



COULD YOU GUESS?

When your arms were full of blossoms... We had plucked beside the way...

Scoundrels & Co. By COULSON KERNAHAN. Author of "Captain Shannon," "A Book of Strange Sins," "A Dead Man's Diary," etc.

CHAPTER I.

I SEE A STRANGE SIGHT IN THE CABIN OF THE SEA SWALLOW.

It was getting dark when I arrived at Southend, whither I had journeyed to join a friend who was on board his yacht.

"No, sir," he said. "I don't know Mr. Duncan, nor his boat. What's her name?"

"Ah! That I can't tell you," I replied. "I know she's a ten-tonner and a yawl, and that she was to be of the pier-head, but her name I don't know."

"That's all right, sir," said the man reassuringly. "She's there yet. The tide's just on the turn. If you'll jump in I can put you alongside o' her in twenty minutes."

He was as good as his word, but though as soon as we were within ear-shot of the yacht I hailed her with a lusty "Duncan, ahoy!" no one came on deck in response to my summons.

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company, the simultaneous shuffling of feet overhead told me that the proposal to adjourn to the cabin had received the assent of the meeting.

As the cabin was lighted by a swinging oil lamp, and the fo'castle, where I was concealed, was entirely in darkness, I ran very little risk of discovery;

but all the same—when I heard the first step upon the companion ladder which led from the deck—I instinctively drew back my head under the tarpaulins, where I could neither see nor be seen.

After about half a minute I made loid to advance my head again, so as to get a sight of what was going on. And such a sight!

For the first moment I could not believe my eyes, but was persuaded that I was still sleeping. How else was I to account for the sight I saw, except by supposing that the whole business of the seven boats, each carrying a mysterious passenger, was a dream of which the present scene was a continuation.

Standing around the table were seven men, all so exactly alike that I should not have been surprised had I been told that I was looking at one man surrounded by six facsimiles of himself.

No one who had seen that sight, under such circumstances as I saw it, would have wondered that I could not believe the evidence of my senses, but lay there open-mouthed and scarce daring to breathe, my eyes journeying in a circle from face to face and from figure to figure, till I was dazed and drunken with imbecile astonishment.

All the seven were of swarthy complexion. All had bushy brown hair, with brown beards, trimmed in the same manner. All wore glasses, and all were dressed exactly alike in blue serge suits, with turn-down collars, blue and white spotted sailor scarfs, and black bowler hats of similar shape.

While I was gazing at this singular spectacle, one of the seven took the seat at the head of the table with his back to me, motioning to the others to seat themselves, which they did, three on each side, leaving the space at the foot of the table unoccupied.

Then the chairman struck the table sharply with his open hand. "Let the candidate for the seventh place on the council stand forward," he said.

For the space of three or four seconds nobody stirred. Then a man, who was sitting near the entrance to the cabin, shot to his feet as if taken by surprise, squared his shoulders, with his arms lying stiff at his side, and stood in the attitude which in the drill-yard is known as "at attention."

I could not see the face of the man at the head of the table, but I knew instinctively that the two eyes of him were covering the candidate, like two guns in a battery screwed up to cover a target. Though his back was to me, I seemed in some way to feel the penetrating intensity of his eyes, and to share the discomposure which the object of his scrutiny was evidently experiencing.

The military stiffness of the upstander's bearing seemed to ooze out of his fingertips. His shoulders contracted, and his head, which at first was well thrown back, came forward, and into his eyes stole a sheepish, furtive look which but ill became him.

All this was not lost upon the man at the head of the table. It seemed to me that his voice took on an added sharpness as, with the single word "There," he pointed with his pen to the foot of the table where the candidate would be facing the company. The man moved to the position indicated, and then the chairman addressed him in a hard, cold voice—

"You have come here as a candidate for the seventh place on the council? Is that so?"

"That is so," replied the other sullenly.

"I need not tell you that you have not been invited here to-night without due consideration as to your ability for the post you seek to fill. I may tell you too that you have been a 'marked man' for some months past. If I mistake not, you have suspected the position of affairs in regard to this council for a long time, and we decided that one of two things must happen—either that your undoubted ability must be enlisted on the side of the council, or else—that the council must be protected from any injury you have it in your power to do us. What the latter alternative would necessitate need not now, fortunately, be dwelt upon. You have, I believe, been sounded—carefully, of course—in regard to your readiness to undertake the responsibilities of the post. Am I right in supposing that you do not come here altogether ignorant of what these responsibilities mean?"

"I do not," said the candidate.

"You are aware that once having joined us there is no going back, and that for the man who plays us false there is only one penalty?"

The fellow nodded.

"Very good. And, on the other hand, you are probably not unaware that there are certain advantages accruing to a seat on the council which are not altogether to be despised?"

"I had surmised as much," said the candidate, almost insolently, and with a greedy glitter in his small eyes.

spirators. Hence we go through no melodramatic form of 'initiation,' and exact from you no harrowing vow. We, who constitute the council, are united by the strongest of all bonds—self-interest. That is a bond which binds men more closely than any oath. Sit down, Councillor Number Seven. Now that you are one of us, it is right that you should be taken into our confidence to some extent. You are no doubt aware that most of us here are more or less officially connected with certain organizations and societies, some of which are secret, and some of which are not?"

"Quite aware," was the prompt response. "All of which are of a political nature?"

"That I understand, too."

"Very well. Just now there is a big public that is in favor of agitation of every sort—of leagues, associations and unions—and we have practically got the management of such matters into our own hands. Then, as you know, there are some secret societies which are not ungenerously supported in this country and in America, and these, too, we may be said to control. In fact, if I may use such a term, we who constitute this council form a sort of syndicate for the taking over and



COUNCILLOR NUMBER SEVEN.

carrying of everything in the way of agitation and revolt, from a secret society for the assassination of crowned heads and tyrants, down to an agitation against an unpopular landlord, a political meeting, or a strike. Do I make myself understood?"

"Perfectly."

"You have perhaps, however, surmised that, although we fully approve the patriotic and commendable sentiments which inspire so many thousands in England and America to subscribe their money for the carrying on of the work, we ourselves are not inclined to give our services entirely gratuitously?"

He paused and looked curiously at the new councillor, who nodded his entire consent and hearty approval of this statement of the case.

"In fact, you will not be surprised to learn that—like statesmen and patriots, who devote their time to the public service because they find that by doing so they can beat forward their private interests; like clergymen and ministers, who so long as people are willing to pay for religion are quite ready to preach it; and, in short, like every one else who is not absolutely a fool—our first consideration, in the conduct of whatever business the public think fit to entrust to us, is not to put too fine a point upon it, to feather our own nests. It is quite true that there are many men and women working in connection with these associations and societies who, there is no denying, are honest and disinterested; and very good decoy ducks they are too, to bring the money in. But such men and women, though they do not suspect it, are simply our tools. We are not, of course, such fools as to spoil our own game by killing the goose that lays the golden eggs. But in our case the game is a very easy one to play. If an attempt—successful or unsuccessful—upon the life of some hated monarch or unpopular statesman, the blowing up of a palace or prison, or similar demonstration, did not occur every now and then, our subscribers would begin to think that they were getting nothing for their money, and supplies would cease. But though much of the enormous power which is given to us by the complete control of all these societies, leagues, associations and unions is used by us for political purposes, we do not hesitate to use this same power in the interests of our own pockets. For instance, if we heard that large sums of money or other valuables were being conveyed from one place to another, or were secreted in any particular building, and we could avail ourselves of the power which we have at our control to secure that sum of money for ourselves, we should not hesitate about putting the machinery into motion. Do you remember the mysterious robbery at the duchess of Doncaster's?"

"Why, yes!" gasped Number Seven, for once genuinely surprised. "One hundred thousand pounds in jewels and hard cash disappeared, no one knew where."

"Precisely," said the chairman coolly. "They did not realize so much as that, however, although, owing to the fact that we have agents in most of the continental cities, we have exceptional facilities for the disposal of valuables."

"That now, as a case in point, could never have been negotiated successfully but for the intricate machinery which we have it in our power to set in motion. No ordinary 'conveyor'—if I may use the term—could have carried that bit of business through to a successful issue, even with the assistance of skilful confederates."

"And the proceeds of that haul, do I understand that they were divided among the seven councillors?" asked Councillor Number Seven, with glittering eyes.

"Precisely. It was a benefit performance. You are still desirous of assuming the councilship?"

"Need you ask?"

"And when would you like to commence the duties?"

"This minute."

"Good. Well, as I have told you, we do not, when we elect a new member to the council, exact any solemn oath of secrecy from him. The rule—the invariable rule—which we have adopted in place of any such meaningless exaction is this. Whenever a new member is elected, that member has to qualify himself, so to speak, by carrying out personally the first 'removal' which may be decreed by the council. We do this as much for our own protection as for any other reason. The fact that a member is equally 'committed' with ourselves and has rendered himself liable to the same legal penalties, is the best guarantee of his loyalty that we could possibly have. Do you follow?"

"I follow," replied the new councillor, doggedly.

"Well, this is the situation. We recently elected to a place on the council—to the very place you now fill—a new member. He had taken life on more than one occasion, and we thought we were sure of our man, or we should not have invited him to join us. But we have since discovered—

—it is the one and only mistake of the sort we have made—that we have been misled in him. Not that he is not fully as eager to accept responsibility—even the most dangerous responsibility—as any of us. On that ground we have no cause for complaint. But the fact is that when he joined us he was under the impression that our motives were entirely disinterested and patriotic. The discovery that we were not altogether uninfluenced by personal considerations was a shock to him, and produced so great a revulsion of feeling that—as we have ascertained—

—he is in communication with the police, in order that he may serve the cause about which he is so infatuated by ridding it of the men—ourselves—who in his opinion are its betrayers and enemies. He is at this moment alone on board the little yacht which lies in a straight line a couple of hundred yards further out at sea than this vessel. At present the police know nothing of what he has to tell them. The matter has not gone far enough for that. All that he has done is to send word to a certain detective that he has an important communication to make. He has asked that detective—Detective Marten—to join him at 12 o'clock to-night on board the yacht to receive the communication. His reason for so doing is as follows: The council was to meet on board this yacht to-night, but to-morrow night. The man who intends betraying us does not know that we are aware of his intended treachery and that we have altered our date of meeting. He thinks it is to-morrow that we are to assemble, and after he has made known our plans to the detective he will propose that our meeting be allowed to take place, and that then, when we are gathered together here like rats in a trap, the police shall surround the yacht and make the whole of us prisoners. It is a prettily enough arranged programme, but the poor fool has underrated our abilities and our resources for obtaining information."

[To Be Continued.]

WHY SHE WAS FROSTY.

And When He Learned the Reason He Felt That She Was Justified.

A young gentleman, whose gallantry was largely in excess of his pecuniary means, sought to remedy this defect and save the money required for the purchase of expensive flowers by arranging with a gardener to let him have a bouquet from time to time in return for his cast-off clothes, relates London Tit-Bits.

It thus happened one day that he received a bunch of the most beautiful roses, which he at once sent off to his lady-love. In sure anticipation of a friendly welcome he called at the house of the lady the same evening, and was not a little surprised at the frosty reception he met with.

"You sent me a note to-day," the young lady remarked, after a pause, in the most frigid tones.

"—a note?" he inquired, in blank astonishment.

"Certainly, along with a nosegay."

"To be sure I sent you a nosegay."

"And there was a note inside—do you still mean to deny it?"

With these words she handed the dumfounded swain a scrap of paper, on which the following words were written: "Don't forget the old trousers you promised me the other day."

A More Daring Exploit.

Admiral Clark, the famous commander of the United States battleship Oregon, passed some of his early years in Greenfield, Mass. There in the winter he coasted down Burniston mountain, a hair-raising experience, and one dearly prized by the youth of the village, for it meant much to reach the bottom in safety.

Shortly after the Oregon's remarkable voyage in the Spanish-American war, one of the commander's boyhood friends wrote to him. It was not just an ordinary letter of congratulation, but a handsome and sincere tribute to splendid seamanship and personal bravery, such as any man would be proud to read aloud to his wife before mailing. In due course the answer came.

"Dear Old Man," it ran. "It really wasn't much—after taking a double-runner down Burniston mountain.— Youth's Companion.

FIGHT FOR FREEDOM.

Bulgarian Amazons Not Afraid of Turkish Bullets.

Join the Insurgent Army to Preserve Their Homes—Romance of Kristina Petkova, a Woman Soldier of Renown.

In the desultory warfare which is being carried on against the Turk in the Balkans women have come to the front again as soldiers. Among the Bulgarian insurgents who invade Macedonia and raid villages are a number of amazons who are sure of foot in mountain climbing and sure of aim in the fighting which is carried on in the village and on the mountain side.

These women, unlike others who have enlisted in the ranks of armies, do not attempt to conceal the fact that they are women. Some of them wear their hair hanging free to display the fact that they are amazons.

For a civilized or supposedly civilized country, the woman soldier is an almost unknown quantity, and for that reason the fair soldiers of Bulgaria who are risking the perils of an unrecognized warfare against the Turk are attracting attention.

Kristina Petkova is one of these soldiers. The uniform she wears is distinctly a serviceable one—strapped leggings, coarse woolen trousers, and loose fitting blouse, with cartridge belt around the waist and around the shoulders, musket strapped to the back and saber at the side.

There is a romance connected with her service in the Bulgarian ranks of the Macedonian army. Her fiancé is a young officer in the same army. During one of the mountain climbing raids which are undertaken to drive the Macedonian peasants into revolt against the Turks he led a detachment against a village where the Turkish forces were found in unexpected numbers. A quick retreat was all that saved the Bulgarian soldiers, but in this fight the young officer was captured, being in the rear of the retiring Bulgarians. His comrades, having escaped to the mountains, carried the news of his cap-

ture to Kristina. In her despair, knowing that there was little chance of anything but death for him, she gathered about her a number of insurgents for an attempt at rescue.

They retraced their way down the mountain to the village and were planning a night attack when the young officer suddenly appeared among them. He had succeeded in eluding the guard placed over him and had made his escape.

The young girl, however, had cast her lot with the Bulgarian cause, and to be with her lover during the campaigns she decided to enlist as a soldier. He protested at first, but finally relented, being willing to allow her to brave the dangers since she showed the spirit necessary for it.

Among the other women who are seeing service in the Bulgarian army in Macedonia are some who are officers, most of them being noncommissioned. Arnaudova is a sergeant, but, unlike Kristina, she is desirous of appearing as a man. In her costume she appears to be a sturdy and good-looking youth of 21.

The character of the warfare being carried on in the Balkans is of a kind which would attract women to the service. At least, it is a repetition of the kind which has attracted them in times past—a repetition of the desultory, but fierce struggles which have been waged with all the greater ferocity because they have been unorganized.

Religion and race prejudices are among the causes which make the Bulgarian and Macedonian troops the natural enemies of the Turks. It is a struggle for homes and churches, and such a struggle always has claimed the most active interest on the part of women.

When foreign policies cause a war it is seldom that women get closely in touch with it, but as soon as homes are threatened they will be found identified with the men. Frontier life in America demanded that the women be as ready with a rifle as the men, and the condition in the Balkans now presents a similar problem to the Bulgarian women.

His Mania Is Invention.

The greatest number of patents taken out by one man have been granted to Frank Schouke, of Vincennes, Ind. He has patented 6,024 devices of various kinds, and claims to be the most prolific inventor in the country. None of his inventions, however, have brought him a fortune, although he draws a moderate income from some of them.

HERR RICHARD STRAUSS.

World-Stirring German Composer Now Conducting His Own Music in This Country.

Richard Strauss, the most talked-about, most abused and most praised composer of the present day, is said to be more interested in his coming American tour for his wife's sake than for his own. She is going along to sing her husband's intricate songs. Frau Pauline was his "discovery" from a musical point of view, and he expects still greater things of her in the future than she has even hitherto accomplished.

The composer of "Guntram," "Till Eulenspiegel" and so many other puzzling combinations of pure beauty and hideous noise is not yet 40 years old, and his romantic marriage with Frau Strauss took place ten years ago. She was his little singing pupil at the age of 15, and married the musician much against the will of her father, a general in the Bavarian army and a man of high social rank as well. Frau Strauss now sings nothing in public but her husband's

songs, and the song recitals in America will include no other vocal compositions.

Herr Strauss is not taking his own orchestra with him, but will find the American orchestras ready for him as he passes from city to city. He is an admirable conductor—which is a lucky thing for his music, for there are very few other wielders of the baton who can show how effective his strange and terrifically up-to-date compositions are when once you get the idea of them. The first impression it makes on those who are not skilled musicians is that the man has undertaken to set German grammar to music, but a second or third hearing of it captures the hearer or else makes him an enemy for life.

Personally, Herr Strauss—who is not related to the Viennese Strausses of waltz fame—is a simple, earnest-minded man, who has no affectations, wears his hair short, and believes sincerely that music can be made to express the most complex problems of the deepest mind.

Will on Cabin Door.

Miner Disposed of His Ear-Only Possessions Without the Least Loss of Paper and Words.

There is fortunately no provision in the law as to the exact nature of the "paraphment" on which a will should be written. It has frequently happened that property worth large sums of money has been distributed in accordance with the wish of the former owner as a result of directions left in the most accidental manner. Wills that have proven valid have been found carved on the trunks of trees, scratched upon stones, written on the soles of shoes.

One of the most remarkable of these freak wills was that scrawled on the floor of a miner's shanty in British Columbia. The accompanying illustration gives the entire will which, with the

signature, comprised only 14 words. Tim Merrick, who willed his estate in this highly original manner, was a miner living near the town of Golden. Since coming to the district, in 1863, he had worked steadily, and it was supposed, with great success.

One day, in 1886, he was found by one of the mounted police lying dead in his little cabin. The place was searched for papers, but none of any special value were found. Merrick's will was discovered, however, written with chalk on the inside of the door of the cottage. It read: "The state may have all they find. I've got no heirs."

The authorities made a hasty investigation of the premises, but without discovering anything, and the search, as far as they were concerned, was abandoned.

Why Romans Were Beardless.

The ancient Romans considered it effeminate to wear beards. All their busts, representing the famous men of olden times, are without beards.



WILL ON CABIN DOOR. (Shows How an Artful Miner Disposed of His Modest Estate.)