

BANGS JOHN KENDRICK

THE PURSUIT OF THE
HOUSE-BOAT

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John Kendrick Bangs

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CHAPTER I: THE ASSOCIATED SHADES TAKE ACTION

The House-boat of the Associated Shades, formerly located upon the River Styx, as the reader may possibly remember, had been torn from its moorings and navigated out into unknown seas by that vengeful pirate Captain Kidd, aided and abetted by some of the most ruffianly inhabitants of Hades. Like a thief in the night had they come, and for no better reason than that the Captain had been unanimously voted a shade too shady to associate with self-respecting spirits had they made off with the happy floating club-house of their betters; and worst of all, with them, by force of circumstances over which they had no control, had sailed also the fair Queen Elizabeth, the spirited Xanthippe, and every other strong-minded and beautiful woman of Erebean society, whereby the men thereof were rendered desolate.

"I can't stand it!" cried Raleigh, desperately, as with his accustomed grace he presided over a special meeting of the club, called on the bank of the inky Stygian stream, at the point where the missing boat had been moored. "Think of it, gentlemen, Elizabeth of England, Calpurnia of Rome, Ophelia of Denmark, and every precious jewel in our social diadem gone, vanished completely; and with whom? Kidd, of all men in the universe! Kidd, the pirate, the ruffian—"

"Don't take on so, my dear Sir Walter," said Socrates, cheerfully. "What's the use of going into hysterics? You are not a woman, and should eschew that luxury. Xanthippe is with them, and I'll warrant you that when that cherished spouse of mine has recovered from the effects of the sea, say the third day out, Kidd and his crew will be walking the plank, and voluntarily at that."

"But the House-boat itself," murmured Noah, sadly. "That was my delight. It reminded me in some respects of the Ark."

"The law of compensation enters in there, my dear Commodore," retorted Socrates. "For me, with Xanthippe abroad I do not need a club to go to; I can stay at home and take my hemlock in peace and straight. Xanthippe always compelled me to dilute it at the rate of one quart of water to the finger."

"Well, we didn't all marry Xanthippe," put in Caesar firmly, "therefore we are not all satisfied with the situation. I, for one, quite agree with Sir Walter that something must be done, and quickly. Are we to sit here and do nothing, allowing that fiend to kidnap our wives with impunity?"

"Not at all," interposed Bonaparte. "The time for action has arrived. All things considered, he is welcome to Marie Louise, but the idea of Josephine going off on a cruise of that kind breaks my heart."

"No question about it," observed Dr. Johnson. "We've got to do something if it is only for the sake of appearances. The question really is, what shall be done first?"

"I am in favor of taking a drink as the first step, and considering the matter of further action afterwards," suggested Shakespeare, and it was this suggestion that made the members unanimous upon the necessity for immediate action, for when the assembled spirits called for their various favorite beverages it was found that there were none to be had, it being Sunday, and all the establishments wherein liquid refreshments were licensed to be sold being closed—for at the time of writing the local government of Hades was in the hands of the reform party.

"What!" cried Socrates. "Nothing but Styx water and vitriol, Sundays? Then the House-boat must be recovered whether Xanthippe comes with it or not. Sir Walter, I am for immediate action, after all. This ruffian should be captured at once and made an example of."

"Excuse me, Socrates," put in Lindley Murray, "but, ah—pray speak in Greek hereafter, will you, please? When you attempt English you have a beastly way of working up to climatic prepositions which are offensive to the ear of a purist."

"This is no time to discuss style, Murray," interposed Sir Walter. "Socrates may speak and spell like Chaucer if he pleases; he may even part his infinitives in the middle, for all I care. We have affairs of greater moment in hand."

"We must ransack the earth," cried Socrates, "until we find that boat. I'm dry as a fish."

"There he goes again!" growled Murray. "Dry as a fish! What fish, I'd like to know, is dry?"

"Red herrings," retorted Socrates; and there was a great laugh at the expense of the purist, in which even Hamlet, who had grown more and more melancholy and morbid since the abduction of Ophelia, joined.

"Then it is settled," said Raleigh; "something must be done. And now the point is, what?"

"Relief expeditions have a way of finding things," suggested Dr. Livingstone. "Or rather of being found by the things they go out to relieve. I propose that we send out a number of them. I will take Africa; Bonaparte can lead an expedition into Europe; General Washington may have North America; and—"

"I beg pardon," put in Dr. Johnson, "but have you any idea, Dr. Livingstone, that Captain Kidd has put wheels on this House-boat of ours, and is having it dragged across the Sahara by mules or camels?"

"No such absurd idea ever entered my head," retorted the Doctor.

"Do you, then, believe that he has put runners on it, and is engaged in the pleasurable pastime of taking the ladies tobogganing down the Alps?" persisted the philosopher.

"Not at all. Why do you ask?" queried the African explorer, irritably.

"Because I wish to know," said Johnson. "That is always my motive in asking questions. You propose to go looking for a house-boat in Central Africa; you suggest that Bonaparte lead an expedition in search of it through Europe—all of which strikes me as nonsense. This search is the work of sea-dogs, not of landlubbers. You might as well ask Confucius to look for it in the heart of China. What earthly use there is in ransacking the earth I fail to see. What we need is a navel expedition to scour the sea, unless it is pretty well understood in advance that we believe Kidd has hauled the boat out of the water, and is now using it for a roller-skating rink or a bicycle academy in Ohio, or for some other purpose for which neither he nor it was designed."

"Dr. Johnson's point is well taken," said a stranger who had been sitting upon the string-piece of the pier, quietly, but with very evident interest, listening to the discussion. He was a tall and excessively slender shade, "like a spirt of steam out of a teapot," as Johnson put it afterwards, so slight he seemed. "I have not the honor of being a member of this association," the stranger continued, "but, like all well-ordered shades, I aspire to the distinction, and I hold myself and my talents at the disposal of this club. I fancy it will not take us long to establish our initial point, which is that the gross person who has so foully appropriated your property to his own base uses does not contemplate removing it from its keel and placing it somewhere inland. All the evidence in hand points to a radically different conclusion, which is my sole reason for doubting the value of that conclusion. Captain Kidd is a seafarer by instinct, not a landsman. The House-boat is not a house, but a boat; therefore the place to look for it is not, as Dr. Johnson so well says, in the Sahara Desert, or on the Alps, or in the State of Ohio, but upon the high sea, or upon the waterfront of some one of the world's great cities."

"And what, then, would be your plan?" asked Sir Walter, impressed by the stranger's manner as well as by the very manifest reason in all that he had said.

"The chartering of a suitable vessel, fully armed and equipped for the purpose of pursuit. Ascertain whither the House-boat has sailed, for what port, and start at once. Have you a model of the House-boat within reach?" returned the stranger.

"I think not; we have the architect's plans, however," said the chairman.

"We had, Mr. Chairman," said Demosthenes, who was secretary of the House Committee, rising, "but they are gone with the House-boat itself. They were kept in the safe in the hold."

A look of annoyance came into the face of the stranger.

"That's too bad," he said. "It was a most important part of my plan that we should know about how fast the House-boat was."

"Humph!" ejaculated Socrates, with ill-concealed sarcasm. "If you'll take Xanthippe's word for it, the House-boat was the fastest yacht afloat."

"I refer to the matter of speed in sailing," returned the stranger, quietly. "The question of its ethical speed has nothing to do with it."

"The designer of the craft is here," said Sir Walter, fixing his eyes upon Sir Christopher Wren. "It is possible that he may be of assistance in settling that point."

"What has all this got to do with the question, anyhow, Mr. Chairman?" asked Solomon, rising impatiently and addressing Sir Walter. "We aren't preparing for a yacht-race, that I know of. Nobody's after a cup, or a championship of any kind. What we do want is to get our wives back. The Captain hasn't taken more than half of mine along with him, but I am interested none the less. The Queen of Sheba is on board, and I am somewhat interested in her fate. So I ask you what earthly or unearthly use there is in discussing this question of speed in the House-boat. It strikes me as a woful waste of time, and rather unprecedented too, that we should suspend all rules and listen to the talk of an entire stranger."

"I do not venture to doubt the wisdom of Solomon," said Johnson, dryly, "but I must say that the gentleman's remarks rather interest me."

"Of course they do," ejaculated Solomon. "He agreed with you. That ought to make him interesting to everybody. Freaks usually are."

"That is not the reason at all," retorted Dr. Johnson. "Cold water agrees with me, but it doesn't interest me. What I do think, however, is that our unknown friend seems to have a grasp on the situation by which we are confronted, and he's going at the matter in hand in a very comprehensive fashion. I move, therefore, that Solomon be laid on the table, and that the privileges of the—ah—of the wharf be extended indefinitely to our friend on the string-piece."

The motion, having been seconded, was duly carried, and the stranger resumed.

"I will explain for the benefit of his Majesty King Solomon, whose wisdom I have always admired, and whose endurance as the husband of three hundred wives has filled me with wonder," he said, "that before starting in pursuit of the stolen vessel we must select a craft of some sort for the purpose, and that in selecting the pursuer it is quite essential that we should choose a vessel of greater speed than the one we desire to overtake. It would hardly be proper, I think, if the House-boat can sail four knots an hour to attempt to overhaul her with a launch, or other nautical craft, with a maximum speed of two knots an hour."

"Hear! hear!" ejaculated Caesar.

"That is my reason, your Majesty, for inquiring as to the speed of your late club-house," said the stranger, bowing courteously to Solomon. "Now, if Sir Christopher Wren can give me her measurements, we can very soon determine at about what rate she is leaving us behind under favorable circumstances."

"'Tisn't necessary for Sir Christopher to do anything of the sort," said Noah, rising and manifesting somewhat more heat than the occasion seemed to require. "As long as we are discussing the question I will take the liberty of stating what I have never mentioned before, that the designer of

the House-boat merely appropriated the lines of the Ark. Shem, Ham, and Japhet will bear testimony to the truth of that statement."

"There can be no quarrel on that score, Mr. Chairman," assented Sir Christopher, with cutting frigidity. "I am perfectly willing to admit that practically the two vessels were built on the same lines, but with modifications which would enable my boat to sail twenty miles to windward and back in six days' less time than it would have taken the Ark to cover the same distance, and it could have taken all the wash of the excursion steamers into the bargain."

"Bosh!" ejaculated Noah, angrily. "Strip your old tub down to a flying balloon-jib and a marline-spike, and ballast the Ark with elephants until every inch of her reeked with ivory and peanuts, and she'd outfoot you on every leg, in a cyclone or a zephyr. Give me the Ark and a breeze, and your House-boat wouldn't be within hailing distance of her five minutes after the start if she had 40,000 square yards of canvas spread before a gale."

"This discussion is waxing very unprofitable," observed Confucius. "If these gentlemen cannot be made to confine themselves to the subject that is agitating this body, I move we call in the authorities and have them confined in the bottomless pit."

"I did not precipitate the quarrel," said Noah. "I was merely trying to assist our friend on the string-piece. I was going to say that as the Ark was probably a hundred times faster than Sir Christopher Wren's—tub, which he himself says can take care of all the wash of the excursion boats, thereby becoming on his own admission a wash- tub—"

"Order! order!" cried Sir Christopher.

"I was going to say that this wash-tub could be overhauled by a launch or any other craft with a speed of thirty knots a mouth," continued Noah, ignoring the interruption.

"Took him forty days to get to Mount Ararat!" sneered Sir Christopher.

"Well, your boat would have got there two weeks sooner, I'll admit," retorted Noah, "if she'd sprung a leak at the right time."

"Granting the truth of Noah's statement," said Sir Walter, motioning to the angry architect to be quiet—"not that we take any side in the issue between the two gentlemen, but merely for the sake of argument- -I wish to ask the stranger who has been good enough to interest himself in our trouble what he proposes to do—how can you establish your course in case a boat were provided?"

"Also vot vill be dher gost, if any?" put in Shylock.

A murmur of disapprobation greeted this remark.

"The cost need not trouble you, sir," said Sir Walter, indignantly, addressing the stranger; "you will have carte blanche."

"Den ve are ruint!" cried Shylock, displaying his palms, and showing by that act a select assortment of diamond rings.

"Oh," laughed the stranger, "that is a simple matter. Captain Kidd has gone to London."

"To London!" cried several members at once. "How do you know that?"

"By this," said the stranger, holding up the tiny stub end of a cigar.

"Tut-tut!" ejaculated Solomon. "What child's play is this!"

"No, your Majesty," observed the stranger, "it is not child's play; it is fact. That cigar end was thrown aside here on the wharf by Captain Kidd just before he stepped on board the House-boat."

"How do you know that?" demanded Raleigh. "And granting the truth of the assertion, what does it prove?"

"I will tell you," said the stranger. And he at once proceeded as follows.

CHAPTER II: THE STRANGER UNRAVELS A MYSTERY AND REVEALS HIMSELF

"I have made a hobby of the study of cigar ends," said the stranger, as the Associated Shades settled back to hear his account of himself. "From my earliest youth, when I used surreptitiously to remove the unsmoked ends of my father's cigars and break them up, and, in hiding, smoke them in an old clay pipe which I had presented to me by an ancient sea-captain of my acquaintance, I have been interested in tobacco in all forms, even including these self-same despised unsmoked ends; for they convey to my mind messages, sentiments, farces, comedies, and tragedies which to your minds would never become manifest through their agency."

The company drew closer together and formed themselves in a more compact mass about the speaker. It was evident that they were beginning to feel an unusual interest in this extraordinary person, who had come among them unheralded and unknown. Even Shylock stopped calculating percentages for an instant to listen.

"Do you mean to tell us," demanded Shakespeare, "that the unsmoked stub of a cigar will suggest the story of him who smoked it to your mind?"

"I do," replied the stranger, with a confident smile. "Take this one, for instance, that I have picked up here upon the wharf; it tells me the whole story of the intentions of Captain Kidd at the moment when, in utter disregard of your rights, he stepped aboard your House-boat, and, in his usual piratical fashion, made off with it into unknown seas."

"But how do you know he smoked it?" asked Solomon, who deemed it the part of wisdom to be suspicious of the stranger.

"There are two curious indentations in it which prove that. The marks of two teeth, with a hiatus between, which you will see if you look closely," said the stranger, handing the small bit of tobacco to Sir Walter, "make that point evident beyond peradventure. The Captain lost an eye-tooth in one of his later raids; it was knocked out by a marine-spike which had been hurled at him by one of the crew of the treasure-ship he and his followers had attacked. The adjacent teeth were broken, but not removed. The cigar end bears the marks of those two jagged molars, with the hiatus, which, as I have indicated, is due to the destruction of the eye-tooth between them. It is not likely that there was another man in the pirate's crew with teeth exactly like the commander's, therefore I say there can be no doubt that the cigar end was that of the Captain himself."

"Very interesting indeed," observed Blackstone, removing his wig and fanning himself with it; "but I must confess, Mr. Chairman, that in any properly constituted law court this evidence would long since have been ruled out as irrelevant and absurd. The idea of two or three hundred dignified spirits like ourselves, gathered together to devise a means for the recovery of our property and the rescue of our wives, yielding the floor to the delivering of a lecture by an entire stranger on 'Cigar Ends He Has Met,' strikes me as ridiculous in the extreme. Of what earthly interest is it to us to know that this or that cigar was smoked by Captain Kidd?"

"Merely that it will help us on, your honor, to discover the whereabouts of the said Kidd," interposed the stranger. "It is by trifles, seeming trifles, that the greatest detective work is done. My friends Le Coq, Hawkshaw, and Old Sleuth will bear me out in this, I think, however much in other respects our methods may have differed. They left no stone unturned in the pursuit of a criminal; no detail, however trifling, uncared for. No more should we in the present instance overlook the minutest bit of evidence, however irrelevant and absurd at first blush it may appear to be. The truth of what I say was very effectually proven in the strange case of the Brokedale tiara, in which I figured somewhat conspicuously, but which have never made public, because it involves a secret affecting the integrity of one of the noblest families in the British Empire. I really believe that mystery was solved easily

and at once because I happened to remember that the number of my watch was 86507B. How trivial and yet how important it was, to what then transpired, you will realize when I tell you the incident."

The stranger's manner was so impressive that there was a unanimous and simultaneous movement upon the part of all present to get up closer, so as the more readily to hear what he said, as a result of which poor old Boswell was pushed overboard, and fell, with a loud splash into the Styx. Fortunately, however, one of Charon's pleasure-boats was close at hand, and in a short while the dripping, sputtering spirit was drawn into it, wrung out, and sent home to dry. The excitement attending this diversion having subsided, Solomon asked:

"What was the incident of the lost tiara?"

"I am about to tell you," returned the stranger; "and it must be understood that you are told in the strictest confidence, for, as I say, the incident involves a state secret of great magnitude. In life—in the mortal life—gentlemen, I was a detective by profession, and, if I do say it, who perhaps should not, I was one of the most interesting for purely literary purposes that has ever been known. I did not find it necessary to go about saying 'Ha! ha!' as M. Le Coq was accustomed to do to advertise his cleverness; neither did I disguise myself as a drum-major and hide under a kitchen-table for the purpose of solving a mystery involving the abduction of a parlor stove, after the manner of the talented Hawkshaw. By mental concentration alone, without fireworks or orchestral accompaniment of any sort whatsoever, did I go about my business, and for that very reason many of my fellow-sleuths were forced to go out of real detective work into that line of the business with which the stage has familiarized the most of us—a line in which nothing but stupidity, luck, and a yellow wig is required of him who pursues it."

"This man is an impostor," whispered Le Coq to Hawkshaw.

"I've known that all along by the mole on his left wrist," returned Hawkshaw, contemptuously.

"I suspected it the minute I saw he was not disguised," returned Le Coq, knowingly. "I have observed that the greatest villains latterly have discarded disguises, as being too easily penetrated, and therefore of no avail, and merely a useless expense."

"Silence!" cried Confucius, impatiently. "How can the gentleman proceed, with all this conversation going on in the rear?"

Hawkshaw and Le Coq immediately subsided, and the stranger went on.

"It was in this way that I treated the strange case of the lost tiara," resumed the stranger. "Mental concentration upon seemingly insignificant details alone enabled me to bring about the desired results in that instance. A brief outline of the case is as follows: It was late one evening in the early spring of 1894. The London season was at its height. Dances, fetes of all kinds, opera, and the theatres were in full blast, when all of a sudden society was paralyzed by a most audacious robbery. A diamond tiara valued at 50,000 pounds sterling had been stolen from the Duchess of Brokedale, and under circumstances which threw society itself and every individual in it under suspicion—even his Royal Highness the Prince himself, for he had danced frequently with the Duchess, and was known to be a great admirer of her tiara. It was at half-past eleven o'clock at night that the news of the robbery first came to my ears. I had been spending the evening alone in my library making notes for a second volume of my memoirs, and, feeling somewhat depressed, I was on the point of going out for my usual midnight walk on Hampstead Heath, when one of my servants, hastily entering, informed me of the robbery. I changed my mind in respect to my midnight walk immediately upon receipt of the news, for I knew that before one o'clock some one would call upon me at my lodgings with reference to this robbery. It could not be otherwise. Any mystery of such magnitude could no more be taken to another bureau than elephants could fly—"

"They used to," said Adam. "I once had a whole aviary full of winged elephants. They flew from flower to flower, and thrusting their probabilities deep into—"

"Their what?" queried Johnson, with a frown.

"Probabilities—isn't that the word? Their trunks," said Adam.

"Probosces, I imagine you mean," suggested Johnson.

"Yes—that was it. Their probosces," said Adam. "They were great honey-gatherers, those elephants—far better than the bees, because they could make so much more of it in a given time."

Munchausen shook his head sadly. "I'm afraid I'm outclassed by these antediluvians," he said.

"Gentlemen! gentlemen!" cried Sir Walter. "These interruptions are inexcusable!"

"That's what I think," said the stranger, with some asperity. "I'm having about as hard a time getting this story out as I would if it were a serial. Of course, if you gentlemen do not wish to hear it, I can stop; but it must be understood that when I do stop I stop finally, once and for all, because the tale has not a sufficiency of dramatic climaxes to warrant its prolongation over the usual magazine period of twelve months."

"Go on! go on!" cried some.

"Shut up!" cried others—addressing the interrupting members, of course.

"As I was saying," resumed the stranger, "I felt confident that within an hour, in some way or other, that case would be placed in my hands. It would be mine either positively or negatively—that is to say, either the person robbed would employ me to ferret out the mystery and recover the diamonds, or the robber himself, actuated by motives of self-preservation, would endeavor to direct my energies into other channels until he should have the time to dispose of his ill-gotten booty. A mental discussion of the probabilities inclined me to believe that the latter would be the case. I reasoned in this fashion: The person robbed is of exalted rank. She cannot move rapidly because she is so. Great bodies move slowly. It is probable that it will be a week before, according to the etiquette by which she is hedged about, she can communicate with me. In the first place, she must inform one of her attendants that she has been robbed. He must communicate the news to the functionary in charge of her residence, who will communicate with the Home Secretary, and from him will issue the orders to the police, who, baffled at every step, will finally address themselves to me. 'I'll give that side two weeks,' I said. On the other hand, the robber: will he allow himself to be lulled into a false sense of security by counting on this delay, or will he not, noting my habit of occasionally entering upon detective enterprises of this nature of my own volition, come to me at once and set me to work ferreting out some crime that has never been committed? My feeling was that this would happen, and I pulled out my watch to see if it were not nearly time for him to arrive. The robbery had taken place at a state ball at the Buckingham Palace. 'H'm!' I mused. 'He has had an hour and forty minutes to get here. It is now twelve-twenty. He should be here by twelve-forty-five. I will wait.' And hastily swallowing a cocaine tablet to nerve myself up for the meeting, I sat down and began to read my Schopenhauer. Hardly had I perused a page when there came a tap upon my door. I rose with a smile, for I thought I knew what was to happen, opened the door, and there stood, much to my surprise, the husband of the lady whose tiara was missing. It was the Duke of Brokedale himself. It is true he was disguised. His beard was powdered until it looked like snow, and he wore a wig and a pair of green goggles; but I recognized him at once by his lack of manners, which is an unmistakable sign of nobility. As I opened the door, he began:

"'You are Mr.—'

"'I am,' I replied. 'Come in. You have come to see me about your stolen watch. It is a gold hunting-case watch with a Swiss movement; loses five minutes a day; stem-winder; and the back cover, which does not bear any inscription, has upon it the indentations made by the molars of your son Willie when that interesting youth was cutting his teeth upon it.'"

"Wonderful!" cried Johnson.

"May I ask how you knew all that?" asked Solomon, deeply impressed.

"Such penetration strikes me as marvellous."

"I didn't know it," replied the stranger, with a smile. "What I said was intended to be jocular, and to put Brokedale at his ease. The Americans present, with their usual astuteness, would term it bluff. It was. I merely rattled on. I simply did not wish to offend the gentleman by letting him know

that I had penetrated his disguise. Imagine my surprise, however, when his eye brightened as I spoke, and he entered my room with such alacrity that half the powder which he thought disguised his beard was shaken off on to the floor. Sitting down in the chair I had just vacated, he quietly remarked:

"You are a wonderful man, sir. How did you know that I had lost my watch?"

"For a moment I was nonplussed; more than that, I was completely staggered. I had expected him to say at once that he had not lost his watch, but had come to see me about the tiara; and to have him take my words seriously was entirely unexpected and overwhelmingly surprising. However, in view of his rank, I deemed it well to fall in with his humour. 'Oh, as for that,' I replied, 'that is a part of my business. It is the detective's place to know everything; and generally, if he reveals the machinery by means of which he reaches his conclusions, he is a fool, since his method is his secret, and his secret his stock-in-trade. I do not mind telling you, however, that I knew your watch was stolen by your anxious glance at my clock, which showed that you wished to know the time. Now most rich Americans have watches for that purpose, and have no hesitation about showing them. If you'd had a watch, you'd have looked at it, not at my clock.'

"My visitor laughed, and repeated what he had said about my being a wonderful man.

"And the dents which my son made cutting his teeth?' he added.

"Invariably go with an American's watch. Rubber or ivory rings aren't good enough for American babies to chew on,' said I. 'They must have gold watches or nothing.'

"And finally, how did you know I was a rich American?' he asked.

"Because no other can afford to stop at hotels like the Savoy in the height of the season,' I replied, thinking that the jest would end there, and that he would now reveal his identity and speak of the tiara. To my surprise, however, he did nothing of the sort.

"You have an almost supernatural gift,' he said. 'My name is Bunker. I am stopping at the Savoy. I AM an American. I WAS rich when I arrived here, but I'm not quite so bloated with wealth as I was, now that I have paid my first week's bill. I HAVE lost my watch; such a watch, too, as you describe, even to the dents. Your only mistake was that the dents were made by my son John, and not Willie; but even there I cannot but wonder at you, for John and Willie are twins, and so much alike that it sometimes baffles even their mother to tell them apart. The watch has no very great value intrinsically, but the associations are such that I want it back, and I will pay 200 pounds for its recovery. I have no clew as to who took it. It was numbered—'

"Here a happy thought struck me. In all my description of the watch I had merely described my own, a very cheap affair which I had won at a raffle. My visitor was deceiving me, though for what purpose I did not on the instant divine. No one would like to suspect him of having purloined his wife's tiara. Why should I not deceive him, and at the same time get rid of my poor chronometer for a sum that exceeded its value a hundredfold?"

"Good business!" cried Shylock.

The stranger smiled and bowed.

"Excellent," he said. "I took the words right out of his mouth. 'It was numbered 86507B!' I cried, giving, of course, the number of my own watch.

"He gazed at me narrowly for a moment, and then he smiled. 'You grow more marvellous at every step. That was indeed the number. Are you a demon?"

"No,' I replied. 'Only something of a mind-reader.'

"Well, to be brief, the bargain was struck. I was to look for a watch that I knew he hadn't lost, and was to receive 200 pounds if I found it. It seemed to him to be a very good bargain, as, indeed, it was, from his point of view, feeling, as he did, that there never having been any such watch, it could not be recovered, and little suspecting that two could play at his little game of deception, and that under any circumstances I could foist a ten-shilling watch upon him for two hundred pounds. This business concluded, he started to go.

"Won't you have a little Scotch?' I asked, as he started, feeling, with all that prospective profit in view, I could well afford the expense. 'It is a stormy night.'

"Thanks, I will,' said he, returning and seating himself by my table—still, to my surprise, keeping his hat on.

"Let me take your hat,' I said, little thinking that my courtesy would reveal the true state of affairs. The mere mention of the word hat brought about a terrible change in my visitor; his knees trembled, his face grew ghastly, and he clutched the brim of his beaver until it cracked. He then nervously removed it, and I noticed a dull red mark running about his forehead, just as there would be on the forehead of a man whose hat fitted too tightly; and that mark, gentlemen, had the undulating outline of nothing more nor less than a tiara, and on the apex of the uttermost extremity was a deep indentation about the size of a shilling, that could have been made only by some adamantine substance! The mystery was solved! The robber of the Duchess of Brokedale stood before me."

A suppressed murmur of excitement went through the assembled spirits, and even Messrs. Hawkshaw and Le Coq were silent in the presence of such genius.

"My plan of action was immediately formulated. The man was completely at my mercy. He had stolen the tiara, and had it concealed in the lining of his hat. I rose and locked the door. My visitor sank with a groan into my chair.

"Why did you do that?' he stammered, as I turned the key in the lock.

"To keep my Scotch whiskey from evaporating,' I said, dryly. 'Now, my lord,' I added, 'it will pay your Grace to let me have your hat. I know who you are. You are the Duke of Brokedale. The Duchess of Brokedale has lost a valuable tiara of diamonds, and you have not lost your watch. Somebody has stolen the diamonds, and it may be that somewhere there is a Bunker who has lost such a watch as I have described. The queer part of it all is,' I continued, handing him the decanter, and taking a couple of loaded six-shooters out of my escritoire—the queer part of it all is that I have the watch and you have the tiara. We'll swap the swag. Hand over the bauble, please.'

"But—' he began.

"We won't have any butting, your Grace,' said I. 'I'll give you the watch, and you needn't mind the 200 pounds; and you must give me the tiara, or I'll accompany you forthwith to the police, and have a search made of your hat. It won't pay you to defy me. Give it up.'

"He gave up the hat at once, and, as I suspected, there lay the tiara, snugly stowed away behind the head-band.

"You are a great fellow,' said I, as I held the tiara up to the light and watched with pleasure the flashing brilliance of its gems.

"I beg you'll not expose me,' he moaned. 'I was driven to it by necessity.'

"Not I,' I replied. 'As long as you play fair it will be all right. I'm not going to keep this thing. I'm not married, and so have no use for such a trifle; but what I do intend is simply to wait until your wife retains me to find it, and then I'll find it and get the reward. If you keep perfectly still, I'll have it found in such a fashion that you'll never be suspected. If, on the other hand, you say a word about to-night's events, I'll hand you over to the police.'

"Humph!' he said. 'You couldn't prove a case against me.'

"I can prove any case against anybody,' I retorted. 'If you don't believe it, read my book,' I added, and I handed him a copy of my memoirs.

"I've read it,' he answered, 'and I ought to have known better than to come here. I thought you were only a literary success.' And with a deep-drawn sigh he took the watch and went out. Ten days later I was retained by the Duchess, and after a pretended search of ten days more I found the tiara, restored it to the noble lady, and received the 5000 pounds reward. The Duke kept perfectly quiet about our little encounter, and afterwards we became stanch friends; for he was a good fellow, and was driven to his desperate deed only by the demands of his creditors, and the following Christmas he sent me the watch I had given him, with the best wishes of the season.

"So, you see, gentlemen, in a moment, by quick wit and a mental concentration of no mean order, combined with strict observance of the pettiest details, I ferreted out what bade fair to become a great diamond mystery; and when I say that this cigar end proves certain things to my mind, it does not become you to doubt the value of my conclusions."

"Hear! hear!" cried Raleigh, growing tumultuous with enthusiasm.

"Your name? your name?" came from all parts of the wharf.

The stranger, putting his hand into the folds of his coat, drew forth a bundle of business cards, which he tossed, as the prestidigitator tosses playing-cards, out among the audience, and on each of them was found printed the words:

SHERLOCK HOLMES,

DETECTIVE.

FERRETING DONE HERE.

Plots for Sale.

"I think he made a mistake in not taking the 200 pounds for the watch. Such carelessness destroys my confidence in him," said Shylock, who was the first to recover from the surprise of the revelation.

CHAPTER III: THE SEARCH-PARTY IS ORGANIZED

"Well, Mr. Holmes," said Sir Walter Raleigh, after three rousing cheers, led by Hamlet, had been given with a will by the assembled spirits, "after this demonstration in your honor I think it is hardly necessary for me to assure you of our hearty co-operation in anything you may venture to suggest. There is still manifest, however, some desire on the part of the ever-wise King Solomon and my friend Confucius to know how you deduce that Kidd has sailed for London, from the cigar end which you hold in your hand."

"I can easily satisfy their curiosity," said Sherlock Holmes, genially. "I believe I have already proven that it is the end of Kidd's cigar. The marks of the teeth have shown that. Now observe how closely it is smoked—there is barely enough of it left for one to insert between his teeth. Now Captain Kidd would hardly have risked the edges of his mustache and the comfort of his lips by smoking a cigar down to the very light if he had had another; nor would he under any circumstances have smoked it that far unless he were passionately addicted to this particular brand of the weed. Therefore I say to you, first, this was his cigar; second, it was the last one he had; third, he is a confirmed smoker. The result, he has gone to the one place in the world where these Connecticut hand-rolled Havana cigars—for I recognize this as one of them—have a real popularity, and are therefore more certainly obtainable, and that is at London. You cannot get so vile a cigar as that outside of a London hotel. If I could have seen a quarter-inch more of it, I should have been able definitely to locate the hotel itself. The wrappers unroll to a degree that varies perceptibly as between the different hotels. The Fortuna cigar can be smoked a quarter through before its wrapper gives way; the Felix wrapper goes as soon as you light the cigar; whereas the River, fronting on the Thames, is surrounded by a moister atmosphere than the others, and, as a consequence, the wrapper will hold really until most people are willing to throw the whole thing away."

"It is really a wonderful art!" said Solomon.

"The making of a Connecticut Havana cigar?" laughed Holmes. "Not at all. Give me a head of lettuce and a straw, and I'll make you a box."

"I referred to your art—that of detection," said Solomon. "Your logic is perfect; step by step we have been led to the irresistible conclusion that Kidd has made for London, and can be found at one of these hotels."

"And only until next Tuesday, when he will take a house in the neighborhood of Scotland Yard," put in Holmes, quickly, observing a sneer on Hawkshaw's lips, and hastening to overwhelm him by further evidence of his ingenuity. "When he gets his bill he will open his piratical eyes so wide that he will be seized with jealousy to think of how much more refined his profession has become since he left it, and out of mere pique he will leave the hotel, and, to show himself still cleverer than his modern prototypes, he will leave his account unpaid, with the result that the affair will be put in the hands of the police, under which circumstances a house in the immediate vicinity of the famous police headquarters will be the safest hiding-place he can find, as was instanced by the remarkable case of the famous Penstock bond robbery. A certain churchwarden named Hinkley, having been appointed cashier thereof, robbed the Penstock Imperial Bank of 1,000,000 pounds in bonds, and, fleeing to London, actually joined the detective force at Scotland Yard, and was detailed to find himself, which of course he never did, nor would he ever have been found had he not crossed my path."

Hawkshaw gazed mournfully off into space, and Le Coq muttered profane words under his breath.

"We're not in the same class with this fellow, Hawkshaw," said Le Coq. "You could tap your forehead knowingly eight hours a day through all eternity with a sledge-hammer without loosening an idea like that."

"Nevertheless I'll confound him yet," growled the jealous detective. "I shall myself go to London, and, disguised as Captain Kidd, will lead this visionary on until he comes there to arrest me, and when these club members discover that it is Hawkshaw and not Kidd he has run to earth, we'll have a great laugh on Sherlock Holmes."

"I am anxious to hear how you solved the bond-robbery mystery," said Socrates, wrapping his toga closely about him and settling back against one of the spiles of the wharf.

"So are we all," said Sir Walter. "But meantime the House-boat is getting farther away."

"Not unless she's sailing backwards," sneered Noah, who was still nursing his resentment against Sir Christopher Wren for his reflections upon the speed of the Ark

"What's the hurry?" asked Socrates. "I believe in making haste slowly; and on the admission of our two eminent naval architects, Sir Christopher and Noah, neither of their vessels can travel more than a mile a week, and if we charter the Flying Dutchman to go in pursuit of her we can catch her before she gets out of the Styx into the Atlantic."

"Jonah might lend us his whale, if the beast is in commission," suggested Munchausen, dryly. "I for one would rather take a state-room in Jonah's whale than go aboard the Flying Dutchman again. I made one trip on the Dutchman, and she's worse than a dory for comfort; further—I don't see what good it would do us to charter a boat that can't land oftener than once in seven years, and spends most of her time trying to double the Cape of Good Hope."

"My whale is in commission," said Jonah, with dignity. "But Baron Munchausen need not consider the question of taking a state-room aboard of her. She doesn't carry second-class passengers. And if I took any stock in the idea of a trip on the Flying Dutchman amounting to a seven years' exile, I would cheerfully pay the Baron's expenses for a round trip."

"We are losing time, gentlemen," suggested Sherlock Holmes. "This is a moment, I think, when you should lay aside personal differences and personal preferences for immediate action. I have examined the wake of the House-boat, and I judge from the condition of what, for want of a better term, I may call the suds, when she left us the House-boat was making ten knots a day. Almost any craft we can find suitably manned ought to be able to do better than that; and if you could summon Charon and ascertain what boats he has at hand, it would be for the good of all concerned."

"That's a good plan," said Johnson. "Boswell, see if you can find Charon."

"I am here already, sir," returned the ferryman, rising. "Most of my boats have gone into winter quarters, your Honor. The Mayflower went into dry dock last week to be calked up; the Pinta and the Santa Maria are slow and cranky; the Monitor and the Merrimac I haven't really had time to patch up; and the Valkyrie is two months overdue. I cannot make up my mind whether she is lost or kept back by excursion steamers. Hence I really don't know what I can lend you. Any of these boat I have named you could have had for nothing; but my others are actively employed, and I couldn't let them go without a serious interference with my business."

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