

MONEY FOR CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS!

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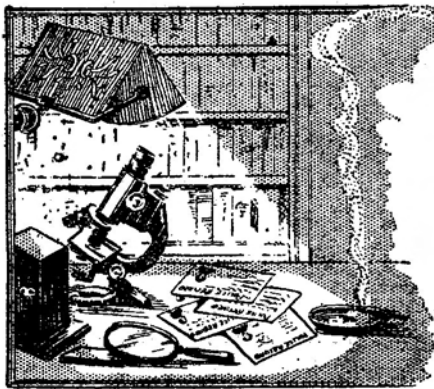
ON SALE EVERY TUESDAY.

Dec. 10, 1921.



A WARM WELCOME FOR TEDDY.
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COMPLETE IN THIS NUMBER.



THE CASE OF THE GOLD COAST HEIRESS!

A Grand, Long Complete Detective Story introducing Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake.

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

Ferrers Locke, the Up-to-Date Detective with New Methods.

A Strange Meeting.

FERRERS LOCKE! Here!" It was a sharp, startled exclamation. Jack Drake started out of a doze. It was hot, with an oven-like heat, in the little coast town of Kawhee, on the Gold Coast. Under the awnings, on the verandah of the Planters Hotel, Jack Drake was leaning back in a deep cane chair, dozing away the sultry afternoon.

Ferrers Locke, the famous Baker Street detective, was standing by the verandah rail, looking out across the sand dunes to the sea. In the bay, a dingy schooner rode at anchor; beyond the schooner the sea stretched bright and blue and glassy calm to the horizon.

A man in dirty white drill and a sun helmet came up the palm-shaded street of Kawhee, and ascended the two or three broad wooden steps into the verandah of the Planters Hotel.

He glanced carelessly at the Baker Street man; but as his eyes fell on the clear-cut face of Ferrers Locke he started, and exclaimed.

He made a rapid step towards Locke, still staring at him blankly.

"You here, Locke! You here!"

Ferrers Locke glanced at the man, and a rather grim look came over his face. Jack Drake sat upright in his chair. The Baker Street detective, and his boy assistant, had been a couple of days at Kawhee, and in that isolated little town on the Gold Coast of Africa, Drake had certainly not expected to meet anyone who knew him.

He looked with interest at the stranger. He saw a man of about thirty, thick-set and muscular, with a narrow, sallow face, and sharp, ferret-like eyes, set very close together. So far as he knew, Drake had never seen the man before. But he evidently knew Ferrers Locke—and equally evidently Ferrers Locke knew him.

"Silky Smith!" said the detective quietly.

"You remember me?"

"Quite well."

"And I remember you," said Silky Smith, with a gleam in his narrow eye. "What are you doing here, Ferrers Locke?"

The Baker Street detective smiled slightly.

"Do you really expect me to explain that to you, Mr. Smith?" he asked genially.

Jack Drake smiled.

As a matter of fact, Ferrers Locke was not in Kawhee on "business" of any kind.

A "case" had brought him out to Lagos on a tramp steamer, and at Lagos he had heard from his old acquaintance Captain Jervis. He expected to meet Jervis at Kawhee, and for that reason, and no other, he had travelled along to the Gold Coast town on a coasting steamer, and put up for a few days at the Planters Hotel.

He had not had the remotest expectation of meeting a London "crook" in that solitary spot, far from the haunts of civilised crime—though near enough to the haunts of crime of a more barbarous kind.

But the narrow, crafty face of Silky Smith was full of suspicion. It was evident that he connected Locke's presence in Kawhee with his own presence there. It was perhaps a natural suspicion—for Kawhee was about the last place in the world where one might have anticipated meeting the famous detective of Baker Street.

"Keeping it dark, of course?" said Smith.

Ferrers Locke shrugged his shoulders.

Silky Smith came a step nearer to him, his narrow eyes gleaming with an ugly light.

"You are not in Baker Street now, Mr. Locke," he said, in quiet tones, that had a ring of menace in them. "There is not a policeman at your beck and call. You are on dangerous soil here."

"I have been accustomed to treading dangerous ground for a long time, Mr. Smith."

"It is more dangerous here than you may guess. Will you tell me why you are here?"

"I will tell you nothing, Mr. Smith," answered Ferrers Locke calmly.

"You need not tell me—I know!" Smith snapped.

"In that case, why question me?" smiled Locke. He added, with the same unruffled calm. "I advise you not to draw the revolver your fist is resting upon, Mr. Smith. It would be scarcely prudent to use it here—even in Kawhee, on the Gold Coast, there is some law and order, you know."

Silky Smith, with an oath, withdrew his hand from the pocket of his dingy drill jacket.

He sat in one of the cane chairs, and shouted to a black waiter. In silence, eyeing Locke savagely, he mixed himself a drink.

Locke watched the sea impassively.

He was expecting Captain the Honourable Algernon Jervis to arrive that afternoon, by water; and he had intended to leave on Jervis's boat. But the sight of Silky Smith was changing his plans.

What was the London crook doing in that out-of-the-way spot? His manner, if nothing else, his rage, and evident fear at finding Ferrers Locke there, showed that it was some evil business that brought him. Locke wondered whether a new "case" had turned up to occupy his attention on the sun-scorched African coast, and to delay his return to Baker Street.

Silky Smith broke the silence at last.

"How did you get to hear of it?" he asked.

Locke glanced at him.

"Of what?" he asked.

"You know what," said Smith savagely. "What's the good of pretending that you did not come here on my account? What else could have brought you here from London?"

Locke did not answer.

"We're not in London now," continued the crook venomously. "In this country, a man who meddles in other people's business may find himself fed to the crocodiles before he knows what has happened to him. Death lurks in every shadow on the Gold Coast, Ferrers Locke."

"Threatened men live long," remarked the detective.

"Speak out! Are you going to chip in?"

"That depends," said Ferrers Locke, looking curiously at the man.

Drake listened in silence.

He had not the remotest idea of what Silky Smith was driving at; and, so far, neither had Ferrers Locke.

But Locke's face did not betray his ignorance.

He was "drawing" the crook—leading him on to show his hand; and Silky Smith, convinced as he was that Locke was there on his account, fell blindly into the trap.

"It depends?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"On what?" snarled Smith.

"On circumstances," yawned Ferrers Locke.

Smith gave him a sharp and eager look.

"Do you mean that you'd be willing to go in with me?" he asked eagerly. "If you mean that, it's a go. Halves!"

Locke seemed to reflect.

"Halves!" repeated Silky Smith. "That's a fair offer. Or a share in the swag if you simply stand aside."

Drake started a little. The offer of a share in the "swag" from a criminal was a rather unusual one for Ferrers Locke to hear. But the detective did not betray any resentment by so much as the flicker of an eyelid.

He continued to regard the crook with quiet curiosity.

"What sort of a share?" he asked.

"A thousand pounds."

"So much as that?"

"On my word," said Silky Smith, "and I'll make it all safe. Dash it all, Locke, you've come a long way on this business, but you can't be getting as much as that from the old man."

Drake wondered who the "old man" was! So, probably, did Ferrers Locke.

"I know you get big fees," continued Silky Smith. "But don't tell me you're touching a thousand of the best on this job."

"Quite so—I am not."

"How much, then?"

Locke shook his head, and smiled.

"Whatever it is, I'll double it," said Silky Smith.

"You are generous!" said Ferrers Locke, with a touch of sarcasm.

"I can afford it, if all goes well," said Silky Smith. "But there's one thing I want to know. How did you get on to it at all?"

He scanned the Baker Street detective's face eagerly.

"How the thump did you catch on—how did the old man catch on? It beats me to a frazzle! You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw you here! Of course, I knew at once what you were after. But how did you get to know? I'd have sworn that I was the only man in London that knew."

"A detective has to know many things," said Ferrers Locke lightly.

"But it's queer. There was no clue to Kawhee, so far as I knew," said the perplexed Silky. "It was just chance that I knew—and I only knew from the Weasel, and he's in chokey now, and can't talk. He met Hilton out here, and so he knew. And he told me about it, never dreaming that this would come of it. Have you seen Hilton's girl yet?"

Locke's face expressed nothing. Certainly no look or sign from him betrayed that he had never, till that moment, heard of Hilton, or "Hilton's girl."

"Can't you answer?" snapped Silky Smith.

"My dear fellow, I am not in a confidential mood," drawled Ferrers Locke.

Silky Smith had an ugly look.

"Give me the griffin plainly," he said. "Are you against me, or will you share and stand aside?"

"Double my fee from the old man?" said Ferrers Locke reflectively.

"That's it."

"On what security?"

"I'll give you anything you like in black and white," said Silky Smith eagerly.

"And what will that be worth, Silky Smith? How much are you worth at the present moment? You are not six months out of prison, I believe—and you cannot have made your fortune in that time," said Ferrers Locke banteringly.

"I'm worth about as much as I stand up in," growled Silky Smith. "But I shall be rich when I've married Hilton's girl."

"So that is the game?" said Ferrers Locke, without moving a muscle.

"Of course. It's the only way of getting hold of the goods, isn't it?"

"You've fixed it up?"

"As good as," said Smith. "Of course, if she knew, she would turn me down fast enough. But she knows nothing yet."

"You're sure of success, at all events?"

"Pretty sure," said Silky, with a grin. "There are ways and means. As you know so much, Locke, you can guess pretty accurately that I shouldn't take 'No' for an answer, in the circumstances. Fifty thousand pounds isn't to be picked up every day."

"Quite so. So if Hilton's girl should have the bad taste to decline to favour you—"

"I've got that cut and dried. Now talk business. Will you take my written promise to pay you a thousand pounds, and stand aside—or will you go into the game with me, and help me with the girl, and take a good share? I'm not mean about it."

Silky Smith was on his feet again now, and his hand was in the pocket of his drill jacket.

His sharp, narrow eyes gleamed up and down the street of palms—silent and deserted in the blaze of the tropic sun.

There was no one in sight—even the black waiter was gone from the verandah.

Locke read the desperate thought in the man's mind, as easily as he would have read the open page of a book.

But his clear-out face remained impassive.

His hand rested lightly on a bamboo table beside him, on which stood a glass of iced lemonade.

"You want my answer?" he asked.

"Yes—here and now."

"I'll give it," yawned Ferrers Locke. "I'm in Kawhee by mere chance—expecting to meet a friend in his yacht who may be coming along this afternoon. But for that, I should have taken the steamer home to England from Lagos, after winding up the case that brought me out here."

Silky Smith stared at him.

"I had no expectation whatever of seeing you here, Mr. Smith," continued Locke, coolly and calmly. "Until you spoke, I had never heard of the 'old man,' or Hilton, or Hilton's girl. As soon as I saw you, I knew that you must be here on some rascally business, so far from your usual haunts. But I knew nothing more. I have been leading you on, my friend, to give yourself away."

Silky Smith snapped his teeth.

"Now that I have some outline of your scheme," continued the Baker Street detective deliberately. "I shall intervene in the matter. I shall make it my business to defeat your rascality, Mr. Smith. Do I make myself clear?"

The crook drew a hissing breath.

"Then—you knew nothing!" he panted.

"Nothing."

"You were not here after me?"

"No."

"You rotten spy!" hissed Smith.

His hand flashed out from his pocket, and there was a revolver in it that glinted in the sun.

Drake sprang to his feet, as the rascal threw up the weapon to fire.

But even quicker than the rapid movement of the crook was the action of Ferrers Locke.

His hand was on the tumbler of iced lemonade, and as Silky Smith's arm went up, the glass jerked forward, and the liquid shot into the crook's face, splashing into his eyes.

Silky Smith staggered back with a gasping cry, his hand, with the revolver in it, sagging at his side.

Like a flash the Baker Street detective leaped forward before he could recover, and struck out straight from the shoulder.

The crook received the blow fairly on the jaw, and went down on the planks of the verandah with a crash.

The revolver fell from his hand, and Jack Drake caught at it, and scented it.

Locke nodded approvingly.

"Take care of that, Drake," he said.

"You bet, sir!"

Silky Smith sat up dazedly, his hand to his jaw. His eyes glittered at the Baker Street detective as venomously as a snake's.

"You—you—" he muttered thickly.

Ferrers Locke gave a contemptuous laugh.

"You had better try again, Mr. Smith," he said. "Or you would be better advised not to try again. I shall not let you off so cheaply next time."

The crook staggered to his feet. He gave the Baker Street detective one bitter, malevolent look, and went unsteadily down the steps of the verandah. Ferrers Locke glanced thoughtfully after the dingy figure as it faded from view down the sunbaked street of Kawhee.

A Quixotic Guest.

JACK DRAKE looked at his chief.

His heart was beating rather fast, with the excitement of that sudden and almost tragic interlude in the sleepy West African afternoon. Ferrers Locke, impassive as ever, sat down in the long cane chair, and met the glance of his boy assistant with a smile.

"Even in this solitary spot, Drake, we seem to have stumbled upon a case," he remarked.

"And we're going to take it up, sir?"

"Undoubtedly."

"I don't quite catch on to it, sir," said Drake, with a perplexed frown. "Who can Hilton be—and Hilton's girl?"

"We have to find that out. But there is obviously a fortune of fifty thousand pounds at stake, which Mr. Smith hopes to secure by marrying Miss Hilton—whomsoever she may be," said Ferrers Locke. "He has come out to Kawhee for the purpose, so we must presume that Miss Hilton must be a resident in this locality."

"A white girl—here!"

"There are planters in the vicinity, and traders, and some of them have their wives and daughters with them," said Locke.

"I have no doubt that a little local inquiry will enlighten us as to the identity of Mr. Hilton and his girl. Apparently someone in England is anxious to get in touch with the lady. Silky Smith certainly concluded that I had been engaged, and sent out here for the purpose. An old man, according to what he said, and there is a fortune at stake—the girl is apparently an heiress, and ignorant of the fact. Silky Smith hopes to secure the fortune by marrying her, before she is aware of the facts. He knows where she is to be found—as evidently her friends in England do not. That is his business here. It is not likely that the lady will look upon his suit favourably. Mr. Smith carries too much of his character in his face. His design, therefore, will be to kidnap her, and force her consent—he has admitted as much. It is rather a clever scheme, and Mr. Smith might have succeeded perfectly—if he had not found us here."

"But now—"

"Now he will not succeed, if I can help it," said Ferrers Locke tranquilly.

He rose to his feet and glanced out at sea.

A handsome steam yacht had glided into the bay, and dropped her anchor a few cables' length from the dingy schooner there.

A boat had dropped from the steamer, and was pulling ashore.

"Captain Jervis's yacht?" asked Drake.

"Yes."

"And—?"

"That is Jervis in the boat," said Drake, as he shaded his eyes with his Panama hat and stared seaward.

He had seen Captain the Honourable Algernon Jervis, whom he had recognised in Ferrers Locke's rooms in Baker Street. The Herculean proportions of the gallant captain were not easily forgotten once seen. The Honourable Algernon was well over six feet in height, with powerful limbs, and deep chest. Drake caught the glitter of an eyeglass, and smiled. The boat came through the surf, and the big captain leaped lightly on the sand, and strode up towards the Planters Hotel.

Locke waved a hand from the verandah.

The wooden steps creaked and groaned under Captain Jervis's weight as he came up.

He shook hands with Ferrers Locke, and gave Drake a kind nod of recognition.

"Jolly glad you're here, Locke," he said, in his deep voice.

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Ferrers Locke drew rein. "Something is wrong here," he said quietly. There was a babbling crowd of coolies in front of the bungalow, and an old negress, in the verandah, was shrieking.

"I was surprised to see you that day in Lagos—but jolly glad! You're the very man I want."

"I am glad to hear it," said Locke. He called to the black waiter, and ordered a cool drink for his friend. "You look as fit as ever, Jervis, in spite of the heat. What harebrained adventure has brought you to the West Coast of Africa?"

Jervis chuckled.

"What brought you?" he asked.

"A case that is now concluded. I should have taken the steamer in Lagos, but for our brief meeting," said Locke. "I had no time to waste then," said Jervis. "I just asked you to come along to Kawhee and wait for me here—"

"And I came."

"You'd rather get back to England in my yacht than in one of the dashed tramp steamers, I take it?"

"Quite so, if you can accommodate Drake also."

"Of course."

Jervis snipped the end from a big black cheroot, and lighted it.

"Guess why I'm here," he said.

"Some harebrained adventure, as I have already remarked," answered Ferrers Locke, his eyes resting on the young man's handsome, bronzed face with a tolerant smile.

"How well you know me!" grinned Jervis. "What do you think of a knight-errant quest for a lost lady, whom I have never even seen?"

"I think it is very like you," said Ferrers Locke, laughing.

"Probably. But that's how it stands. If all goes well, there will be a lady passenger on board the Firefly, going home," said Captain Jervis. "Shall I spin you the yarn?"

"By all means."

"It's a queer one," said the Honourable Algernon, blowing out a thick cloud of smoke, that made Drake cough and back away. "There's a girl somewhere on this coast who's heiress to fifty thousand pounds, and doesn't know a word of it."

Drake started.

"Indeed," said Ferrers Locke. "And her name, I presume, is Hilton?"

The Honourable Algernon jumped almost clear of his seat.

"Are you a wizard, Locke?" he ejaculated. "How the merry thunder do you know that?"

"I guessed," said Locke, with a smile.

"It's the fact, though it beats me how you know it. You have not been retained by old Mr. Hilton, I suppose, to look for her?"

"No."

"So far as I know, old Hilton has left the job to his solicitors, and they are working through some agents out here," said Captain Jervis. "I fancy they may find the girl by the time her hair grows grey. She's somewhere on the Gold Coast, and that's all they know. You haven't come across her by any chance out here?"

"So far, no."

"Well, to get on with it. I'm some sort of a second cousin, or nephew, a dozen times removed, to old Hilton," continued Captain Jervis. "I visit him once in a blue moon, when I feel inclined for quiet and repose, in a restful corner of Surrey—which isn't often. I dropped in on him a few weeks ago, and found him in no end of a bate. He'd had news of his son, who went out to the Coast here donkey's ages ago. Young Hilton—he was young then—before my time—was a bit of a dog, and he got into trouble, and elated, and his father never heard of him again. Seems to have been rather a waster. Well, just before I dropped in at Hilton Place, a man had turned up there—a mining engineer, named McNab, home from the Gold Coast. He brought news of Roderick Hilton—news of his death."

Locke listened attentively.

"McNab had come on him, knocked out by sunstroke, at a coast town," said Captain Jervis. "He had been on a bender, and rum and the hot sun between them knocked him out. McNab did all for him that he could, but he was very close to the finish. He told the man his father's name and where he lived, asked him to send the news to him, and to beg of him to do something for his daughter. Apparently he'd married out here, and there was a daughter—the first old gentleman had heard of it. McNab couldn't tell anything more—the poor fellow pegged out at that. Where his daughter was, even what her name was, the mining man never learned. Hilton hadn't time to tell him before the close came. But the man kindly enough turned up at Hilton Place to tell all he knew."

Ferrers Locke nodded.

Jack Drake was listening with breathless interest.

"Old Hilton told me the whole story," continued Captain Jervis. "He had never expected to hear of his son again; he had mourned him as dead. He has no other sons—both killed in the war—he's a lonely old man now, and he yearned after his unknown granddaughter. He set his solicitors to work on the job, and left it at that. But an idea came into my head." The Honourable Algernon grinned. "I believe I must be a direct descendant of Don Quixote. Anyhow, I hadn't anything special to do, and I wasn't keen on staying in London for the winter fogs—"

"So you came out here on an adventurous expedition?"

"Exactly."

"With what luck?"

"I've been hunting and inquiring up and down the Coast for anyone of the name of Hilton," said Captain Jervis. "I'd had news of a man who'd met a chap of that name, just before I came on you in Lagos. He was a man who'd been a coffee planter near Kawhee. So there you are! I saw the man, and he told me that a chap named Hilton had a plantation here—Roderick Hilton—and had disappeared a few months ago, leaving his daughter alone on the estate. By his account, the man wasn't much in the way of a father; but it was the same man evidently. So here I am in Kawhee—to look for the Hilton plantation, which isn't a few miles away, and to tell the young lady that she's granddaughter to a big gun in England, and to take her home, if she'll accept a passage on the Firefly. I fancy she'll be keen enough to go when she hears the news. Poor Hilton, who pegged out almost in rags, was heir to fifty thousand pounds—left him by an uncle during his absence, and

which he never heard of. It goes to his children—if any. That lonely young lady of the plantation is a big heiress."

Captain Jervis blew out a cloud of smoke.

"I want you to come with me to call on her," he continued. "A potent grave and reverend signor like yourself will inspire more confidence in a young lady than a harum-scarum fellow like myself. What?"

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"You are not alone in your quixotic quest, my dear fellow," he remarked. "Silky Smith is also on the trail."

"Rh? Who the merry dooce is Silky Smith?" exclaimed the captain, with a stare.

"One of the most cunning and dangerous crooks in London," answered Ferrers Locke quietly.

"But how—"

Ferrers Locke explained.

The Honourable Algernon clenched his big bronzed fists as he listened.

"I want to get within hittin' distance of that merchant!" he exclaimed, when the Baker Street detective had concluded.

"You may have the opportunity; he is still in Kawhee. According to what I learned from him, he heard of Hilton from a man called the Weasel, who was out here some time ago. How he knows the story of the relationship to old Mr. Hilton, and the fifty thousand pounds, I did not learn."

"Basy enough," said Captain Jervis, with a shrug of the shoulders. "As soon as he had heard McNab's story, old Mr. Hilton sent for his solicitor to consult on the steps to be taken, and among others, they decided on advertising. There's advertisements in a dozen papers or more, asking for any information regarding Roderick Hilton, who went to the Gold Coast twenty years ago. There's a handsome reward offered. There are plenty of people in London, of course, who've spent years out here, and any one of them might have dropped across Hilton some time, and remembered him. No doubt your silky friend saw the advertisements."

Locke nodded.

"And they reminded him of what the Weasel had told him of Hilton out here," he remarked. "It's clear enough now. And instead of going to old Mr. Hilton with what he knew, Mr. Smith decided to come out here himself and capture the heiress. Rather a clever scheme."

"I'll give him somethin' for his cleverness, if I land on him!" growled Captain Jervis.

Ferrers Locke rose.

"I've no doubt the landlord of the Planters can tell us just where to find the Hilton plantation," he said. "We can get horses here. We'd better ride out to the place at sundown—the sooner the better. Mr. Silky Smith is not the man to let the grass grow under his feet."

"I'm with you, Mr. Locke."

And when the blazing sun sank towards the reddened waters of the Atlantic, and the heat died away a little, three horsemen rode out of Kawhee with a native guide, and took the jungle path to the plantation.

Silky Smith in Luck!

"MISSY ALINE!"

"Well Koka?" Aline Hilton turned from the green-shuttered window of the room in the bungalow, as the old native servant entered.

Through the half-closed shutters there was a wide view of the coffee and rubber plantation, and the hills in the distance.

The sun was setting, in a glow of purple and gold, and Aline Hilton's eyes had been fixed wistfully on the path that ran up to the door of the bungalow.

A man in dingy white drill had come striding up the path, and he was now in the porch—the girl had seen him come.

He was a stranger to her; but instinctively she had disliked his narrow, hard face, his keen and cunning eyes.

"White gentleman wish to see missy," said old Koka.

"Show him in, Koka."

"Yes, missy."

The old Yoruba woman retired, and Aline Hilton sat down, and rested her chin pensively on her hand.

For six months or more the girl had lived alone in the bungalow, with no companions but the native servants.

But Aline Hilton was accustomed to taking care of herself. Even when her father had been at home he had cared little for his daughter, and little for the plantation. It was the girl who managed the plantation, and gave orders to the coolies; but for her care, the place would have gone to rack and ruin long ago. Roderick Hilton had been little better than a burden.

Often enough he was absent. Sometimes his absences were long—but they had never been prolonged into months before. And the conviction had forced itself on Aline's mind that she would never see her father again. She had known that the end must come some day—that his impaired constitution could not always resist the influence of drink and the deadly climate—a climate which only the strictest temperance can enable a white man to bear.

He did not return—and she felt that he was dead. But the hapless man was not missed on the plantation. The girl was accustomed to managing the place, and she continued to manage it—hoping, though with a dying hope, that news of her father might yet come.

It was possible that the narrow-eyed stranger brought news of her father, and for that reason she was willing to see him.

Old Koka showed him into the shady room, with a suspicious eye upon him—she did not trust Silky Smith's looks any more than the planter's daughter did.

"Ole Koka not far away, if missy want her," said the Yoruba woman, as she retired—a plain hint to Silky Smith.

Silky Smith stood, hat in hand, blinking at Aline.

In his own circle, among the criminals of London, Silky Smith had a ready tongue and plenty of assurance. He had flattered himself that he would have little difficulty in winning the heart and hand of a girl brought up on a lonely West African plantation, ignorant of the great world beyond the

jungle path. Though Mr. Smith was fully prepared to take more active measures if the headdress did not smile on his suit.

But this quiet, dignified girl was rather a surprise to Mr. Smith. Her cool, clear gaze rather confused the crook.

And the meeting with Ferrers Locke in Kawhee had deranged Mr. Smith's plans.

He knew that the Baker Street detective would lose no time in discovering who and where "Hilton's girl" was, and in placing her upon her guard. He cursed himself for his folly in being "drawn" by the astute detective; but it was too late to think of that now. Ferrers Locke certainly intended to intervene; and after a visit from the Baker Street detective, it was quite certain that any chance Mr. Smith might have had of marrying the headdress by fair means, would vanish.

Mr. Smith had to secure his own ends before Ferrers Locke came to the Hilton plantation—and that left him no time for courtship.

Though now, as he looked almost timidly at the quiet, calm-eyed girl, he realised that courtship would have had no chance. Aline Hilton was not the kind of girl to be taken by Mr. Smith's flashy looks and manners.

"Please be seated, sir!" The girl's quiet voice broke in upon the crook's confused thoughts.

Silky Smith dropped, rather than sat, in a chair. The girl's eyes continued to regard him calmly and scrutinisingly. Somehow, Silky Smith realised that she knew him for a rogue.

"You have called——" The girl broke off on a note of interrogation.

Silky pulled himself together. He reminded himself that all his measures were taken, and that the girl of the lonely bungalow was quite at his mercy. He had lost no time, since the meeting with Ferrers Locke had warned him that he had no time to lose.

"You are Miss Hilton?" he asked.

"That is my name."

"This is Roderick Hilton's bungalow?"

"Yes."

"And you are his daughter?"

Aline inclined her head.

"Do you bring me news of my father?" she asked.

"Yes, Miss Hilton." Even Silky Smith, rogue as he was, spoke rather gently—he was a rascal to the marrow of his bones, but he did not care to be brutal to this quiet, pensive-looking girl, yet in her teens. "I am afraid the news is—bad."

Aline caught her breath.

"He is dead?"

"Yes, months ago."

"I feared it!" said Aline quietly.

She was silent for a few moments. The news was a shock; but she had had time to get used to the idea. And Roderick Hilton had not been a father to be deeply mourned.

"Thank you for telling me," she said. "It was kind of you to come."

Silky Smith smiled faintly. It was not kindness that had brought him to the plantation at the back of the Coast town.

"I have further news for you," he said. "I am acquainted with your grandfather in England——"

"I have never heard of him."

"Your father did not tell you?"

"He confided nothing to me," she said wistfully. "He was not—not an affectionate father. Then I have relations in England?"

"You have a grandfather, who is very anxious to see you," said Silky Smith. "He has commissioned me to bring you home to him. My schooner is now in the bay at Kawhee, and I have come up the river to the plantation in my boat. It waits at the steps."

"You are very kind, Mr.——"

"Smith," said Silky.

"Mr. Smith. But I shall have to think this out. I will consult with my only friend here, the clergyman in Kawhee."

Silky drew a deep breath. He would have preferred to take the headdress peaceably and without violence. But his measures were laid to deal with resistance.

"There is no time to be lost, Miss Hilton," he urged. "I am bound to sail to-morrow."

"I thank you, Mr. Smith; but I cannot sail with you," said Aline, raising her eyebrows a little. "I cannot come to such a sudden decision."

Silky Smith had hardly expected anything else; but it had been worth trying. He rose to his feet.

"I am afraid I must insist," he said coolly.

Aline looked at him.

"Are you out of your senses?" she asked coldly.

"Not at all." Silky Smith walked to the shuttered window, threw open the shutters wide, and gave a long, loud whistle. From the tamarinds at the end of the path three rough-looking figures emerged, and ran up the path towards the bungalow.

Aline caught her breath.

The three were roughly-clad sailormen—the worst type of beachcombers found in the liquor-shops of the Gold Coast. And they were armed.

"Good heavens!" panted Aline. "Koka—Koka! Help!"

"Quick!" shouted Silky.

The three ruffians reached the window, pausing. Two or three coolies stared at them from the coffee fields, but did not offer to interfere. Aline ran to the door, but Silky Smith interposed, catching her by the arm. The door burst open, and old Koka sprang into the room.

"Throw out the old fool!" panted Silky.

One of the beachcombers seized the old negress, and hurled her from the room. Old Koka fell, with a cry, half-stunned.

Aline Hilton was struggling in Silky Smith's grasp. But she struggled in vain.

In a twinkling her wrists were seized and bound together, and Silky Smith and his followers carted her through the open French window, and rushed along the path with their capture.

A minute more and Aline was in the waiting boat, and the ruffians were bending to their oars pulling down the stream to the bay.

Silky Smith had made his throw for fortune; and success had smiled on him. The boat was pulling swiftly away in the dusk of the mangroves when Ferrers Locke and his companions rode up to the door of the bungalow.

Too Late!

FERRERS LOCKE drew rein. "Something is wrong here," he said quietly. There was a babbling crowd of coolies in front of the bungalow, and an old negress, in the verandah, was shrieking to them. The buzz of excited voices in a strange tongue reached the three horsemen as they came cantering up the path to the bungalow.

Jack Drake looked round him, in surprise. Captain Jervis eyed the coolies in amazed inquiry. Ferrers Locke pushed his way through the throng, and stepped on the verandah, catching the old negress by the shoulder. A fear was in his heart that Silky Smith had already struck.

"What has happened?"

"Miss Aline——" gasped Koka.

"Miss Hilton?"

"Yes, massa—taken away! She taken away! Bad white man take missy Aline away——" The old Yoruba woman went off into a wail.

"Tell me what has happened—quick!" said Ferrers Locke sharply.

The Baker Street man's commanding manner calmed the old Yoruba a little. She gasped out her tale.

Ferrers Locke rejoined his companions. "The scoundrel has been here already," he said. "He has struck his blow in broad daylight. The poor girl appears to have been quite unprotected; there are only coolies about the place. Take care of the horses, Drake, and follow me. Keep your revolver handy, Jervis."

"You bet!" muttered the Honourable Algernon.

From Koka, Ferrers Locke had learned the direction taken by the kidnappers. He hurried down the path, and through the tamarinds that screened off the shallow creek.

There he picked up a good many traces of the party.

Drake followed, leading the three horses; and Captain Jervis, with his revolver gripped in his bronzed hand. Locke bent and scanned the swampy bank of the creek.

"They had a boat here," he said. "You can see where it was resting against the mud; and there are the footprints of four men—three of them in rough sea-boots, and one in shoes. That one, I imagine, is Mr. Smith. They took to the water here."

"And the girl?"

"There is no trace of her, as she was carried," said Locke. "You see that the footprints towards the water, in the mud here, are deeper than the earlier ones coming away from the creek. They were carrying a burden when they returned."

"The cowardly hounds!" muttered Jervis.

Locke set his lips hard.

"After seeing me in Kawhee, Silky Smith evidently determined to strike without losing time," he said. "He must have spied upon the place already, and learned that the girl was unprotected. But he is not very far ahead of us—and he has us to deal with."

"Where does this creek lead to?"

"Evidently down to the bay," Locke reflected for a moment. "Doubtless we could get a boat or a canoe here, and follow. But the fact that they used a boat would seem to indicate that they were going back to the shore, and we shall cover the ground more rapidly on horseback."

Jervis nodded.

"You think the villain intends to carry her off by sea?"

"More likely than to seek a hiding-place in the jungle," said Locke. "Smith is a London crook. He is not the man to plunge into the African forest if he could help it. There has been a schooner at anchor in the bay at Kawhee since yesterday, and I suspect that it is the vessel Smith arrived by. The old woman yonder described his assistants as being clad like seamen—they came off some vessel. Let us look for the schooner, at all events, as a first shot. If it is drawn blank, we can then seek for a trail from the creek."

"Good!"

The three mounted, and rode away from the plantation—leaving the bungalow in loud confusion behind them.

It was some miles back to Kawhee by the path, and they rode at a gallop, in the dusk of the African evening.

The last rays of the sun had disappeared in the bosom of the Atlantic, and a pale crescent of moon showed over the forest, as the horses' hoofs ground up the sand of the shore.

Captain Jervis's yacht was riding at anchor—but she rode alone. The dingy schooner was gone.

"Gone!" muttered Jervis, between his teeth.

"As I suspected," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "But your crew, Jervis, will have observed what happened. Let us get on board. We shall get exact information there."

In a quarter of an hour Locke was on the deck of the Firefly, with the captain—and he learned all he wished to know. Lennox, the mate, had seen the boat come through the surf to the schooner, and had seen a woman passed on board—a white woman. He had suspected nothing amiss. The schooner had taken advantage of the breeze, and had run out to sea.

Jervis caught Locke by the arm.

"The scoundrels know nothing of my connection with the affair," he muttered. "They do not know that you have a steam yacht at your orders, Locke. But the Firefly's at your service. We are going after them."

"And we shall run them down," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "Our legs will be on board by the time you have steam up. Lose not a moment."

And as the moon rose higher over the sandy shore and rolling surf, the Firefly steamed out to sea, on the hunt for the kidnapper and the Gold Coast heiress.

THE END.

Another fine long story of Ferrers Locke in next Tuesday's "Boys' Herald."