

Stories of the Sanctuary Club.

BY L. T. MEADE AND ROBERT EUSTACE. TOLD BY PAUL CATO.

III.—THE DIANA SAPPHIRE.

ANYONE WHO LOOKS UPON DIANA UNVEILED IS BLIND.



HE month of October, 1893, will always stand out in my memory as the time when those grave and terrible troubles, which in the end had such serious consequences, began.

Hitherto Chetwynd and I had gone on prosperously, the Club was doing well, the cures resulting from our special treatment were numerous, the members were pleased with us and with each other; but from the day when Dr. Horace Kort paid us his heavy premium to be our third partner, these things gradually but surely changed. From the first I had disliked the man, and from the first I think I suspected him; but Chetwynd was taken with his undoubted attainments, and, as we wished to extend our premises, further funds were necessary for the purpose.

At any rate, the deeds of partnership were signed and Kort took up his residence with us. He was of a good half-English, half-German family, and had spent at least ten years in the great Continental schools of research, having taken his degree at Vienna. He was himself a man with considerable outward charm. He had a sympathetic manner, and a fund of vivacious and amusing stories. He was reserved, without having a trace of hardness or apparent coldness about him, and the members quickly assured us that they thought our new partner an undoubted acquisition. Little did they guess as they looked at him that Kort was one of the keenest vivisectioners of the day, the valued collaborator of Parker in some of his latest advances, and that those white, tapering fingers, which could bring music of the finest order out of more than one instrument, could also wrestle effectively with science at the dissecting-table and laboratory bench.

In appearance, Kort was about thirty years of age, and was rather below than above the middle height. His face was dark and thin; he had straight features and keen, somewhat deeply-set, eyes. He invariably dressed with extreme care, and was in every sense of the word a polished man of the world. He came to us in the August of '93, and a couple of months later, early in October, the following trifling incident occurred.

One morning soon after breakfast a lady drove up in a closed carriage. She inquired for Dr. Kort, who happened to be out at the time. The servant informed her that either Chetwynd or myself would be glad to see her. She answered that Dr. Kort was the only member of the firm she wished to see. She was just about to drive away when the doctor himself came hurriedly up. I happened to be standing near, and I was startled at the change in his face. For the first time heart and soul seemed to breathe out of it. He gave an involuntary start and quickly suppressed an exclamation, whether of joy, grief, or anger I could not determine, then his face turned to an ashy pallor, and going up to the carriage he spoke emphatically and in a very low voice to its inmate. Finally I heard him say, "I will drive a short way back with you, Isobel; you must not come in now." He entered the carriage, the coachman turned and drove back in the direction of town.

Kort returned in the course of the morning, looking very much as usual. He entered Chetwynd's consulting-room, where I happened to be, and throwing himself on a sofa began to talk. Watching him narrowly, however, I observed that his hand trembled as he took up the morning paper to substantiate some news which he was relating to us. I had caught a glimpse of the occupant of the carriage, and I could not help wondering somewhat about her. She was young, so dark as to look almost foreign, with delicate features, a pale complexion, and wonderful blue eyes. The colour of her eyes reminded me more of sapphires than anything else, and they were sufficiently big and out of the common to arrest the attention of anyone. They gave great distinction to a face which in itself bore claims to beauty, and as Kort approached the carriage I saw them change and darken, but with what emotion I could not guess.

That very evening, as I was busily engaged writing letters, Kort came into my room.

"I want to speak to you," he said. "I am anxious about a case which has just been brought to my notice. It is that of a man about my own age whom I happened to know some years ago. He is in very poor

circumstances and also very ill—consumptive, of course. I should like him to try our Davos treatment, and as he is much too poor to pay the club subscription and entrance fee, I propose to do this for him, if you and Chetwynd have no objection to his coming here.”

“Why, certainly not,” I replied. “And it is kind of you to help him,” I could not help adding. I looked at the man in some little astonishment. He returned my gaze, and smiling very gravely said, in a low voice :—

“Benevolence when judiciously exercised has its special charms; why should not I enjoy those pure pleasures as well as another man?”

“Why not?” I answered, feeling ashamed for the moment of the suspicions I entertained towards him. “Well, tell me more about your intended patient.”

“I was going to propose,” he answered, “that you and I should go to visit Philip Sherwin, at Pinner, to-morrow. We can drive over in half an hour. Can you manage this?”

I looked up my engagements, and said that it would be possible for me to do so.

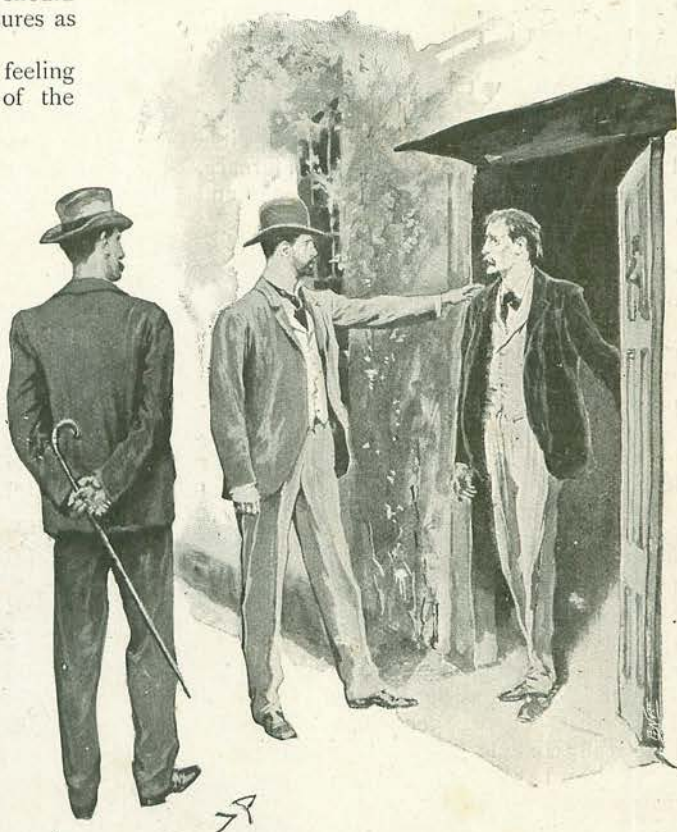
“Very well, we will go over immediately after breakfast. He is a queer chap, but I have taken a fancy to him. I met him first at the School of Mines in Jermyn Street.”

Kort went away a moment later, and on the following morning he and I found ourselves at Pinner. We were standing outside a neglected-looking door in the midst of an untidy garden. The paint was blistered off the wood and the knocker was rusty from long disuse. Of bells there were none. Dr. Kort raised the knocker, and after a moment or two we heard steps in the passage, the chain was unhooked, and the door opened by a thin, hectic-looking man, in an old velvet coat. He might have been from thirty to thirty-five years of age, and had the sunken and yet bright eyes, and the painfully clear complexion, of the consumptive.

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To my astonishment, the very moment the young man made his appearance Dr. Kort stepped forward, laid his hand on his shoulder, and said, in a low, emphatic voice :—

“Now, Philip, be reasonable, forget old prejudices, and receive me as the friend which I truly am. Let me introduce you to Dr. Cato, the head of the celebrated Sanctuary Club at Hampstead. I have heard of your illness, and believe that if there is a place in the world which offers you a chance of cure it is that Club. May we both come in?”



“DR. KORT STEPPED FORWARD AND LAID HIS HAND ON HIS SHOULDER.”

The young man’s face grew whiter than ever, he looked full at Kort, and then said, slowly, and with a most bitter emphasis :—

“I should like to take you by the throat, but you know I cannot.”

“Yes, I know that,” answered Kort, suppressing a smile, and glancing at me with a significant shrug of his shoulders. His gesture seemed to say, “We must humour him; he is not responsible for his actions.”

I watched the pair with keen interest.

Sherwin did not speak at all for a moment; he looked from Kort to me, breathed quickly as though his emotions were almost strangling him, and then said, in a low voice, quite destitute of his former spirit:—

"Yes, come in if you want to. I suppose this is good of you, Kort, and there is nothing for it but—"

"Submission," said Kort, in a low voice.

The man did not answer at all. We had now entered the house. He walked on before us leading the way down a dark hall, and opening a door on the right, led us into a lofty room which looked out upon a large, neglected back garden. Glancing round I saw that I was in a lapidary's workshop. A wooden bench ran along one complete side, littered with many tools and instruments for polishing and cutting gems. In one corner stood a stone-cutter's lathe, and beside it a large safe. There was also a huge furnace, upon which lay several pairs of tongs and clay pots for melting glass.

"This is my workshop," he said, turning to me; "I spend most of my time here."

"I see that you are still as mad as ever, Sherwin," said Kort. "Does the great discovery approach nearer the light?"

Sherwin laughed—there was both bitterness and pathos in his laugh.

"I am nearer to it—much nearer," he said, emphatically; "all I ask is that I may live long enough to perfect it." Then he added, turning to me, "I get this old house for a very low rent; it suits my purpose admirably, and I am happy here. May I ask what you two gentlemen have really come for to-day?"

"I heard you were ill, no matter how, no matter when," said Kort. "Dr. Cato and I are anxious to relieve you. We wish you to come to the Sanctuary Club."

"I have heard of your place," said Sherwin, looking at me, "but it is only meant for the rich; I am a poor man."

"We can manage that," said Kort, emphatically. "The treatment is the one treatment in the world for you, and we have both come here to-day in order to implore of you to accept our

hospitality and become our guest at the Sanctuary Club."

"But how? I do not understand," he said.

Kort went up to him and drew him aside. He said some words in a low voice which I could not catch; the other man started back, and looked at him with indescribable aversion and dislike. Kort continued to speak very quietly, and presently I heard Sherwin say, in a low voice:—

"It is distasteful, more than distasteful, but if what you say is true, I must submit."

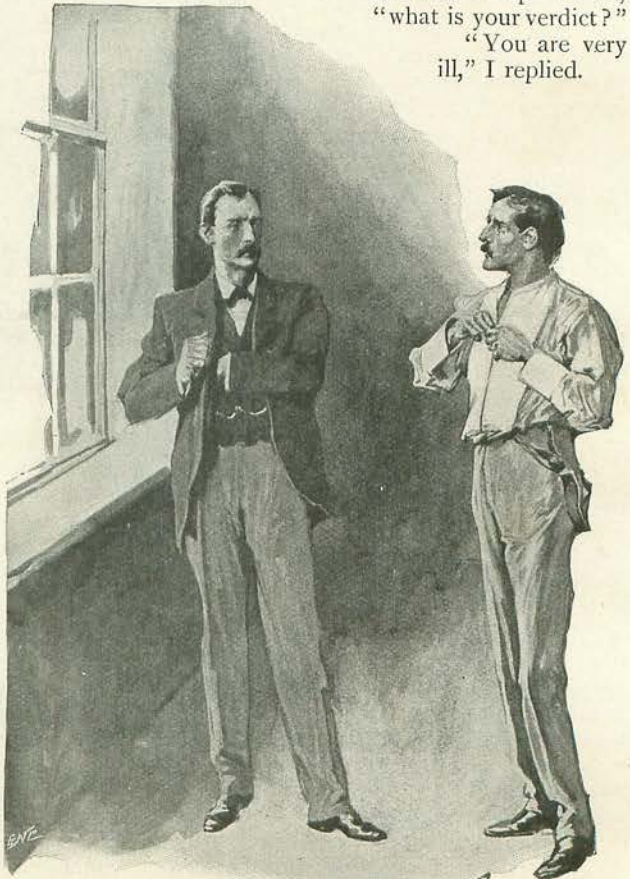
He then returned to the window where I was standing.

"Do you mind examining my lungs?" he said. "I should be very glad to get your verdict."

I had brought my stethoscope, and immediately did what he required. I found mischief to a considerable extent in both lungs. Even with the treatment we proposed to adopt the poor fellow's days were numbered.

"Well," he said, just glancing at me as he buttoned up his shirt, "what is your verdict?"

"You are very ill," I replied.



"WELL, WHAT IS YOUR VERDICT?"

"Hopelessly ill?"

"I fear so."

"Then what is the use of my going to your Club?"

"That depends altogether on how you look at it," I answered. "I can at least promise you great relief, and your life will certainly be much prolonged."

He stood quite still, evidently thinking deeply.

"Very well, I will accept," he said, after a moment's pause. "It is all-important for me that my life should be preserved. I will be your guest, Dr. Cato, on a condition."

"What is that?" I asked.

"I possess a treasure of great value; you must allow me to bring it with me to the Club, and you must insure its being put in a place of safety."

I was about to ask for further information, when Kort said, abruptly: "You would like to give your confidence to Cato, Sherwin. While you do so I will walk in the garden."

As Dr. Kort spoke, he opened one of the French windows and went out. The moment he did so Sherwin uttered a sigh of relief.

"This is all very strange and overwhelming," he said; "I have not seen Kort for years."

"But he is an old friend," I said.

"He is an acquaintance of some years' standing," replied Sherwin, in a reserved voice. "His visit to-day has startled me very much, and if it were not for the sake of Isobel——"

"Isobel!" I could not help exclaiming, startled by the coincidence of names.

"Why, do you know her?" he said; "but you cannot."

"A lady of that name called to see Dr. Kort yesterday at the Sanctuary Club, that is all," I answered.

"Ah," he said, "I thought as much. I would humble myself even more than I am about to do, for her sake. But let us change the conversation. I want to give you my confidence, not with regard to Isobel, but in connection with another matter."

"I am quite willing to listen," I replied.

"May I ask first," he began, "if you know anything about precious stones?"

"Not much," I answered.

"Perhaps you are not then aware that the majority are allotropic forms of either elements or chemical compounds crystallized in the earth at some period of the world's history. These crystallizations take place under conditions of great pressure and heat. Now, scientists, following out this idea, have

recently succeeded in making diamonds by the crystallization of carbon."

"I did not know how the artificial diamond was made," I replied, "but I have heard of it, of course."

"Up to the present," he continued, a flush of excitement coming into his cheeks, "the only gem which has been made artificially is the diamond. Now, please listen—the sapphire, ruby, topaz, emerald, and amethyst are all of the same chemical composition, the colouring ingredients alone differentiating them—corundum, it is called—sesquioxide of aluminium, you know. If that could be crystallized, priceless gems could be made—real ones, mark you, not imitations. To do this has been my work for the last ten years, and I am at last close to the right solution. I want to perfect it before I die. That is why I accept your invitation, Dr. Cato, and why I——" He stopped abruptly, clenched his hands, and made a significant gesture in the direction of the window.

"I hate Kort," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper; "you and he do not belong to the same world."

"Have you reasons for making such a grave statement?" I asked.

"Yes, but I dare not and will not divulge them; forget what I have said. The man is antipathetic to me, that is all. Now to return to my own story. If I succeed in crystallizing the sesquioxide of aluminium, I shall have effected a revolution in the precious stone trade and secured a fortune for myself. You will say, what does a dying man want with a fortune? But I have my secret reasons for wishing to acquire it. Without money I am powerless; with it I can institute a lawsuit against one of the greatest scoundrels of modern times. You see, therefore, how essential it is that my life should be prolonged."

Looking at him as he spoke, I began to think that Kort was right, and that he really was not quite responsible for his actions. He was intensely restless, clasping and unclasping his painfully thin hands, and darting queer glances at me out of his sunken eyes.

"Do you think you are near your great discovery?" I asked.

"Yes, I am close to it, and yet it baffles me; but I have at least one consolation, it has been made already by another."

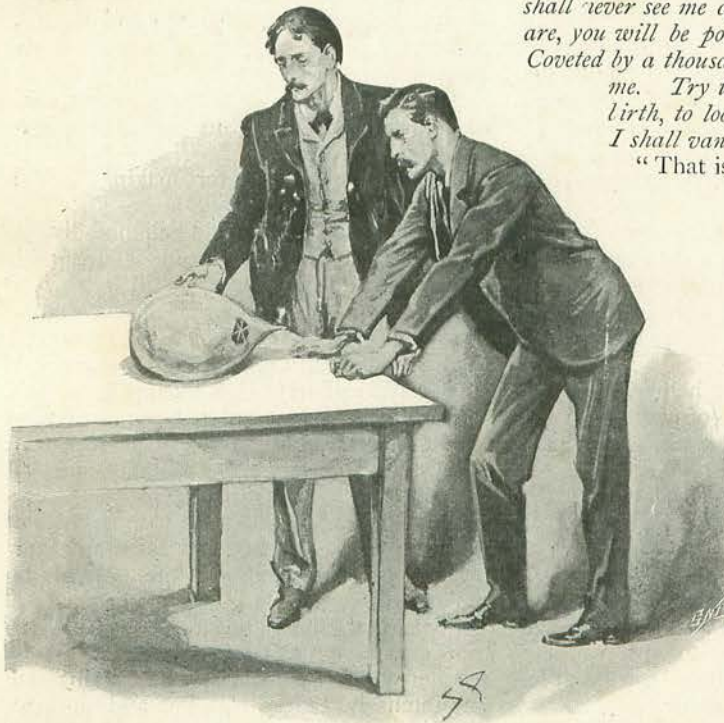
"You cannot be serious," I could not help saying.

"I am, another has been before me in this discovery. The sapphire, for instance,

has already been made by artificial means. Come, you don't believe me—you shall see for yourself."

He went across to the safe, unlocked it, and pulled open the heavy doors, then he lifted out with an apparent effort an enormous mass of solid glass, the shape of an immense pear; it was twice the size of a man's head, and must have weighed about 30lb. He laid this glass globe down very gently on the table. I gazed at it with the most intense curiosity, for in the centre of the mass, towards the tapering end, was embedded the most enormous sapphire I had ever seen. It was of circular shape, and of the deepest blue, with six white lines radiating from the centre—these formed a sort of star. I uttered an exclamation.

"What a marvellous thing," I cried. "That



"'WHAT A MARVELLOUS THING,' I CRIED."

stone must be priceless; but how did it get in there?"

"Have you ever heard of the great Diana Sapphire?" asked Sherwin, not replying immediately to my question.

"Never," I said.

"Well, it exists, and is well known to all gem collectors. You see it before you now. As to how it got in there, that is a mere

matter of theory. This glass globe with the wonderful gem inside is so old that even the historical records which go back seven centuries are at a loss to know its origin. Masudy, the well-known Arabic writer and traveller, first makes mention of it. See what he says."

Sherwin as he spoke took an old volume from a dusty shelf.

"This is his work," he said, "translated by Athelard and printed about 1470. These words refer to the gem you see before you. The legend is translated from the Arabic." He read aloud slowly, pausing to give emphasis to his words.

"I came not from mines, my master created me from earth. Feast your eyes upon my rays. Here I lie safe in my bed of crystal. Seek not to possess yourself of me, for though I am priceless beyond all gems, he who holds me shall never see me again. However poor you are, you will be poorer if you try to hold me. Coveted by a thousand kings, no gold can buy me. Try to discover the secret of my birth, to look upon me unveiled, and I shall vanish from your sight."

"That is the old legend," he continued, "and I believe it to be as true as that you and I both stand here. My impression is that, by some lost art, the sesquioxide of aluminium was made to crystallize by being put into molten glass. On these lines I am working, and have been working for years."

"But does the legend prevent you from breaking the glass?" I continued. "It must be a great temptation to hold that gem."

"It is a temptation to which I am never going to yield," he answered. "To tell the truth, I am afraid

of that legend. It is not a meaningless jargon of words. It has been observed and revered by the possessors of this crystal globe for centuries. I believe that the sapphire inside that glass globe was made artificially, and that if you were to break the glass, the stone itself would vanish from sight. I believe that its crystalline structure is in such an extremely unstable

condition that it depends for its existence on the surrounding pressure and support of the glass in which it was embedded. That is my interpretation of the legend, and it is my life's work to effect a reproduction."

"An ingenious theory, certainly," I said. "Would it be an unfair question to ask you how this interesting gem got into your possession?"

"The stone has been in our family for over two hundred years," he replied. "My great-great-grandfather, who was British Consul at Cadiz, in Spain, married a Moorish woman of great beauty. The Moors, as you know, came originally from Arabia. An uncle of hers had the crystal containing the stone in his possession, and gave it to her on his death-bed, on the sole condition that she and her descendants would always keep the sapphire unbroken in its crystal bed. It was brought over to England when my grandfather settled here, and was given to me by my father on his death-bed as the most precious thing he could bestow upon me. Many times I have been tempted to break the glass globe and release the gem, but I shall never do so. Experts before now have gazed at this wonderful stone, and they tell me that it is of priceless value. As such is the case I have had this safe specially constructed for it, and I do not think there is a man in London who could break it open. Now, Dr. Cato, I will come to your Club, I will accept a favour from a man like Kort, I will put myself under your treatment, for the sole and only reason that I want to perfect my discovery, I want to handle riches, I want to be known to futurity as the man who re-discovered the crystallization of sesquioxide of aluminium, and I want to revenge myself on my enemy. Knowing my story, I dare therefore to ask of you conditions. I cannot part with the gem. May I bring it to the Sanctuary?"

"You may," I replied. "We have a safe in our laboratory which I think will also defy the burglars' art; you may place it there in perfect safety."

"Thank you. Condition number two is this. May I pursue my experiments in one of your laboratories?"

"We have a small one adjoining the larger laboratory, which I will place at your service," I replied.

He bowed gravely in acknowledgment of this kindness, and then said:—

"My final and last condition is, that you will keep what I have now told you an absolute and complete secret."

"From the world, certainly," I answered; "but it will be difficult to keep the fact of the crystal's existence from my brother doctor."

"Kort?" he interrupted. "Kort knows nearly as much about the Diana Sapphire as I do myself."

"I allude to our other partner," I said, "Dr. Chetwynd."

"Well," he replied, somewhat impatiently, "tell him just what is necessary, but no more."

"I will do so," I said.

Soon afterwards Kort and I took our leave.

"Sherwin is a curious specimen of humanity," said my partner to me on our way back.

"He interests me immensely," I replied.

"He has a crank, poor fellow," replied the doctor. "I sympathize with him sincerely. Once we were the greatest friends, although he now imagines that I am his worst enemy, a common case enough where the mind is affected."

I did not say any more. I fully believed myself that Sherwin was on the borderland between the sane and insane, but I had a queer impression, which was destined soon to be strengthened, that as far as Kort was concerned there was method in his madness.

The next day the poor fellow arrived at the Club. Everything had been done for his comfort, and he was immediately placed in the artificial Davos suite of rooms. He was allowed, however, to go downstairs at intervals, and soon struck up a friendship with a member of the Club of the name of Edward Banpfylde. This man had been a resident for two or three months. He was supposed to have great wealth, and was a gem merchant of Hatton Garden. Banpfylde was suffering from intense nervous irritability, and the regular hours, good food, and a system of rest and refreshment which were prescribed for him were having to a certain extent beneficial results. But the anxiety on the man's face whenever he thought himself unwatched was very marked, and Kort once said to me: "I do not believe in Banpfylde's wealth."

"But he is a millionaire," I replied.

"So he says, but what are words, time will prove. He is consumed by anxiety; men of his calibre have only one great subject of anxiety, the loss or the making of money. He has become great friends with Sherwin, however, which seems natural enough, as they are both so much interested in gems."

Banpfyld was about sixty years of age, stoutly built, with a red face, small keen eyes, and an irritable manner.

There were times, however, when he could be both good-natured and agreeable—beyond doubt he pitied Sherwin, and took pains to add to the interest of his fast-fleeting life. Notwithstanding our treatment, his disease made rapid progress, and we all knew that he could not last many weeks; he was cheerful, however, and enjoyed his chats with Banpfyld. The two men spent much time in the small laboratory which we had given over for Sherwin's use. What they did there remains a mystery, but I have little doubt that Sherwin confided at least part of his secret to Banpfyld.

They had been together the whole of one day, and Sherwin had gone up to his room thoroughly worn out, when Chetwynd, who watched his languid progress upstairs, turned to me and said, in a low voice:—

"Poor fellow, he may go off at any moment. It needs but a bad fit of hemorrhage to settle him—he is not following out our directions, either, as he ought. He spends too much time with Banpfyld."

"Oh, I have no doubt they have a great deal in common," I replied; "they are both professional gem fanciers."

"It is my opinion," said Chetwynd, "that Banpfyld is picking his brains. He absolutely dogs his footsteps. I don't like it—I hope there is no mischief brewing."

"Mischief brewing?" I cried. "What can you mean?"

"Well, I heard some news about our millionaire to-day."

"What?" I asked.

"Simply this. To put it plainly, he is smashed."

"What, Banpfyld? It cannot be true."

"I fear it is. I happened to meet Balfour, of the Old Jewry City Police, this afternoon, and there is a queer business in the air. I cannot tell you exactly what he told me, but this country is too hot for our guest, that's about it. Balfour thought it right to warn me, knowing that Banpfyld was a member of our Club."

I looked my astonishment at Chetwynd's news, but did not make any remark. After a pause he continued: "You have told me some of the story of the marvellous gem which Sherwin has brought here, and which is locked up for security in our safe. Now, putting two and two together, I don't believe in Banpfyld's disinterested friendship for our dying guest, but I do think

it possible that he may be after the gem. The fact is, I dislike and distrust Banpfyld as much as you dislike and distrust our brother doctor."

"Oh, the cases are by no means parallel," I exclaimed, with some impatience, and I had scarcely said the words before Banpfyld and Sherwin came downstairs together. Sherwin came straight up to me.

"I thought you were in bed," I cried.

"No, I am restless, I could not sleep," he said. "I want you to give me the key of the safe. Banpfyld has begged of me to show him the Diana. If you will come downstairs we will get it out and he can see it. He is awfully keen about it," he added, in a whisper.

"Show him the crystal to-morrow," I said, laying my hand on his wrist. "Look here, you are feverish: do be rational and go to bed."

"I tell you I could not sleep, and I am most anxious to get Banpfyld's opinion with regard to the Diana; he is a great authority. He has heard of the gem, of course, but has never seen it."

"Very well, it is your property," I said; "we will go down. By the way, have you any objection to Chetwynd accompanying us?"

"None whatever," replied Sherwin; "I should like you to see the Diana Sapphire, Dr. Chetwynd." He bowed courteously to Chetwynd as he spoke, and just at that moment Kort made his appearance.

"What," he cried, "not in bed yet, Sherwin? This is very bad."

"I am not going at present," said Sherwin. He half turned his back on Kort, and glancing at Banpfyld, Chetwynd, and myself, said:—

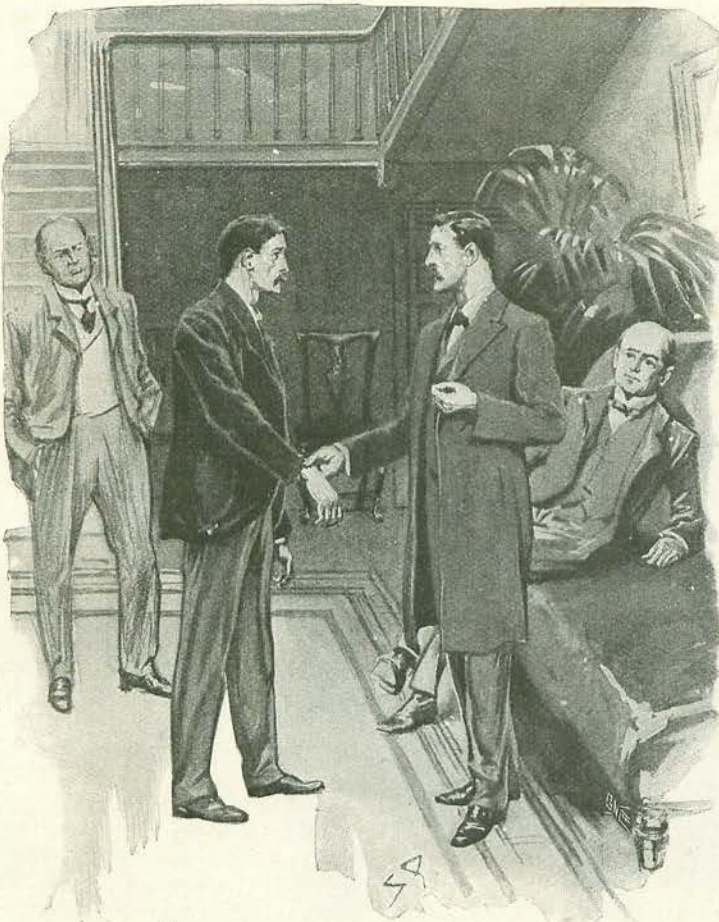
"Well, gentlemen, shall we proceed?"

As we crossed the hall to descend to the basements I watched Kort. He was fond of shrugging his shoulders; he shrugged them now with a peculiar gesture and quietly followed us. We all entered the laboratory and I switched on the electric light.

When Sherwin saw that Kort was also in the room, he said in a low voice to the latter: "You have seen the gem before, but if you do not find it irksome to look at it again, pray remain."

"I shall not find it irksome," answered Kort; his eyes shone with a queer light, he came and stood near Sherwin. We all clustered round the safe; I unlocked it, and lifting out the great glass globe, laid it on the bench.

"There you are," said Sherwin, snatching



“SHOW HIM THE CRYSTAL TO-MORROW,” I SAID.”

off the wash-leather cloth that covered it, and stepping back. “What do you think of the Diana Sapphire, Mr. Banpfylde?”

Banpfylde stepped forward. I heard him utter a sudden exclamation, and then he stared at the gem without speaking; his eyes were widely dilated, the magnificent sapphire was gleaming and scintillating beneath the glare of the incandescents. Chetwynd, too, uttered a sharp exclamation, and also stepped forward to examine the gem. Banpfylde was now peering into the crystal—he turned round.

“Yes,” he said, quietly, “you are quite right, Sherwin; there is no other stone in the world to equal it.”

His face, which had been deeply flushed, was now pale.

“I have heard of it, of course,” he continued. “By the way, you say it has a curious legend attached to it. May I ask what it is?”

“Certainly,” answered Sherwin, and, somewhat to my astonishment, he repeated the old Arabic legend word for word—he evidently knew it by heart.

Banpfylde listened attentively, his eyes still riveted upon the stone. Chetwynd took out a note-book, and jotted down the words as Sherwin uttered them.

“Now, what do you suppose this all means?” asked Chetwynd. “Have you heard any interpretation of that queer jargon?”

“Never,” answered Sherwin; “but I have made an interpretation for myself. Of that, however, I am not disposed to speak. What do you think of the legend, Mr. Banpfylde?”

“I think,” replied the dealer, “that the words are mere nonsense, invented to keep thieves from

touching the gem. In its present state it would be difficult to steal it.”

“But how do you suppose it got inside the crystal?” I asked.

“It was never put there by the hand of man,” he replied, instantly. “This external crystalline covering is, I believe, not glass or crystal; I believe it to be a kind of exceedingly pure quartz—gneiss, you know. Sapphires are frequently found embedded in this mineral. I believe that it has been cut and polished to resemble this pear shape. If the crystal were mine I should break it open and chance it,” continued Banpfylde.

I happened at that moment to glance at Chetwynd, who was still bending over the gem, peering into the crystal, and examining it with the deepest interest. His face looked full of queer excitement.

“What do you suppose the value of that sapphire would be if it were extracted?”

asked Kort, suddenly, of Banpfyld. Up to the present he had not uttered a word. Banpfyld turned and stared at him.

"Nearer forty than thirty thousand pounds," he exclaimed. "By the way, Mr. Sherwin,"

the heir, whose property it is, comes to claim it. My solicitors understand," he added.

His voice was so faint I could scarcely catch the words. I forbore to question him further and went downstairs. In the hall I met Chetwynd.

Chetwynd laid his hand on my arm.

"By the way," he said, "I have been making some interesting experiments with regard to the sapphire."

"Indeed!" I exclaimed. "Of what nature?"

"This has been a day of strange things altogether," he continued. "Come to my room, will you? I have something I want to say."

I followed him.

"To begin with," he commenced, the moment we found ourselves alone, "have you noticed Banpfyld to-day?"

"Not specially," I answered; "is anything fresh the matter?"

"I should say the expression on his face was matter enough," was his answer. "He has been drinking

he continued, "do you feel inclined to part with it? It will make you a rich man."

"Certainly not," he answered, flushing.

"But why?"

"I decline to tell my reasons. I thank you for your opinion. We will put the crystal away now, Dr. Cato."

The next day Sherwin was much worse. He was now obliged to keep to his bed, as the slightest movement brought on sharp attacks of hemorrhage.

There came a night about a fortnight later when he lay looking like a mere shadow. His hollow eyes fixed themselves on my face. He said, after a pause: "I shall die, Dr. Cato, without fulfilling my life-work. I have no property to leave behind me, and no friends to leave it to."

"But what about the Diana Sapphire?" I asked.

"My solicitors will take charge of it until

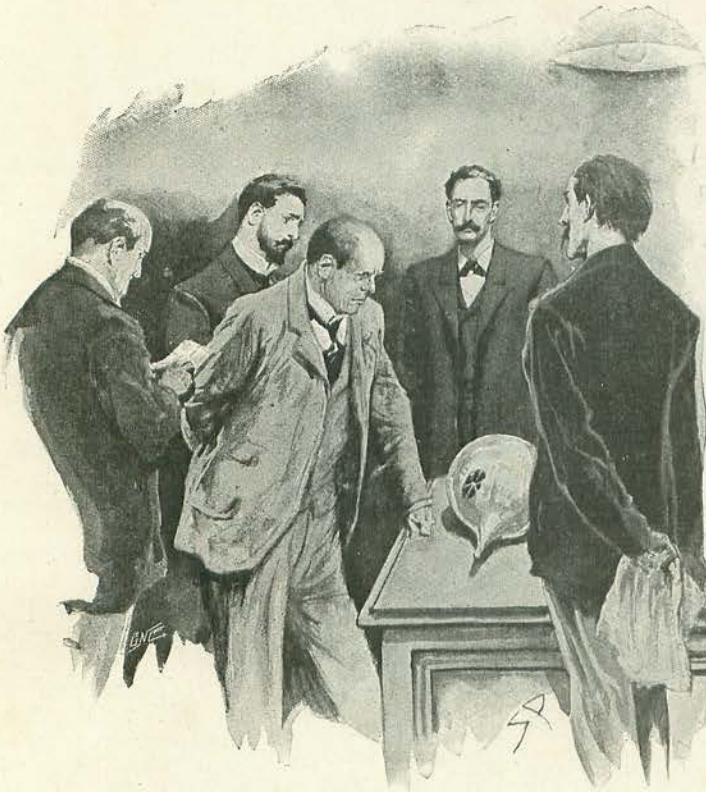
heavily, and I met him not half an hour ago in the grounds pacing up and down as though he were bereft of his senses. He was muttering to himself in the queerest way. He has beyond doubt got into a tight corner, and does not know how to extricate himself. To tell the truth, I wish he were not here; such a man's influence in the Club does no good."

"If your suspicions are founded on fact, he cannot stay here much longer," I answered; "but now, what about the sapphire?"

"Ah, I am coming to that. I do believe I have struck something very curious: no less than the key to the legend."

"Now, what do you mean?" I cried.

"Well, you know, it says that if anyone shall seek to hold the Diana Sapphire it shall vanish from his eyes. I believe it would, for in rescuing that sapphire from its bed of



"WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE WOULD BE THE VALUE OF THAT SAPPHIRE?"

crystal the man would assuredly lose his sight."

"What in the name of Heaven do you mean?" I cried.

"You can see for yourself," he answered. As he spoke he produced a tiny glass bead; it was pear-shaped, and was an exact facsimile on a very small scale of the crystal encasing the Diana Sapphire.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked.

"No," I replied, "except that it is like the crystal on a small scale. Did you make it?"

He did not answer, but, seizing a heavy paper-weight, struck it a smart blow on the tail end. There was a loud and sharp report—the bead had disappeared into fine powder.

"A Prince Rupert's Drop," he said, quietly. "You have heard of it, of course?"

I nodded.

"Well, you know what these drops are. When glass is dropped into water and suddenly cooled a crust is formed while the internal mass is still liquid. This tends to contract on cooling, but is prevented by the molecular forces which attach it to the crust. In this state, unless it is struck, or its tail broken off, it will last as such for centuries, and look like an ordinary bit of glass; but when struck and broken it flies into powder with an explosion. Now, my impression is that the sapphire is inside a Prince Rupert's Drop of enormous size."

"Good God!" I exclaimed.

"I am pretty certain of it from its peculiar shape. Now, you have heard what sort of a report that little thing made when it was broken, but if the crystal which is in our safe downstairs were smashed, the explosion would be terrific. It would certainly blind the man who broke it, and, in all probability, kill him, or, at any rate, disfigure and injure him as much as a charge of dynamite. Thus the sapphire would vanish from *his* sight for ever."

For a moment I could scarcely speak; then I inquired:—

"What made you think of this?"

"In the first instance, the peculiar shape," he answered. "I made many Prince Rupert's Drops as a boy. Well, I thought I would tell you—it is a pretty theory, but I cannot, unfortunately, put it to the test."

I left Chetwynd and crossed the hall preparatory to going upstairs, when I suddenly came face to face with Kort.

"What," I said, "up still?"

"Yes," he answered. "I have many things to keep me awake, as doubtless you have,

Dr. Cato." He passed me coldly, walked as far as the end of the hall, and then came swiftly back.

"By the way," he said, "I have seen Sherwin; I do not think he will last until the morning."

"Indeed," I answered. "I am sorry you went to him. He was put specially under my care, and I did not wish to have him disturbed."

"He is here as my guest, don't forget," said Kort; "but, never mind, he has all but done with this troublesome world. So much the better for him."

I did not say anything further, but went upstairs. Kort stood holding a candle in his hand and watched me as I did so. I looked back at him and saw a queer smile slightly parting his lips. I was turning aside into my own corridor, when it occurred to me that I would go to see Sherwin. If he were as ill as Kort had indicated, he ought not to be left alone. I paused a moment outside the door of his room. Even through the heavy oak I could hear his laboured breathing; and believing that after all he was sound asleep, and that it would be a pity to disturb him, I was just going away, when I heard his voice ask, very faintly, "Is that you, doctor?"

I opened the door; he was half sitting up in bed.

"I knew it was you, doctor," he continued; "I knew your step. I have just had a most horrible dream. It has upset me terribly. I believe it was sent to me as a warning."

I went up to him and laid my hand on his forehead. It was wet with perspiration; his eyes had a startled expression. He clutched tight hold of my hand as if he would not let me go.

"Lie down, Sherwin, lie down," I said. "A dream is but a dream, remember. It need not trouble you."

"But it does," he whispered, "and I think Kort must have caused it. He was in my room this evening, he spoke of—of—"

"Whom?" I asked.

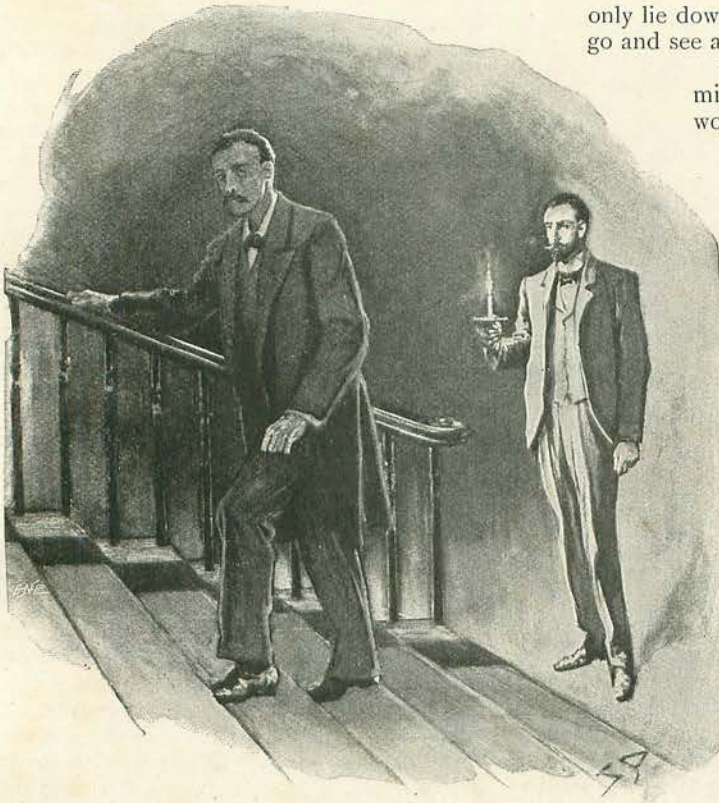
The poor fellow began to struggle for breath.

"Of her—Isobel—she is his wife. Did he ever tell you that he had a wife?"

"Never," I answered.

"He has. Ask him about her after—after I am gone." He gave a horrible laugh.

"I could say nothing bad enough to describe him," he said, faintly, "but, oh, Dr. Cato, I can only think of the sapphire now. My dream was about it. Is it—is it all right?"



"KORT STOOD AND WATCHED ME."

"Of course it is, my dear boy," I answered. "It is in our safe, secure as possible; you know that, Sherwin. Now try to sleep."

"I cannot," he answered; "my dream was much too vivid to be false. I know it is true, and it was sent to me as a warning. They are taking the sapphire away; I can see them doing it. Go at once and stop them, doctor. My God! can't you see for yourself?" He grasped my arm more tightly than ever, and stared wildly out across the room.

"You have had a nightmare," I answered; "there is nothing to see. The sapphire is perfectly safe."

"It is not. I tell you I see them taking it now. Quick! Go and stop them. That dream was sent to me—was sent to me. Kort would stop at nothing—nothing—and Banpfylde is his tool. I feel it—I am certain of it. Oh, Dr. Cato, won't you have pity on me? Will you not go downstairs and find out for yourself if the safe is untampered with?"

"Very well," I answered; "if you will

only lie down and remain quiet I will go and see and bring you word."

"You will? You promise?" he cried. "You would not break your word to a dying man?"

"I would break my word to no man," I answered. "Trust me, Sherwin. I will go down as quickly as possible and come back to you."

I left the room, resolving to visit the laboratory, ascertain for myself that Sherwin's wild words were the mere hallucination of his brain, and then spend the rest of the night by the dying man's side. Crossing the hall I opened a door leading to the laboratory steps and went quickly down. Half-way down I paused, stopped, and listened. Late as the hour was, someone was moving about below.

I was not seriously alarmed at this, for Chetwynd often worked in the laboratory until morning. I hurried on, therefore—a light streamed from under the door. I flung it open and entered. I was just about to utter my friend's name when the words were arrested on my lips. Chetwynd was nowhere to be seen, but fully dressed and standing at the bench was Banpfylde. I could not at first ascertain what he was doing, but at the sound of my voice he swung sharply round.

"May I ask, sir, what your business is here at this hour?" I inquired. "Are you not aware that it is against the rules for members to come to the laboratory?"

"I am perfectly well aware of that fact, Dr. Cato," he replied, in the suavest tones, and with wonderful self-control; "but the emergency which brought me here to-night was so exceptional that I felt justified in breaking a well-known rule. For days past I have been suffering from spasmodic asthma, the only thing that relieves me is oxygen—I have a cylinder of my own which I always have in my room. It was empty; I came here to fetch a fresh one."

It was true that his position corroborated his words, for he had in his hand a small forty cubic feet cylinder, which he had taken from the cupboard.

"Whatever the emergency, you had no right to do it," I replied; "the doctors in this establishment expect to be summoned in case of need, and you did distinctly wrong when you broke the rules. I must now ask you to go to your room. Kindly do so without delay."

He did not answer me for a moment, but stood looking full at me. He was a powerfully built man, some inches taller than myself. His lips were compressed, and he began to breathe heavily. I knew well that he was not really suffering from asthma—he had lied to me. What his motive was I could not tell. Suddenly his eyes dropped, and I saw that he was looking intently at my waistcoat pocket, where I generally kept the key of the safe in which the Diana Sapphire had been placed. He had seen me produce it from that receptacle on the night when Sherwin had shown us the sapphire. It was not there now. I always locked it at night in my own small safe upstairs, but as he glanced in the direction of my coat I guessed what he was about to do in a flash. Before I could even cry out or utter a word the man had sprung upon me, and brought me by the suddenness and violence of the attack to the floor. His great hand was upon my throat, and I saw his bloodshot eyes within an inch of mine. I tried to shout for help, but with one of his hands crushing my throat I could not utter a word. The next instant, with the other hand, he slipped from his coat-pocket a short jemmy, and brought it down upon my head with all his force. I remembered nothing more.

When I came to myself I was lying upon the stone floor,

sick and faint. I wondered dimly where I was, then memory returned in a flash and I struggled to rise; but I was firmly bound hand and foot, and a duster soaked in chloroform was tightly fastened across my mouth. A light, hissing sound fell on my ears, and I feebly turned my head. Never shall I forget the sight that met my eyes, dull and dim though they were. Banpfylde was kneeling beside the safe at the further end of the laboratory. In one hand he held a lighted Bunsen burner, from which glowed a dazzling white flame, and with the other he was wrenching and tearing at the lock of the safe with some tool which I could not distinctly see.

To my astonishment and horror I perceived that the metal round the lock was glowing with a white heat. I heard it spit and crack, and saw the white sparks flying as the man gouged and tore away at the molten metal. What he was really doing I could not at first comprehend. All I knew was that he was breaking into the safe in some marvellous manner, and that I, within a stone's throw, was powerless to prevent him. I tried to shout out, but my voice only came in a dull,



"HE WAS WRENCHING AND TEARING AT THE LOCK."

hoarse whisper. For one moment he turned his face towards me. It was red with excitement, and distorted with the most feverish anxiety—the next instant the safe door swung back. I saw Banpfylde reach in his hand and draw out the great Diana Sapphire. He laid it on the stone flags and picked up the short steel jemmy he had just been using. Dazed and sick as I felt, I knew in a flash what he was about to do. He was going to smash the surrounding glass in which the sapphire lay, and so liberate the gem. If Chetwynd's theory were true, and that glass was, in reality, an enormous Prince Rupert's Drop, the man was rushing to his fate, and I, in my present position, was powerless to save him.

"Stop, for God's sake stop!" I cried, but my voice was choked down to a hoarse growl.

Steadying the great mass of glass with one hand, and gathering all his strength, he brought the jemmy down with one terrific blow upon the tail of the crystal globe. There was a deafening explosion as of a thousand cannon. Every light was instantly extinguished, and with a shriek of pain I heard the miserable man plunge heavily forward upon the stone flags. We were in total darkness, but at that awful instant I could have sworn that something or someone brushed quickly past me and out of the room. I felt the draught made by a hurried movement. In sick despair I made another frantic effort to rise, but all in vain—I was tied down too tightly. The next instant, to my intense relief, I heard the clamour of approaching voices, quick footsteps hurried down the corridor, and Chetwynd and Kort, holding lights, rushed in. To release me from my bonds was the work of a moment, and then Kort ran up to Banpfylde and turned the light full on his face. Chetwynd and I gazed in horrified silence at what a moment before had been a man—living, breathing, in the full possession of every faculty. The terrific explosion had done its deadly work—the Diana Sapphire had avenged itself—a large portion of the man's skull had absolutely been blown away. He must have died as he fell.

"I was right," muttered Chetwynd.

As for me, I grasped the edge of the nearest bench to support myself. I felt faint and sick. Kort laid the dead man quietly back on the floor, then he turned and faced us.

"What has happened?" he asked.
"What caused the explosion?"

I pointed to the safe.

"The Diana Sapphire," I exclaimed; "the legend was true."

Kort was about to say something further when a sound behind caused us all to turn our heads. Sherwin, partly dressed, his face ghastly white, his eyes almost starting from his head, was standing in the doorway. The noise of the terrific explosion had doubtless drawn him to the place. I rushed up to him and laid detaining hands on his shoulders.

"Back, back, Sherwin," I cried; "this is no place for you. I will take you to your room and explain."

"Explain?" he cried. "I see for myself. My dream was true. Don't touch me, Cato, don't touch me. Oh, my God! the Sapphire, where is it?"

He did not take the least notice of poor Banpfylde's dead body, but began frantically to peer about, going down on his hands and knees to examine for the lost treasure.

"Gone," he said; "the legend was true." He looked full up at Kort, then staggered forward and lay insensible, not far from the dead body of the would-be burglar.

"We must take him away before he recovers," said Chetwynd; "this will finish him, poor chap."

Between us we lifted the dying man from the floor, took him upstairs, and laid him on his bed. He lay insensible for over an hour, and then feebly opened his eyes. He looked at me, but without recognition; indeed, he never recognised anyone again. It was a relief to feel that he had lost all memory of the terrible scene which he had witnessed. He murmured faintly, and I thought he said the word "Isobel," but I am not sure. He died at nine o'clock on the following morning.

Early on the ensuing day we three doctors met in the laboratory. Banpfylde's body had been removed, and the *débris* caused by the terrific explosion had been partly cleared away.

"But what does it mean?" said Kort. "You two seem to know something—I want an explanation—for God's sake tell me what really happened?"

"It is about the strangest thing I ever heard of," answered Chetwynd. "That glass crystal was in reality an enormous Prince Rupert's Drop."

I gazed at Kort as my brother doctor spoke. My impression was that he knew of this already. If he did, however, he did not turn a hair; his dark eyes were fixed with intense interest on Chetwynd's face.

See for yourselves : the lock has been melted out with this Bunsen burner—look, the blow-pipe junction runs to that oxygen cylinder—a cut above drills. It was nothing less than a masterpiece. See, the man literally melted out the iron like butter with the oxy-hydrogen flame. There was someone behind this job—a chemist, and no ordinary one at that. I shall never believe that that was Banpfylde's work, and, what is more," continued Chetwynd, "I shall not rest until I find out who instigated him to do the job."

"You are never likely to know," said Kort. "I happened to hear that the man was in desperate circumstances, and desperate men find desperate means to recover themselves. But, by the way, what has become of the sapphire? Did it disappear when the glass was shattered?"

"It looks like it," answered Chetwynd; "I have searched for it, but have seen it nowhere."

"Then poor Sherwin's theory was right," I could not help saying; but as I uttered the words I glanced at Kort. For one quarter of an instant he had given himself away. The look of relief on his face was too marked. I thought once again of that footfall which had hurried past me in the dark, of the slight draught made by a person moving quickly. Had Kort stolen the priceless sapphire? Was Sherwin right in his suspicions of the man whom I also deeply distrusted? What was the story of Isobel? Why had Sherwin died with his secret unrevealed?

"At least one thing is true," said Chetwynd, turning suddenly to me in that moment of stillness in which it almost seemed as if Kort and I were challenging each other. "At least one thing is obvious: the Diana Sapphire has proved the truth of its own legend. It has vanished from our sight."



"WE LIFTED THE DYING MAN FROM THE FLOOR."

"You have heard of a Prince Rupert's Drop, of course?" continued Chetwynd.

"Yes, but I have never seen one."

"The sapphire was embedded in one. I had thought out the whole idea no later than yesterday, and told Cato about it. I little knew how soon my theory was to be verified. The terrific explosion which occurred last night proves that the sapphire was imprisoned in one."

Kort took up a fragment of glass which still remained on the floor, examined it carefully, and laid it down.

"But there is something still stranger to be explained," continued Chetwynd, "and with regard to that I have formed no theory at present."

"To what do you allude?" asked Kort.

"I allude to the strange way in which Banpfylde opened the safe. That was no work of an ordinary jewel dealer. It was something beyond all burglars' resources.