

So they clasped hands, and Bellew turned, and set off along the grassy lane. And, presently, as he went, he heard the hum of the car grow rapidly fainter and fainter until it was lost in the quiet of the evening.

## CHAPTER XXV

*The Conspirators*

THE shadows were creeping down, and evening was approaching, as Bellew took his way along that winding lane that led to the House of Dapplemere.

Had there been anyone to see, (which there was not), they might have noticed something almost furtive in his manner of approach, for he walked always under the trees where the shadows lay thickest, and paused, once or twice, to look about him warily. Being come within sight of the house, he turned aside, and forcing his way through a gap in the hedge, came by a roundabout course to the farm-yard. Here, after some search, he discovered a spade, the which, (having discarded his stick), he took upon his shoulder, and with the black leather bag tucked under his arm, crossed the paddock with the same degree of caution, and so, at last, reached the orchard. On he went, always in the shadow until, at length, he paused beneath the mighty, knotted branches of "King Arthur." Never did conspirator glance about him with sharper eyes, or hearken with keener ears, than

did George Bellew, — or Conspirator No. One, where he now stood beneath the protecting shadow of “King Arthur,” — or Conspirator No. Two, as, having unfolded the potato sack, he opened the black leather bag.

The moon was rising broad, and yellow, but it was low as yet, and “King Arthur” stood in impenetrable gloom, — as any other thorough-going, self-respecting conspirator should; and now, all at once, from this particular patch of shadow, there came a sudden sound, — a rushing sound, — a chinking, clinking, metallic sound, and, thereafter, a crisp rustling that was not the rustling of ordinary paper.

And now Conspirator No. One rises, and ties the mouth of the sack with string he had brought with him for the purpose, and setting down the sack, bulky now and heavy, by Conspirator No. Two, takes up the spade and begins to dig. And, in a while, having made an excavation not very deep to be sure, but sufficient to his purpose, he deposits the sack within, covers it with soil, treads it down, and replacing the torn sod, carefully pats it down with the flat of his spade. Which thing accomplished, Conspirator No. One wipes his brow, and stepping forth of the shadow, consults his watch with anxious eye, and, thereupon, smiles, —

surely a singularly pleasing smile for the lips of an arch-conspirator to wear. Thereafter he takes up the black bag, empty now, shoulders the spade, and sets off, keeping once more in the shadows, leaving Conspirator No. Two to guard their guilty secret.

Now, as Conspirator No. One goes his shady way, he keeps his look directed towards the rising moon, and thus he almost runs into one who also stands amid the shadows and whose gaze is likewise fixed upon the moon.

“Ah? — Mr. Bellew!” exclaims a drawling voice, and Squire Cassilis turns to regard him with his usual supercilious smile. Indeed Squire Cassilis seems to be even more self-satisfied, and smiling than ordinary, to-night, — or at least Bellew imagines so.

“You are still agriculturally inclined, I see,” said Mr. Cassilis, nodding towards the spade, “though it’s rather a queer time to choose for digging, isn’t it?”

“Not at all, sir — not at all,” returned Bellew solemnly, “the moon is very nearly at the full, you will perceive.”

“Well, sir, — and what of that?”

“When the moon is at the full, or nearly so, I generally dig, sir, — that is to say, circumstances permitting.”

“ Really,” said Mr. Cassilis beginning to caress his moustache, “ it seems to me that you have very — ah — peculiar tastes, Mr. Bellew.”

“ That is because you have probably never experienced the fierce joys of moon-light digging, sir.”

“ No, Mr. Bellew, — digging — as a recreation, has never appealed to me at any time.”

“ Then sir,” said Bellew, shaking his head, “ permit me to tell you that you have missed a great deal. Had I the time, I should be delighted to explain to you exactly how much, as it is — allow me to wish you a very good evening.”

Mr. Cassilis smiled, and his teeth seemed to gleam whiter, and sharper than ever in the moon-light:

“ Wouldn't it be rather more apropos if you said — ‘ Good-bye ’ Mr. Bellew? ” he enquired. “ You are leaving Dapplemere, shortly, I understand, — aren't you? ”

“ Why sir,” returned Bellew, grave, and imperturbable as ever, — “ it all depends.”

“ Depends! — upon what, may I ask? ”

“ The moon, sir.”

“ The moon? ”

“ Precisely! ”

“ And pray — what can the moon have to do with your departure? ”

“ A great deal more than you'd think — sir. Had I the time, I should be delighted to explain to you exactly how much, as it is, — permit me to wish you a very — good evening! ”

Saying which, Bellew nodded affably, and, shouldering his spade, went upon his way. And still he walked in the shadows, and still he gazed upon the moon, but now, his thick brows were gathered in a frown, and he was wondering just why Cassilis should chance to be here, to-night, and what his confident air, and the general assurance of his manner might portend; above all, he was wondering how Mr. Cassilis came to be aware of his own impending departure. And so, at last, he came to the rick-yard, — full of increasing doubt and misgivings.

"That deep hush which seems a sigh  
Breathed by Earth to listening sky."

## CHAPTER XXVI

*How the money moon rose*

EVENING had deepened into night,—a night of ineffable calm, a night of an all pervading quietude. A horse snorted in the stable nearby, a dog barked in the distance, but these sounds served only to render the silence the more profound, by contrast. It was, indeed, a night wherein pixies, and elves, and goblins, and fairies might weave their magic spells, a night wherein tired humanity dreamed those dreams that seem so hopelessly impossible by day.

And, over all, the moon rose high, and higher, in solemn majesty, filling the world with her pale loveliness, and brooding over it like the gentle goddess she is. Even the distant dog seemed to feel something of all this, for, after a futile bark or two, he gave it up altogether, and was heard no more.

And Bellew, gazing up at Luna's pale serenity, smiled and nodded,—as much as to say, "You'll do!" and so stood leaning upon his spade listening to:

Now, all at once, upon this quietude there rose a voice up-raised in fervent supplication; wherefore, treading very softly, Bellew came, and peeping round the hay-rick, beheld Small Porges upon his knees. He was equipped for travel and the perils of the road, for beside him lay a stick, and tied to this stick was a bundle that bulged with his most cherished possessions. His cheeks were wet with great tears that glistened in the moon-beams, but he wept with eyes tight shut, and with his small hands clasped close together, and thus he spoke,—albeit much shaken, and hindered by sobs:

"I s'pose you think I bother you an awful lot, dear Lord,—an' so I do, but you haven't sent the Money Moon yet, you see, an' now my Auntie Anthea's got to leave Dapplemere—if I don't find the fortune for her soon. I know I'm crying a lot, an' real men don't cry,—but it's only 'cause I'm awful—lonely an' disappointed,—an' nobody can see me, so it doesn't matter. But, dear Lord, I've looked an' looked everywhere, an' I haven't found a single sovereign yet,—an' I've prayed to you, an' prayed to you for the Money Moon an'

—it's never come. So now, dear Lord, I'm going to Africa, an' I want you to please take care of my Auntie Anthea till I come back. Sometimes I'm 'fraid my prayers can't quite manage to get up to you 'cause of the clouds, an' wind, but to-night there isn't any, so, if they do reach you, please — Oh! please let me find the fortune, and, if you don't mind, let — *him* come back to me, dear Lord, — I mean my Uncle Porges, you know. An' now — that's all, dear Lord, so Amen! ”

As the prayer ended Bellew stole back, and coming to the gate of the rick-yard, leaned there waiting. And, presently, as he watched, he saw a small figure emerge from behind the big hay-stack and come striding manfully toward him, his bundle upon his shoulder, and with the moon bright in his curls.

But, all at once, Small Porges saw him and stopped, and the stick and bundle fell to the ground and lay neglected.

“ Why — my Porges! ” said Bellew, a trifle huskily, perhaps, “ why, Shipmate! ” and he held out his hands. Then Small Porges uttered a cry, and came running, and next moment Big Porges had him in his arms.

“ Oh, Uncle Porges! — then you — have come back to me! ”

“ Aye, aye, Shipmate. ”

“ Why, then — my prayers *did* reach! ”

“ Why, of course, — prayers always reach, my Porges. ”

“ Then, oh! — do you s'pose I shall find the fortune, too? ”

“ Not a doubt of it, — just look at the moon! ”

“ The — moon? ”

“ Why, haven't you noticed how — er — peculiar it is to-night? ”

“ Peculiar? ” repeated Small Porges breathlessly, turning to look at it.

“ Why, yes, my Porges, — big, you know, and — er — yellow, — like — er — like a very large sovereign. ”

“ Do you mean — Oh! do you mean — it's — the — ” But here Small Porges choked suddenly, and could only look his question.

“ The Money Moon? — Oh yes — there she is at last, my Porges! Take a good look at her, I don't suppose we shall ever see another. ”

Small Porges stood very still, and gazed up at the moon's broad, yellow disc, and, as he looked the tears welled up in his eyes again, and a great sob broke from him.

“ I'm so — glad! ” he whispered. “ So — awful — glad! ” Then, suddenly, he dashed

away his tears and slipped his small, trembling hand into Bellew's.

"Quick, Uncle Porges!" said he, "Mr. Grimes is coming to-night, you know — an' we must find the money in time. Where shall we look first?"

"Well, I guess the orchard will do — to start with."

"Then let's go — now."

"But we shall need a couple of spades, Shipmate."

"Oh! — must we dig?"

"Yes, — I fancy that's a — er — digging moon, my Porges, from the look of it. Ah! there's a spade, nice and handy, you take that and I'll — er — I'll manage with this pitch-fork."

"But you can't dig with a — "

"Oh! well — you can do the digging, and I'll just — er — prod, you know. Ready? — then heave ahead, Shipmate."

So they set out, hand in hand, spade and pitch-fork on shoulder, and presently were come to the orchard.

"It's an awful big place to dig up a fortune in!" said Small Porges, glancing about.

"Where do you s'pose we'd better begin?"

"Well, Shipmate, between you and me, and

the pitch-fork here, I rather fancy 'King Arthur' knows more than most people would think. Any way, we'll try him. You dig on that side, and I'll prod on this."

Saying which, Bellew pointed to a certain spot where the grass looked somewhat uneven, and peculiarly bumpy, and, bidding Small Porges get to work, went round to the other side of the great tree.

Being there, he took out his pipe, purely from force of habit, and stood with it clenched in his teeth, listening to the scrape of Small Porges' spade.

Presently he heard a cry, a panting, breathless cry, but full of a joy unspeakable:

"I've got it! — Oh, Uncle Porges — I've found it!"

Small Porges was down upon his knees, pulling and tugging at a sack he had partially unearthed, and which, with Bellew's aid, he dragged forth into the moonlight. In the twinkling of an eye the string was cut, and plunging in a hand Small Porges brought up a fistful of shining sovereigns, and, among them, a crumpled banknote.

"It's all right, Uncle Porges!" he nodded, his voice all of a quaver. "It's all right, now, — I've found the fortune I've prayed for, —

gold, you know, an' banknotes—in a sack. Everything will be all right again now." And, while he spoke, he rose to his feet, and lifting the sack with an effort, swung it across his shoulder, and set off toward the house.

"Is it heavy, Shipmate?"

"Awful heavy!" he panted, "but I don't mind that—it's gold, you see!" But, as they crossed the rose-garden, Bellew laid a restraining hand upon his shoulder.

"Porges," said he, "where is your Auntie Anthea?"

"In the drawing-room, waiting for Mr. Grimes."

"Then, come this way." And turning, Bellew led Small Porges up, and along the terrace.

"Now, my Porges," he admonished him, "when we come to the drawing-room windows,—they're open, you see,—I want you to hide with me in the shadows, and wait until I give you the word—"

"Aye, aye, Captain!" panted Small Porges.

"When I say 'heave ahead, Shipmate,'—why, then, you will take your treasure upon your back and march straight into the room—you understand?"

"Aye, aye, Captain."

"Why, then—come on, and—mum's the word."

Very cautiously they approached the long French windows, and paused in the shadow of a great rose-bush, near-by. From where he stood Bellew could see Anthea and Miss Priscilla, and between them, sprawling in an easy chair, was Grimes, while Adam, hat in hand, scowled in the background.

"All I can say is—as I'm very sorry for ye, Miss Anthea," Grimes was saying. "Ah! that I am, but glad as you've took it so well,—no crying nor nonsense!" Here he turned to look at Miss Priscilla, whose everlasting sewing had fallen to her feet, and lay there all unnoticed, while her tearful eyes were fixed upon Anthea, standing white-faced beside her.

"And when—when shall ye be ready to—leave, to—vacate Dapplemere, Miss Anthea?" Grimes went on. "Not as I mean to 'urry you, mind,—only I should like you to—name a day."

Now, as Bellew watched, he saw Anthea's lips move, but no sound came. Miss Priscilla saw also, and catching the nerveless hand, drew it to her bosom, and wept over it.

"Come! come!" expostulated Grimes, jingling the money in his pockets. "Come,

come, Miss Anthea, mam!— all as I'm axing you is — when? All as I want you to do is — ”

But here Adam, who had been screwing and wringing at his hat, now stepped forward and, tapping Grimes upon the shoulder, pointed to the door:

“ Mister Grimes,” said he, “ Miss Anthea's told ye all as you come here to find out, — she's told ye as she — can't pay, so now, — s'pose you — go.”

“ But all I want to know is when she'll be ready to move, and I ain't a going till I do, — so you get out o' my way! ”

“ S'pose you go! ” repeated Adam.

“ Get out o' my way, — d'ye hear? ”

“ Because,” Adam went on, “ if ye don't go, Mister Grimes, the ‘ Old Adam ’ be arising inside o' me to that degree as I shall be forced to ketch you by the collar o' your jacket, and — heave you out, Mr. Grimes, sir, — so s'pose you go.”

Hereupon Mr. Grimes rose, put on his hat, and muttering to himself, stamped indignantly from the room, and Adam, shutting the door upon him, turned to Miss Anthea, who stood white-lipped and dry-eyed, while gentle little Miss Priscilla fondled her listless hand.

“ Don't, — don't look that way, Miss An-

thea,” said Adam. “ I'd rayther see you cry, than look so. It be 'ard to 'ave to let the old place go, but — ”

“ Heave ahead, Shipmate! ” whispered Bellew.

Obedient to his command Small Porges, with his burden upon his back, ran forward, and stumbled into the room.

“ It's all right, Auntie Anthea! ” he cried, “ I've got the fortune for you, — I've found the money I prayed for, — here it is, oh! — here it is! ”

The sack fell jingling to the floor, and, next moment, he had poured a heap of shining gold and crumpled banknotes at Anthea's feet.

For a moment no one moved, then, with a strange hoarse cry, Adam had flung himself down upon his knees, and caught up a great handful of the gold; then while Miss Priscilla sobbed with her arms about Small Porges, and Anthea stared down at the treasure, wide-eyed, and with her hands pressed down upon her heart, Adam gave a sudden, great laugh, and springing up, came running out through the window, never spying Bellew in his haste, and shouting as he ran:

“ Grimes! ” he roared, “ Oh! Grimes, come back an' be paid. Come back — we've had our



little joke wi' you,—now come back an' be paid!"

Then, at last, Anthea's stony calm was broken, her bosom heaved with tempestuous sobs, and, next moment, she had thrown herself upon her knees, and had clasped her arms about Small Porges and Aunt Priscilla, mingling kisses with her tears. As for Bellew, he turned away, and, treading a familiar path, found himself beneath the shadow of "King Arthur." Therefore, he sat down, and lighting his pipe, stared up at the glory of the full-orbed moon.

"Happiness," said he, speaking his thought aloud, "'Happiness shall come riding astride the full moon!' Now — I wonder!"

## CHAPTER XXVII

*In which is verified the adage of the cup and the lip.*

Now as he sat thus, plunged in thought, he heard the voice of one who approached intoning a familiar chant, or refrain, — the voice was harsh, albeit not unmusical, and the words of the chant were these:

"When I am dead, diddle diddle, as well may hap,  
[Bury me deep, diddle diddle, under the tap,  
Under the tap, diddle diddle, I'll tell you —"

"Lord!" exclaimed the singer, breaking off suddenly, "be that you, Mr. Belloo, sir?"

"Yea, in good sooth, Adam, the very same, — but you sing, Adam?"

"Ah! — I sing, Mr. Belloo, sir, an' if you ax me why, then I tell you because I be 'appy-earted an' full o' j-o-y, j'y, sir. The mortgage be paid off at last, Mr. Belloo, sir, — Miss Anthea be out o' debt, — free, sir, — an' all along o' Master Georgy, God bless him!"