholarship, which, as far as ignorant Buddy could judge from outside tributes, appeared to be genuine and sound, wasn't it that Atherton was a colossal fraud, thin, tenuous, but still mounting skywards, commanding, a colossus of fraud who made up in imposing height that which it had not in bulk?

Yes. Atherton was a fraud. He was a bad man. A self-manufactured man. Buddy's psychological analysis grew muddled as he ate the scrambled eggs. He was recalled to pleasant, mundane affairs by Tonio, who, raising his glass of Krug 1911, the greatest wine of that *annus mirabilis*, to his lips, and, pausing as it reached his nose, suddenly cried:

"But say, Buddy, this is champagne, I know. We have often drink it together. But I not ever knew

it could smell like this. Ah! It is like what my father and mother would tell me about Italy. 'Here in America,' they used to say, 'no one can smell anything. The air is poisoned with gasolene. But in Italy you have a thousand smells,' and they would tell me of the smell of the wine that came out of the tubs when the feet of the peasants crushed the grapes. I didn't believe them, but I love all nice smells. There are the old kinds of roses and gardenias, and, in South Carolina and California, the little smell of garlic. Oh, that is good, Buddy! I have a nose. Sometimes it hurts me. I smell a smell. I say: 'Good God,'—he smote his brow violently—"and my friends say, 'What's the matter?' They can't smell it. But me. . . . And that's what I mean. . . . Never have I thought of such perfume for wine."

Said Buddy, glass to lips:

"It's a curious thing—heredity. Here are you, a Latin, born in America. All good drinking years, so to speak, spent in a dry, bootlegger-ridden America. And you come to Europe for the first time and instinctively you recognize one of God's greatest gifts to mankind. Tonio"—he pledged the little man, whose dark eyes glowed at the tribute—"we're closer brothers than ever."

After lunch they went back to the library. A couple of stout packing-cases with covering boards, nails and hammer scrupulously laid out—the work, as Buddy had gathered during the meal, of the untidy Putterill—confronted them. Buddy set Tonio to his task, and looked idly out of the window. The sky had grown less leaden and the pale gleam of a veiled, watery sun spread over the lawn and trees. He might as well, he thought, stroll round the property while it was still in his possession.

"What we gonna do with them when they're packed?" asked Tonio.

"They'll be sent by goods train to London."

"And this?" Tonio pointed to the despatch-box.

"We take that with us," said Buddy.

Again he examined the safe. Its smooth steel surfaces forbade the hypothesis of a secret receptacle wherein the missing keys could be hidden. This great locked iron box worried him. He felt certain that its contents were connected with the disturbing cheque-book now in his pocket, that they would reveal secrets of Atherton's life which he had been at some pains to hide. And where were the keys? That Atherton could be so careless as to lose anything was inconceivable. He determined to send the Bronsons off on a joy-ride to any happy December far-away spot they could think of, and devote a whole day to turning the Park Lane flat upside down.

He put on hat and coat and went into the open air. He walked fast, his still young muscles needing exercise. His mind was preoccupied by thoughts of the baffling despatch-box. It was no trumpery thing to be ripped up with a sardine-tin opener, or hammer and chisel. A burglar's acetylene burner would be needed. At what kind of shop could he buy a burglar's acetylene burner?

At this stage of his reflections he found himself staring at his own front gates. A little way down the road stood the front gates before which the gallant horseman had mastered the refractory colt.

Then suddenly he was inspired by one of his lunatic ideas.