



# The Glow of the Rubies

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standly, but seemed embarrassed for a reply.

"Oh, I say, you know!" I urged him. He started to speak, then pulled up. His breath went out in a sort of sigh. And he just stood there looking at me, and looking kind of scared.

Fact! Perfectly irreproachable service for five years; and now here, dash it, showing emotion and that sort of thing, just like—well, like people, by Jove! God, I don't mind saying I was devilish put out! I screwed my glass rather severely and he made another go:

"I hope, Mr. Lightfoot, sir, you'll try to pardon me, sir, but I—Well, indeed, sir, the mistake wasn't mine; it was the dealer's fault, you know, sir."

"Oh!" Jenkins cleared his throat with an effort, his eyes rolling at me apologetically. When he spoke there was a tremble in his utterance, and it was rather husky:

"Why, sir," he began in a few tones, "you told me to have your dealer ship this gentleman, this Mr. Mastermann, a dozen boxes of Paloma perfectos—your favorite brand, you know, sir—ninety dollars the hundred."

He paused, his fingers resting tremblingly on the edge of the table.

"An error, sir, of the shipping clerk. Ho—"

With a murmured apology, Jenkins paused to wipe his forehead. I saw that the perspiration had gathered in great drops. Then he seemed to gather himself for a resolute effort, his eyes fixing themselves upon me with the most extraordinary expression—kind of half-frightened, half-desperate glare—that sort of thing, don't you know. I began to feel devilish uncomfortable and edged away.

And he made another plunge: "They sent him—"

And, dash me if he didn't stick again! It just looked like he couldn't get past. But I encouraged him—just like you have to do a horse, you know—and this time he got over:

"They sent him a dozen boxes of 'Hickey's Pride,' sir, instead!"

He spoke in a low, choking voice and looked me full in the eye—the kind of look you get when a chap's boxing with you, you know—that sort of thing.

## CHAPTER II.

### An Ominous Discovery.

I was puzzled. "Hickey's Pride?" I repeated thoughtfully. "I don't seem to recall that one. Do I smoke it often?" Jenkins seemed to gasp.

"You? Certainly not, sir! Never!"

"Was just a wondering, sir, if it might not be among those you haven't opened—there are several piles. If I might look, sir—"

I nodded. Fact is, I allow Jenkins much privilege, owing to long service. Then, you know—oh, dash it, he's so original—so refreshing and that sort of thing—so surprising. Just as in this case, he thinks of so many devilishly ingenious, out-of-the-way sort of things!

It was Jenkins' idea that I find out what was in the box by just opening the dashed thing while he looked for the letter.

Clever that, eh? Well, rather! So I unshathed my little pocket manicure knife, cut the strings and removed the wrapper. Inside was just a little, straw-covered box with a telescope cover and inside the box, wrapped in tissue, was a tight roll of bright red silk.

That was all—not another thing but this little silk roll. It was a wad as thick as three fingers and perhaps twice as long, tied with a bit of common string, ending in a loose bow-knot.

I pinched the roll gloomily. "If it's a red silk muffler, Jenkins, catch me wearing it, that's all!" I burst out indignantly. "Rotten bad form, if you ask me. I'd look like an out-and-out bouncer!"

Then I had a horrible thought: "Or—the Salvation Army, dash it!"

Here Jenkins thrust a letter at me. "Perhaps this may explain it, sir," he suggested.

Sure enough, it was from Hong Kong, and from that chap, Mastermann. Out there on special mission for his government, he said. I don't know what it was—never did know, in fact, for I skipped down to this paragraph, which I read aloud:

"Every puff of those rare cigars you sent me has but reminded me that my debt to you is still unpaid."

I read thus far; then I read it again. But I could make nothing of it.

"Cigars—cigars?" I exclaimed, puzzled.

Then I forgot the letter as I stared at Jenkins.

"And what's the matter with you?" I demanded.

For I had caught him with his hand over his mouth, obviously trying to suppress a chuckle. He sobered in-

stantly, but seemed embarrassed for a reply. He bent close, whispering behind his hand, and I knew he had been eating radishes for dinner:

"It's what's known in the trade, sir, as a 'twofer!'"

"A 'twofer!'" I repeated, puzzled.

"Two for five, sir," Jenkins spoke faintly. "I'm sure I'm ashamed to mention to a perfect gentleman—"

"By Jove, I know!" I lifted my finger suddenly. "I know now the kind you mean—big, fat, greasy-looking ones—the sort Vanderdecker and Colonel Boylston smoke over at the club." I shook my head. "Too jolly thick and heavy for me. So they're two for a 'V'—oh, I see—'twofers!' By Jove!"

A brand new one, this—a ripper! I made up my mind to spring it on the fellows first chance—that is, if I could remember the jolly thing. I just looked at Jenkins' solemn face and laughed.

"Oh, I say, Jenkins—hang the expense, you know!" I remonstrated in some disgust. For this London chap had given me no end of a good time, you know; and it's such devilish bad form—rotten, I say—bagging about expense when you want to make a come-back and do the handsome. I was jolly glad the mistake had happened.

Just here I remembered the letter and went at it again, for I was keen to find out, if possible, if it was a muffler under the string. So I fixed my glass and read on:

"Realizing what these cigars are, I have given them, from time to time, to friends of mine—and others. Really, I don't think I ever had such unselfish, unalloyed pleasure from anything in my life. Gave one to a bus driver out Earl's Court way—chap who had never been known to speak to man, woman or child in years, and, after he lighted it—well, my word! He opened up and grew so halcyon-ly loquacious I had to get off."

"Had been trying to get Jorgins, my chief, to send me out here again to China, but he was ever finding some cold, beastly evasion. But when your package came to the office, the first thing I did after I had tried the cigars was to hand the old iceberg a box with my compliments."

"Five minutes after, he came back completely thawed out. Fact is, never saw him so warm toward any one. Asked me if the other boxes were to be given away outside. Said no; that his was the only box I could spare; was going to keep 'em all there at the office and smoke 'em myself. Never saw a man so moved—so worked up over little thing. Next day he sent me out here to China."

I tried to think of something they were as red as, but somehow I couldn't fetch the idea. I thought of red ink and blood and fireworks, but they didn't seem to be up to them at all. And a big, velvety petal that dropped from one of the crimson roses just seemed brown beside them.

I was wondering whether the little spider was curious about the jolly red color there below him. And just then Jenkins' hand went out and swept at the little thread. The spider dropped and shot into a fold of the pajamas.

"I say! Look out!" I exclaimed as Jenkins made another clutch. "Don't mash the beast on the silk; you'll ruin it—the silk, I mean!"

"There it goes, sir!" said Jenkins eagerly. "Over by your hand."

"No; by Jove; he's gone into a leg of the pajamas! Here, shake him out—gently now!"

Jenkins lifted the garment gingerly and lightly shook it. But nothing came forth.

"Why don't you look in the leg," I said, "and see if you can see it?"

Jenkins peered down one of the silken tubes and forthwith dropped it with a yell. He jumped back.

"Look out, sir," he cried excitedly; "don't touch 'em! There's a tarantula in there big as a sand crab, and it's alive!"

I backed nervously from the crumpled crimson pile on the floor.

Of course, I knew it was crimson; it must be the shadow of the table there that made the things so dark-black, in fact. But my mind was on the tarantula; and I was thinking that it must have been wrapped with the pajamas. Yet I could not understand how this could be, considering how tightly the things had been rolled.

Anyhow, it was there; and Jenkins pointed excitedly.

"Look, sir! You can see it moving under the silk!"

By Jove, so you could! And the thing seemed nearly as big as a rat. It was making for the end of the leg. I climbed upon a chair.

"Get a club," I exclaimed, "and smash the thing as it comes out!"

Jenkins rushed out and returned with a brassie.

"Careful now," I warned from the chair. "Don't go and hit the dashed thing before it gets out, and make a devil of a mess on the silk! There it is—it's out! No, no—not yet! Wait, until it gets its whole body out! There now; he's drawing out his last beastly leg. Now—now let drive!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

left to write, horizontally; they mourn in white instead of black, and they are awfully honest and pay their debts.

"But there is one other point of difference still queerer: they wear pajamas all day, while we wear them only at night."

Here I yawned. Always hate that heavy, historical, instructive stuff, you know. If you have to hear it, gives you headache, unless you can slip off to sleep first.

"So I reached the letter up to Jenkins."

"Just run over the rest of it yourself, and see if he says anything about his present," I said, settling comfortably. Clever idea of mine, don't you think?"

"And I was just dropping my head to have a snug little nap—just a little forty, you know—when, dash me, if I didn't have another idea! Awfully annoying, times like that."

Mind is so devilish alert, dash it! Always doing things like that; can't seem to get over it, you know. And this ripping idea that bobbed up now and got me all roused up was nothing more or less than to untie the string myself and see what the thing was. See?

"I believe, sir," said Jenkins, looking up, "the gentleman has sent you—hm—has sent you—"

"By Jove, a suit of pajamas!" I exclaimed, holding them up.

It was neck and neck, but I beat Jenkins to it, after all!

"Gentleman says, sir," continued Jenkins, studying the letter, "that his present of a pair of pajamas may seem surprising, but you won't know how surprising until you have worn them."

"Jolly likely," I admitted, feeling the silk. By Jove, it was the finest, yet thinnest stuff I ever saw, soft as rose leaves and as filmy light as a spider's web. Not bad, that, for a comparison, eh? Caught the idea from a vase of full-blown roses that were beginning to shed their petals there on the table. And on one of the blossoms was a little brown spider. Catch the idea? Suggested spider's web, you know.

"They're rather red, sir," Jenkins commented dubiously.

Red? Well, I should say! My! How jolly red they were! We spread them under the light, and the red seemed to flow all over the table and fall from the edge. Why, they were as red as—

I tried to think of something they were as red as, but somehow I couldn't fetch the idea. I thought of red ink and blood and fireworks, but they didn't seem to be up to them at all. And a big, velvety petal that dropped from one of the crimson roses just seemed brown beside them.

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