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CAPTURING THE FOOD LORRY!

A Thrilling Incident From "Teddy Heron's Schooldays."—Inside.



The Blackstone Million!

BY OWEN CONQUEST.

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

A Sporting Offer.

A SPORTING offer!" "That's it, Mr. Locke." Ferrers Locke regarded the young man curiously.

Jack Drake had shown Mr. Edgar Oliphant into the detective's consulting-room, and then taken his seat at his desk. Drake's eyes were on Mr. Oliphant, as that young gentleman sat facing Ferrers Locke.

Drake was rather interested in him.

Edgar Oliphant looked about twenty-five—a rather handsome, athletic, young fellow. He was extremely well-dressed, almost dandified—and there were traces in his face that told of late hours and dissipation. Good-looking as he was, a hard, recklessness could be read in his face, and the glint in his light-grey eyes was not wholly pleasant. He seemed to bring with him an atmosphere of Bond Street and Pall Mall into the quiet Baker Street consulting-room.

Oliphant sat with one elegant leg crossed over the other, not without some care for the crease in his well-cut trousers. There was a half-smile on his face, as he met Ferrers Locke's penetrating glance.

"A sportin' offer!" he repeated. "I've heard a great deal about you, Mr. Locke, an' I believe you're some sportsman. Will you give me a hearin', at least?"

"Certainly, I will do that!" said Locke.

"It's an interestin' case, from your point of view," continued Oliphant. "Quite romantic—missin' heiress, beauty in distress, and a million pounds stake. Sounds interestin', doesn't it?"

"Very," assented Locke.

"The missin' beauty," went on Oliphant, "is my cousin Gloriana. Some name—what?" Oliphant laughed. "Gloriana would be about twenty-three now, if she's still livin'. I hope to goodness she is. I've never seen her, but I'm greatly attached to her. I want you to help me find her, Mr. Locke, and bring her back to England, home, and beauty—and the cool million that my uncle Blackstone has left for her."

"You had better be a little more explicit," said Ferrers Locke drily. "In the first place, in what does the sporting offer consist, to which you have referred?"

"Just this! I understand that you charge fairly high fees for your services—and a case that would take up some weeks of your time would run into a good figure."

"Undoubtedly."

"I happen to be in the unfortunate position of not possessing a sou!" explained Oliphant.

Locke raised his eyebrows.

"Yet you come to me!" he said.

"Exactly—to make you a sportin' offer. Take up the case, and if you fail, you get your trouble for your pains. If you succeed—"

"Well, if I succeed?" said Ferrers Locke, as the young man paused.

"In that case, you may surely depend on it that Miss Blackstone will shell out to a handsome tune," said Oliphant. "I can't give any guarantee, but a young woman suddenly rescued from oblivion, and introduced to a cool million pounds, would naturally shell out a good fee to the man who worked the oracle—what?"

"Probably," assented Locke.

"That's the sportin' offer," continued

Oliphant. "Havin' found her, you could, if you liked, make your own terms before lettin' her into the secret. For wherever she is, it's quite certain that she knows nothin' about her father or his fortune."

Ferrers Locke frowned slightly.

"Having found her," he said, "I should present my account for expenses, with a reasonable fee in addition; but I should certainly not dream of making terms, as you express it, while keeping the young lady in the dark as to the facts, Mr. Oliphant."

Oliphant shrugged his shoulders.

"You could please yourself," he answered. "I'm only pointin' out that I'm puttin' you on to a good thing, if you care to take it up and take the risk."

"Let me have some details, please."

"You'd like to hear the story?"

"Yes."

"Good man! May I smoke?"

Locke pushed the cigarette-box across to his visitor. Edgar Oliphant lighted a cigarette.

"The beginnin' is about twenty years back," he said. "Don't be alarmed—it's not a long story. Twenty years ago Uncle Blackstone was some sort of a big gun in South Africa. Then the war came—"

"The war?"

"Not our war," smiled Oliphant. "That little fuss in South Africa—Kruger and Co., and the rest of it. Of course, I don't remember it personally. But there it was. Uncle Blackstone sent his daughter home. She was a little kid of two or three, and she came by the steamer Silver Spray, in charge of a nurse. Uncle Blackstone was mixed up in the fighting, and was a prisoner with the Boers until Pretoria was taken—he never heard any news of his daughter till afterwards. Then he learned that the Silver Spray had never touched port. The ship had gone down in a hurricane with all hands."

Oliphant blew out a little cloud of smoke.

"Nothin' more was heard of the steamer, or of Gloriana Blackstone," he resumed. "Uncle Blackstone came home to England; a rather soured old fellow—he never got over it. He was a widower, you see, and Gloriana was the only child. He took me under his wing—he brought me up, and was fairly good to me—but I had the misfortune to displease him of late years. Our ways were rather different. Anyhow, when the will was read, after Uncle Blackstone's death, there was nothing for me—next to nothing. Five thousand pounds!" Oliphant made a grimace. "That was a year ago. The five thousand pounds have taken into themselves wings and flown away—as riches do, you know. I'm up against it."

"But—"

"But that isn't what I was goin' to tell you," said Oliphant, with a nod. "Quite so. Uncle's will was made in favour of his daughter Gloriana. A certain sum was set aside, in the hands of his lawyers, to pay for looking for her. Some sort of an inquiry is goin' on, I believe—of course, it won't lead to anythin'. I'm not sure that even you will succeed, Mr. Locke; I only hope for the best."

"It appears that Mr. Blackstone still hoped that his daughter was living?" said Locke.

"That's it! It turns out that he'd never given up hope, and for twenty years or so an inquiry had been going on," said Oli-

phant. "Some sort of news had been got about the Silver Spray. A drunken sailor-man was dug up in Liverpool, who proved, or claimed, to be a survivor. He told a yarn that a boat had got away with the little girl and her nurse, and himself and several other seamen. They landed on an island off the coast of North-West Africa—off the Spanish territory."

"He and the other men took on water and coconuts and tried their luck at sea again; but the nurse and the baby stayed on the island with the natives—the nurse was sick, and doubtless afraid to venture to sea again in an open boat. The natives seem to have received them in a friendly way. No white people on the island, so far as the man knew. His name was Jones, by the way."

"Well, Jones and his companions knocked about in the boat, one after another pegging out from thirst or hunger, till only Jones survived, and he was picked up at the point of death by a ship going down to Sierra Leone."

"It was years later that he found himself in Liverpool, and told his story. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. But Uncle Blackstone believed it, and a steamer was sent out to search—nothing came of it. At that time Gloriana would be, I suppose, about twelve. Now, of course, she's a grown-up young woman. Rather a queer case, I should imagine, if she has been brought up among niggers on an African island, without any white man or woman there. The nurse can scarcely be living now. In fact, Jones' opinion was that she was dying when he left. But she's my Cousin Gloriana, and I want to find her."

"To bring her back to England, and put her in possession of her fortune?"

"Naturally."

"You do not stand to benefit personally in any way, so far as I can make out?"

"Not in the least."

Locke eyed the young man. Edgar Oliphant did not impress him as a man to take up a difficult quest for motives of pure chivalry.

"You have allowed a year to pass since your uncle's death?" he remarked.

"I've been busy!" explained Oliphant, with a smile. "I've had to look after the investment of my five thousand pounds."

"Which has not turned out fortunately?"

"You see, the investment was chiefly in gee-gees, and they ran away with the money," explained Oliphant. "I've had no luck. I've got about enough left to pay my expenses on this trip."

"Oh! You are thinking of taking part in the search?"

"Just that! I want to leave London for a time. I've had a bad streak of luck, and besides, there are some people who want to see me badly, and whom I don't want to see," said Oliphant coolly. "If I come home with a cousin worth a cool million, they will treat me a bit more civilly, I think."

"What becomes of the money, if Miss Blackstone is not found?"

"It's tied up for twenty years," said Oliphant. "After that, if the girl's not found, it goes to charities."

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"You can give me no more information?" he asked.

"I think that's about all."
 "The position of the island?"
 "According to the seaman Jones, it was somewhere between the Gulf of Guinea and the Straits of Gibraltar. That's all he knew."

"Little enough. Where is Jones now?"
 "Dead."
 "There were no whites on the island?"
 "None. Jones thought it was off the Spanish territory in North Africa, but he couldn't be sure. But he saw no Spaniards there."

"What kind of natives?"
 "Niggers, the seaman called them."
 Locke looked thoughtful.
 "I suppose there is one chance in a thousand that Miss Blackstone is still living, and that she may be found," he remarked. "You are undertaking a very difficult quest, Mr. Oliphant."

"I know it! But it's the last shot in the locker."
 "How so?"
 "I—I mean—" Oliphant paused.

"Well, if I find my cousin, and bring her back to enjoy her fortune, she will scarcely leave her only blood relation to starve. Without being mercenary, I can count on that."

"I suppose so."
 "I know it sounds like a wild-goose chase, Mr. Locke. But there's adventure in it—and if you're successful, it's pretty certain that you won't lose by it. It's a sportin' offer, as I said. You can count it among your good deeds, too, if that amounts to anything. What's the verdict, Mr. Locke?"

With all his carelessness, there was anxiety in the young man's face as he regarded the Baker Street detective.

Locke did not reply for some minutes. He was thinking the matter out, quietly and calmly.

He nodded at last.
 "I will undertake the case," he said.
 Oliphant's face lighted up.

"Good man!" he exclaimed heartily.
 "I cannot, of course, promise anything like success. It is, as you have said, very much like a wild-goose chase," said Ferrers Locke.

"But if your cousin is still living, I will do my best to find her."
 "That's all I can ask," said Oliphant.

"When will you be prepared to start?"
 "To-morrow."

"Good again! Of course, I shall be your travelling companion. I want to be in at the death. You like the idea?"

"I have no objection. My assistant will accompany me," said Locke.

Oliphant glanced at Jack Drake, and smiled.

"A chance for you to see something of the world, young 'un!" he said, with a nod. "I shall be glad of your company."

He rose. "Make your own arrangements, Mr. Locke, and I will fall in with them. You're leader, and I'm your most faithful follower—what?"

And after a little further discussion, Mr. Edgar Oliphant sauntered gracefully out of the consulting-room, evidently in a satisfied mood. He hummed a merry tune as he strolled down Baker Street.

FERRERS Locke's Warning.

FERRERS LOCKE remained in a very thoughtful mood after his visitor had left him. Jack Drake did not speak; but he eyed his chief very curiously. The prospect of a run down into southern seas was very agreeable and enticing to Drake, and he was already looking forward to it. And there was an element of romance in the strange case that appealed to him.

Ferrers Locke looked up, and smiled as he caught the glance of his young assistant.

"What do you think of Mr. Oliphant, Drake?" asked the Baker Street detective.

Drake hesitated.
 "He seems a very cheery young fellow," he said, at last.

"Almost a Sir Galahad of chivalry, to undertake this peculiar quest, when he is almost at the end of his financial resources," Ferrers Locke remarked.

Drake coughed.
 "He did not strike you as a Sir Galahad, Drake?"

"Well, no, sir," said Drake frankly. "I can't understand his taking the matter up, unless he has an axe to grind."

Ferrers Locke laughed.
 "It is fairly obvious that he has an axe to grind," he said. "He is not thinking only of getting a possible allowance from his rich cousin, after she has come into her fortune."

"I don't see what else—"

"Mr. Oliphant has not honoured me by taking me into his full confidence," said Locke, rather grimly. "But, unless I am greatly mistaken, I can read his thoughts pretty accurately. We are going to find an English girl who has been brought up among the natives of a savage African island, and who may never have seen any white men, except perhaps some rough traders. Mr. Oliphant is a very good-looking young man—and evidently has an excellent opinion of himself and his attractions."

"Oh," ejaculated Drake.
 "I strongly suspect that it is his intention to lay siege to Miss Gloriana, as soon as she is found, and to return to England as the husband of the heiress. That, I think, is the explanation of Mr. Oliphant's chivalrous quest."

Drake nodded slowly.
 "I thought he had an axe to grind," he said. "I—I say, that's a rather rotten scheme, sir. The poor girl, in the circumstances, will very likely take to him like a duck to water; but he couldn't care for her—he doesn't look as if he could care much for anybody."

Ferrers Locke looked thoughtful.

"I fancy that that is his plan," he said. "Whether it will be carried out is a different matter. He has asked me to find his cousin, if possible. I shall do so. He is thinking of the million. But a girl brought up from childhood by savage negroes—it is possible that Mr. Oliphant may not think the game worth the candle when he sees her. However, it is our duty to rescue the poor girl, if we can do so—and I think we can do so."

Drake looked at him quickly.
 "You have no clue yet, sir?"

"I am not sure," Ferrers Locke smiled.
 "You remember Algy Jervis, Drake?"

"Captain Jervis? Yes."

"He told me a curious story once, that came into my mind while Mr. Oliphant was telling me of his cousin. Jervis has knocked about in many curious corners of the earth in his yacht, and he spent some time last year on the Spanish African coast."

Ferrers Locke glanced at his watch. "I think we will call on Captain Jervis, Drake—he is at home now, in his chambers at Jermyn Street. Call him up, and ask him whether he will be at home to see me?"

"Certainly, sir!"
 Jack Drake promptly rang up Captain the Honourable Algernon Jervis. The captain's deep voice came through on the wires.

"Hallo!"
 "Jack Drake speaking, sir," said Drake.

"Good! Go ahead."
 "Are you at home if Mr. Locke calls this morning?"

"Always at home to Locke. Tell him to roll along."

"Very good, sir."
 Ten minutes later Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake were in the car, threading their way through the London traffic.

There was a slight smile upon the calm, clear-cut face of the Baker Street detective. It roused Drake's curiosity. He was rather eager to learn what Captain Jervis had to tell.

As the car turned into Jermyn Street, Drake caught sight of an elegant figure lounging on the pavement. It was Mr. Edgar Oliphant. He was in company with two other elegantly dressed young men.

He was chatting cheerily, as if he had not a care in the world upon his well-shaped shoulders.

As the car stopped, Oliphant caught sight of the detective, and a look of surprise came over his face. He quitted his companions, and approached the car, as Ferrers Locke alighted.

"We've met again very soon, Mr. Locke," he said, smiling. "My club's not ten minutes from here—will you come along to lunch?"

"Thank you; but I have business on hand," said Ferrers Locke.

"Business in this quarter? Not in connection with our case?" asked Oliphant, with a gay laugh.

"Yes."
 The young man started.

"Not seriously, Mr. Locke?"
 "Quite seriously," said the Baker Street detective. "I hope to pick up a clue here."

"My hat! In Jermyn Street?"
 "Precisely."

"A clue to a girl who was lost twenty years ago on the African coast?"

"Just so."
 "You beat me, Mr. Locke," said Oliphant.

"I suppose you are serious? I've often heard you called a wizard, and I think

you must be one. Our arrangements hold good to start to-morrow?"

"Certainly."
 "I shall be ready."

"One moment, Mr. Oliphant," said Ferrers Locke, with his eyes upon the young man's handsome, careless face. "One word more."

"A hundred, if you like."
 "It is possible that this quest may not turn out exactly as you desire. If you have any selfish object—"

"Mr. Locke!"
 "It is my duty to speak plainly," said Locke quietly. "I intended to say this when we met to-morrow. I will say it now, as I have met you here. If you have any selfish scheme in your mind with regard to this girl, my advice to you is to back out while there is yet time."

"You want to drop the case?"
 "Not at all. I have no intention whatever of dropping it now."

"It interests you, then?"
 "Yes."

Oliphant laughed in rather a puzzled way.
 "You don't want me to understand that you object to me as a travelling companion, Mr. Locke?"

"Not in the least. I believe that you will be very agreeable company."

"Thanks. Then why do you advise me to back out?"

"For reasons I have given. If your intentions are wholly unselfish, and you desire only to help this girl to claim her rights, and mean well by her—"

"Of—of course."
 "In that case, come. But if you have any scheme for your personal advantage, retreat while there is yet time. I felt bound to give you this warning."

Oliphant laughed again.
 "You are truly a wizard, Mr. Locke," he said. He stood by the car, and lighted a cigarette. "You read to the bottom of a fellow's heart. But I am not backin' out."

"Very good," said Locke.
 Oliphant nodded, and went back to his companions, and Ferrers Locke and Jack Drake entered the great building in which were the chambers of Captain the Honourable Algernon Jervis.

The Story of the Island Queen.

CAPTAIN JERVIS shook hands warmly with the Baker Street detective, and bestowed a nod and a smile on Jack Drake.

"Jolly glad to see you, Locke," he said. "What fair wind blew you in this direction?"

The detective sat down.
 "The search for information, Jervis," he answered.

"Go ahead!" said the captain.
 "Do you remember that when we met at Lagos last year, you told me a story of a queer adventure on the Spanish African coast?"

"I remember."
 "I want you to tell me that story again, with all the details that you can remember."

"Any old thing," said the captain.
 He stretched his long legs on a sofa, and lighted a cigarette.

"I won't ask you your reasons," he said. "But for some reason or other you're interested in the Island Queen."

"Exactly."
 "It's a tall story," said Jervis. "I've told it more than once, and fellows think I am pulling their leg. But it's so. There are islands off the Spanish African coast, where white men never set their foot. They belong to Spain, in name, but they're only inhabited by natives—a mixture of Moor and negro. I was wandering that way in the Firefy, when I put in at the island of Kolos. It's not marked on the map—it's one of a dozen more, some of them uninhabited. But Kolos is pretty thickly populated; they do a trade in coconuts and bananas and things, with the people on the coast, and there's a missionary there—an Englishman. He's an old Johnny, and he's been there for ten years, and lost all connection with home."

"His name?"

"Tunstall. I went ashore, and Tunstall asked me to tiffin," went on Captain Jervis. "I heard from him about the Island Queen."

Jack Drake pricked up his ears.
 "It was a startling story," said Jervis.

"From what the missionary told me, Ayouda—she's called Ayouda—was there when he came to the island—an Arab name, but she's a white woman. She was wrecked

there, with another woman, who died soon afterwards. He found that Ayouda could speak a little English, and he taught her more. She took the old fellow under her protection. The natives made no end of a fuss of her—and she was queen of the island."

"Unmarried?" asked Locke.

"Yes; she turned up her white nose at the blacks," said the captain. "But, to judge by her looks—I saw her only at a distance—she was not much of a prize. She was burned blacker than coffee by the sun, and she was a hefty young lady—six feet at least, and muscular in proportion. She ruled the niggers with a rod of iron, and rebellious subjects were thrown to the sharks in the bay. She allowed no traders to settle on the island; and an official who landed there once, by order of the Spanish Government, never appeared thereafter—he was eaten by Queen Ayouda's cherey subjects."

Drake started.

"From what I gathered, the Island Queen is not a cannibal herself; she keeps up that distinction," went on the captain. "But her subjects are the ghastliest crew under the sun. Tunstall, the missionary, is the only white man who cares, or dares, to settle on the island, and he's only there because the capricious lady has pleased to take him under her protection. An order came down to the missionary's hut for his guest—little me—to be taken up to the mud palace to interview the queen. He advised me to cut, and his advice was too good not to be taken. I weighed anchor within the hour."

"What is the queen exactly like?"

"She looks like a hefty mulatto. But there's no doubt that she was white originally."

"Her English name?"

"Not known to me," said Jervis. "Nor to the missionary. But he told me that she has things that prove her identity, in the mud palace—things that came ashore with her twenty years ago!" repeated Locke.

"About that. She keeps them for some reason of her own, and she's told the missionary about them," said Jervis. "She takes pride in being the daughter of a great chief in the white man's country, it appears."

"Any details of the wreck?"

Jervis shook his head.

"No—excepting that Ayouda and her companion came ashore in a boat, with some seamen, who cleared off at once—probably having caught sight of the cooking-pots. The woman died, and the child lived, and was brought up in the native huts."

Locke was silent for some moments. Jack Drake had followed the captain's story eagerly. He understood now what was in Ferrers Locke's mind.

"If the lady has any relations in England," continued the captain, "with a rather keen look at Ferrers Locke, they would be well advised to leave her alone. She's happy on her island; but in England—" He laughed. "She looks about thirty-five, but can't be much over twenty, from what the missionary said. She wears a big brass ring in her nose, and her ear ornaments are made from skulls. She would not be much of a success in this country, I imagine; it's too late for that."

Ferrers Locke laughed.

"Thank you very much, Jervis," he said, as he rose. "It's a strange yarn, and a very interesting one."

There was a glimmer in the Baker Street detective's eyes as he sat in his car again. Drake looked at him. The car hummed away back to Baker Street.

"You think, sir—" began Drake.

Locke nodded.

"It came into my mind while Oliphant was telling me the story of his cousin," he said quietly. "It hangs together very well. There is very little doubt in my mind that Ayouda, the queen of Kolos, is the missing Gloriana Blackstone."

"It is perhaps lucky that Mr. Blackstone never found her, then," said Drake. "It would have been an awful shock to him."

"Probably."

"But Oliphant—" said Drake.

"We start to-morrow," said Locke. "Savage queen or not, cannibal or not, Gloriana Blackstone has the right to know that she is heiress to a large fortune in England, and to be given the choice of returning to her own country."

"That is true, sir. But Oliphant—"

Ferrers Locke shrugged his shoulders.

"I have warned him," he said. "If he

chooses to come, let him come. If his object is disinterested, as he says, there will be no harm done. If he entertains a cunning scheme to entrap an ignorant heiress, for his own benefit, he can take the consequences. When he sees Queen Ayouda, I fancy that even a million will not tempt him—and he will have had his journey for nothing. And if, as he evidently expects, the girl takes a fancy to him—"

"Then, sir—"

"Then it may be a case of the seeker of wool being shorn," said Ferrers Locke. "That is Mr. Oliphant's business. If he is trying to make me a party to a mercenary scheme, he may take his chance."

Drake was silent.

The remainder of that day was busy enough for the Baker Street detective and his boy assistant. They had their preparations to make for the journey, and Ferrers Locke had to arrange his affairs during his absence, which could scarcely be for less than some weeks.

On the morning, Edgar Oliphant called at Baker Street. He was ready to start, and in a very cheery humour.

"Anythin' in the clue, Mr. Locke?" he asked.

"I think so."

"You think you'll find Gloriana Blackstone?"

"Yes."

"Good man!"

"And you are still resolved?" asked Locke.

"Quite!" said Oliphant curtly.

And no more was said on that topic.

On Sunny Seas.

EDGAR OLIPHANT proved an agreeable travelling-companion.

Jack Drake, in spite of a slight distrust he felt towards the young man, could not help liking his society, and finding him entertaining on the long journey. The trip was pleasant enough to Jack Drake. The change from the mist and rain of London, to sunny seas and blue waters, was agreeable. During the first part of the journey, Oliphant was in the greatest of spirits. Evidently he counted upon success, after what the Baker Street detective had told him—and it became clearer that he had an "axe to grind" in seeking the lost heiress of the Blackstone million. In fact, after a time he scarcely made a secret of it.

It was only too clear, from his talk, that

he looked upon the discovery of his Cousin Gloriana as a means of rehabilitating his broken fortunes.

And, pleasant fellow as he was, Drake could see very clearly the faults of his character. He had tired out the patience of a kind uncle by his reckless dissipated and expenses, and he had not the slightest intention of amending his ways. If he was no longer painting the West End red, it was because the horn of plenty had run dry. His keen desire to quit London for a time was largely due to his wish to dodge the moneylenders with whom he was deeply involved. He scarcely concealed the fact that without the aid of the heiress's money, he could hardly venture to return to his old haunts.

Palpably, it was not merely an "allowance" from his rich cousin he was counting upon, as he had told Ferrers Locke.

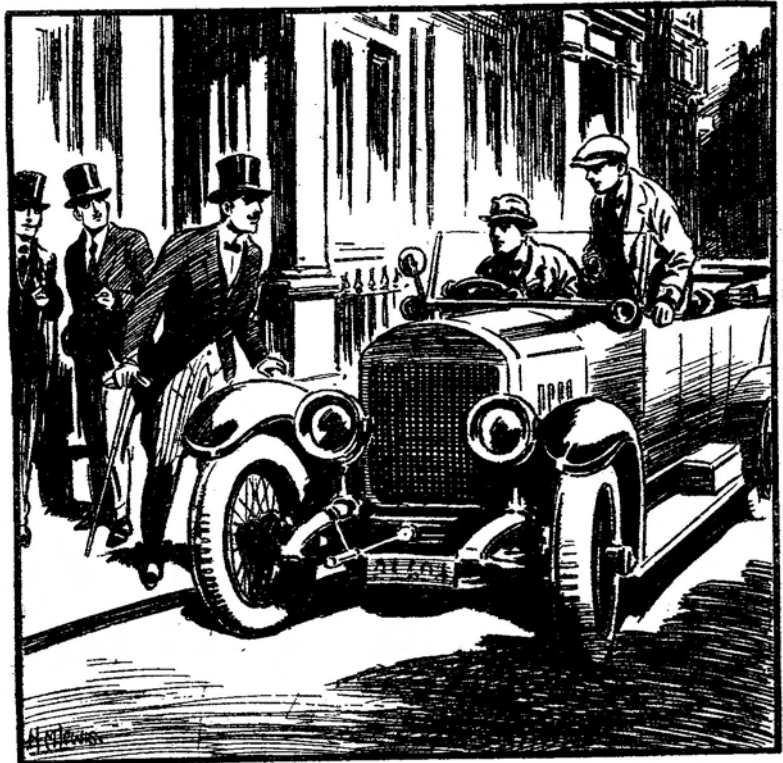
He was counting upon the fortune; and there was only one way in which the fortune could be secured.

That reflection was not a pleasant one to Drake; and, agreeable fellow as Oliphant undoubtedly was, his mercenary designs prevented the boy from taking a real liking to him.

He was prepared to take possession of Gloriana Blackstone before she had had a chance of seeing the world—to get her plighted word while she was still ignorant of her fortune and her prospects. He did not anticipate any difficulty. And when once the heiress's fortune was in his grasp, it was only too clear that Oliphant intended plunging more deeply than ever into riotous expenses.

All that could be read in his careless talk; so far from being ashamed of the cool, calculating selfishness of his scheme, the young man was quite satisfied with himself. More than once Drake observed him glancing into a mirror on board the steamer, and smiling in a satisfied, almost fatuous way at his reflection. Undoubtedly he was a good-looking fellow—and undoubtedly he was calculating on his good looks in his campaign for the heiress and her million.

Apparently he expected to find some quiet, shy young woman, knowing little of the world, who would be glad to accept the protection of a near relation who came to claim her and take her home, and who would be prompt to fall in love with him from sheer gratitude and relief—even without the aid of his handsome face and pleasant manners.



As the car stopped, Oliphant quitted his companions, and approached Ferrers Locke. "We've met again very soon, Mr. Locke," he said. "My club's not ten minutes from here—will you come along to lunch?" "Thank you," said Ferrers Locke; "but I have business on hand."

Drake wondered what he would have thought of Captain Jervis' description of the Island Queen.

Plainly Oliphant had no suspicion whatever of the truth.

Nothing had been said. Ferrers Locke did not choose to enlighten him, and Drake, of course, could say nothing as his chief did not. Ferrers Locke talked little with his client on the journey; and Oliphant was thrown chiefly upon Drake for society, and he talked freely to the boy. On the day they quitted Gibraltar in a Madeira trader, Oliphant was in great spirits, and he walked on the deck with Drake, chatting under the stars that glimmered in a velvety sky.

"We are getting near the end now," he remarked. "It beats me how Locke has picked up a clue. He might confide in me—what? I—I suppose he really has some sort of guidance, and is not going simply by chance?" He looked doubtfully at Drake.

The boy detective was silent.

"Well, I won't ask you any questions," said Oliphant, breaking into a laugh. "You must respect your chief's confidence, if he has told you anything." But Locke perplexes me a little. However, so long as we are getting on with the quest I do not care." He lighted a cigarette, and blew out a cloud of smoke. "Another week—and no for London! What? We seem to have been away years; but things will be a little bit different when I see the smoky old village again—what? I've got a feeling that I shall have better luck on the next Derby; and if not—well, I shall be able to afford a flutter." He smiled genially.

Drake did not answer. It was not with his own money that Mr. Oliphant would be able to afford a flutter on the Derby, that was certain. It was Gloriana Blackstone's money that he was counting upon for that lofty purpose.

"You're looking very serious, kid," said Oliphant suddenly. "Don't you think we shall find my cousin, after all?"

"I think it's most likely, Mr. Oliphant."

"Good, then!"

"But—well, said Drake.

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Drake hastily. Oliphant looked at him, and burst into a laugh, that had a sardonic ring to it.

"Wait till you've been through the world a bit, my boy, and you won't be so particular," he said coolly. "You know, of course, that I am going to marry Gloriana. If Uncle Blackstone had left me his fortune, as I had a right to expect, the dear young lady might have vegetated on her Robinson Crusoe island till the end of the term of her natural life. But a man must have money. I must have the Blackstone million. If not in one way, then in another. Dash it all, she ought to be glad of the chance, I think. I'm not a bad-looking fellow—what?"

Drake laughed.

"No," he said. "But isn't it rather rotten to think of marrying the poor girl for her money, Mr. Oliphant?"

"Not so rotten as dodging round street corners to avoid a moneylender," said Oliphant coolly. "Not so rotten as having Ikey Isaacs asking for me at my club, and not daring to tell the porter to kick him into the street."

"Oh!" said Drake. "But—but suppose Miss Blackstone has spent her whole life among savages, she may be—well, not exactly the kind of person you would care to introduce—"

"I know that; I think it's very probable," said Oliphant. "After we arrive in Eng-

land, she won't be troubled by my company very much. After twenty years on a desert island, she will be satisfied with a home in the country—I shall live mostly in town. Depend on me not to make too big a sacrifice of it."

"Dash it all—," began Drake. But he broke off. It was impossible to penetrate the utterly selfish complacency of this cheerful young man, who proposed to sacrifice a woman's life in order to find him funds for a reckless career of dissipation. Oliphant laughed at the expression on the boy's face. He read Drake's thoughts, and they did not offend him in the least—he was too hardened for that.

If Drake had felt any temptation to put the adventurer upon his guard, it left him now. A man who deliberately planned to inveigle an inexperienced girl into a marriage, with the intention of cruelly neglecting her afterwards, and thinking only of his own selfish pleasure, deserved whatever disappointment was in store for him.

And Drake felt that a bitter disappointment was to come—as soon as Oliphant saw the Island Queen. Reckless and unscrupulous as he was, Drake felt that even Oliphant would realize that it was "not good enough," when he saw the savage queen of Kolos. His dream of returning to London a wealthy man—wealthy with another's fortune—would vanish in smoke.

The trading steamer touched at a coast town of Morocco, where the travellers left it. They stayed twenty-four hours, during which time Ferrers Locke made his arrangements, and Oliphant and Jack Drake were left together. Then they embarked on a Spanish schooner to run down the coast. Oliphant was more puzzled than ever, though he followed the Baker Street detective's lead without question. Under a burning sun the dirty, ill-smelling schooner went her way, her skipper smoking strong cheroots all day, her crew of half-a-dozen half-breeds loafing about the dirty decks. There was something in Ferrers Locke's manner that kept the young man from questioning him; but at last Oliphant put it plainly to the Baker Street detective.

"Where are we heading for, Locke?" he asked, as the schooner, before a light breeze, ran down the coast, with the mountains of Morocco a hazy blue line on the eastern horizon.

"The island of Kolos," answered Ferrers Locke.

"I've never heard of it."

"Few have!" said Locke.

"You think that Kolos is the island where Gloriana Blackstone went ashore twenty years ago?"

"I think so."

"Then you really have some sort of a clue?"

"So I believe."

"Hang it all!" broke out Oliphant irritably. "You're rather too secretive, Locke. I have a right to know."

"You agreed to follow my lead, Mr. Oliphant," said the Baker Street detective tranquilly. "I am going to find your lost cousin. At least, I hope so. That is all."

"You must have had some information about her."

"No doubt."

"You think she is still on the island?"

"I think so."

"Oh, good!" said Oliphant. "Keep your little secrets, Mr. Locke. So long as I meet Gloriana, I shall be satisfied. When do we reach Kolos?"

"In two days from now."

"Are there any white men on the island?"

"Only one—a missionary clergyman."

"How fortunate!" exclaimed Oliphant. "That will solve a lot of difficulties."

"Indeed."

"Yes, indeed!" said Oliphant. "As soon as we land on Kolos, Mr. Locke, your interest in the case ends, naturally. As Gloriana's nearest—in fact, only—relation, I shall take charge of her. After that I shall not require your services."

The Baker Street detective smiled ironically.

"You forget," he said. "You have not engaged my services, Mr. Oliphant. I am to look for my fee—if any—to the young lady herself."

"I shall arrange that matter with my cousin," said Oliphant haughtily. "I shall brook no interference from you, Mr. Locke."

"That depends," said Ferrers Locke, unmoved.

"Upon what?"

"Upon my judgment."

The young man breathed hard. His hand slid into his coat pocket, where a revolver was shaped against the lining. He withdrew it, and laughed.

"I hope we shall not quarrel, Mr. Locke," he said lightly. "We are not in Baker Street now, with a policeman within call." His handsome face hardened into grim seriousness. "You have guessed my object in seeking my cousin, Ferrers Locke?"

"I knew it from the first."

"Do you oppose it?"

"That depends."

"It does not depend!" said Oliphant, setting his teeth. "I shall stand no intervention on your part. I have marked out my way, and I shall follow it. We may as well have a clear understanding, as we are so near to the end. I am a desperate man, Mr. Locke—and if the success of my plan should be endangered, I should take desperate measures." The smile returned to his face, but it was a sardonic and threatening one. "I should be sorry if the distinguished career of Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, came to a sudden end on this obscure corner of the African coast, where the world would never know what had become of him."

Locke smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I do not think that that is likely to happen, Mr. Oliphant," he answered.

"After I have seen Gloriana Blackstone, I shall decide—and tell you my decision. You have laid an unscrupulous plan, and whatever the consequences, you have earned them. This much I may tell you—the scheme will not turn out as you have hoped."

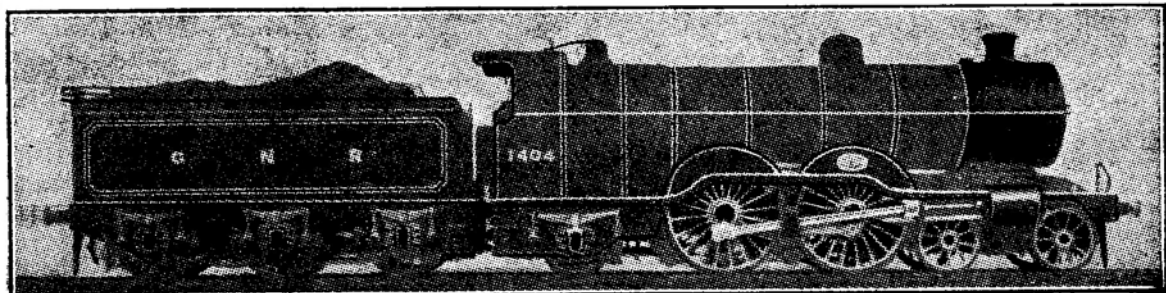
With that, Ferrers Locke turned his back on Oliphant, and walked away along the deck. Edgar Oliphant stared after him, with a black brow and glinting eyes. The light, careless air of the man about town had dropped from him, and at that moment he looked like what he was—a hardened and desperate man. He drew in a hissing breath, and for a moment his grip closed on the revolver in his pocket.

From that hour Oliphant's exuberant spirits seemed to desert him; and it was with grim and anxious eyes that he watched, hour after hour, the sunny waters, till the island of Kolos should rise to view.

THE END.

What will be the result of Edgar Oliphant's cleverly planned scheme? Next week's grand detective story will tell. Do not miss it!

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