CLASSICS TO GO

MRS. RAFFLES

BEING THE ADVENTURES OF AN AMATEUR CRACKSWOMAN

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

Mrs. Raffles

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An Amateur Crackswoman

John Kendrick Bangs

"'IT'S FINE, BUNNY,' SHE CRIED"

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I

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HERALD PERSONAL

That I was in a hard case is best attested by the fact that when I had paid for my Sunday *Herald* there was left in my purse just one tuppence-ha'penny stamp and two copper cents, one dated 1873, the other 1894. The mere incident that at this hour eighteen months later I can recall the dates of these coins should be proof, if any were needed, of the importance of the coppers in my eyes, and therefore of the relative scarcity of funds in my possession. Raffles was dead—killed as you may remember at the battle of Spion Kop—and I, his companion, who had never known want while his deft fingers were able to carry out the plans of that insinuating and marvellous mind of his, was now, in the vernacular of the American, up against it. I had come to the United States, not because I had any liking for that country or its people, who, to tell the truth, are too sharp for an ordinary burglar like myself, but because with the war at an end I had to go somewhere, and English soil was not safely to be trod by one who was required for professional reasons to evade the eagle eye of Scotland Yard until the Statute of Limitations began to have some bearing upon his case. That last affair of Raffles and mine, wherein we had successfully got away with the diamond stomacher of the duchess of Herringdale, was still a live matter in British detective circles, and the very audacity of the crime had definitely fastened the responsibility for it upon our shoulders. Hence it was America for me, where one could be as English as one

pleased without being subject to the laws of his Majesty, King Edward VII., of Great Britain and Ireland and sundry other possessions upon which the sun rarely if ever sets. For two years I had led a precarious existence, not finding in the land of silk and money quite as many of those opportunities to add to the sum of my prosperity as the American War Correspondent I had met in the Transvaal led me to expect. Indeed, after six months of successful lecturing on the subject of the Boers before various lyceums in the country, I was reduced to a state of penury which actually drove me to thievery of the pettiest and most vulgar sort. There was little in the way of mean theft that I did not commit. During the coal famine, for instance, every day passing the coal-yards to and fro, I would appropriate a single piece of the precious anthracite until I had come into possession of a scuttleful, and this I would sell to the suffering poor at prices varying from three shillings to two dollars and a half—a precarious living indeed. The only respite I received for six months was in the rape of the hansom-cab, which I successfully carried through one bitter cold night in January. I hired the vehicle at Madison Square and drove to a small tavern on the Boston Post Road, where the icy cold of the day gave me an excuse for getting my cabby drunk in the guise of kindness. Him safely disposed of in a drunken stupor, I drove his jaded steed back to town, earned fifteen dollars with him before daybreak, and then, leaving the cab in the Central Park, sold the horse for eighteen dollars to a snow-removal contractor over on the East Side. It was humiliating to me, a gentleman born, and a partner of so illustrious a person as the late A. J. Raffles, to have to stoop to such miserable doings to keep body and soul together, but I was forced to confess that, whatever Raffles had left to me in the way of example, I was not his equal either in the conception of crime or in the nerve to carry a great enterprise through. My biggest coups had a way of failing at their very beginning—which was about the only blessing I enjoyed, since none of them

progressed far enough to imperil my freedom, and, lacking confederates, I was of course unable to carry through the profitable series of abductions in the world of High Finance that I had contemplated. Hence my misfortunes, and now on this beautiful Sunday morning, penniless but for the coppers and the postage-stamp, with no breakfast in sight, and, fortunately enough, not even an appetite, I turned to my morning paper for my solace.

"THIS I WOULD SELL TO THE SUFFERING POOR"

Running my eye up and down the personal column, which has for years been my favorite reading of Sunday mornings, I found the usual assortment of matrimonial enterprises recorded: pathetic appeals from P. D. to meet Q. on the corner of Twenty-third Street at three; imploring requests from J. A. K. to return at once to "His Only Mother," who promises to ask no questions; and finally—could I believe my eyes now riveted upon the word?—my own sobriquet, printed as boldly and as plainly as though I were some

patent cure for all known human ailments. It seemed incredible, but there it was beyond all peradventure:

> "WANTED.—A Butler. BUNNY preferred. Apply to Mrs. A. J. Van Raffles, Bolivar Lodge, Newport, R.I."

To whom could that refer if not to myself, and what could it mean? Who was this Mrs. A. J. Van Raffles?—a name so like that of my dead friend that it seemed almost identical. My curiosity was roused to concert pitch. If this strange advertiser should be— But no, she would not send for me after that stormy interview in which she cast me over to take the hand of Raffles: the brilliant, fascinating Raffles, who would have won his Isabella from Ferdinand, Chloe from her Corydon, Pierrette from Pierrot—ay, even Heloise from Abelard. I never could find it in my heart to blame Henriette for losing her heart to him, even though she had already promised it to me, for I myself could not resist the fascination of the man at whose side I faithfully worked even after he had stolen from me this dearest treasure of my heart. And yet who else could it be if not the lovely Henriette? Surely the combination of Raffles, with or without the Van, and Bunny was not so usual as to permit of so remarkable a coincidence.

"I will go to Newport at once," I cried, rising and pacing the floor excitedly, for I had many times, in cursing my loneliness, dreamed of Henriette, and had oftener and oftener of late found myself wondering what had become of her, and then the helplessness of my position burst upon me with full force. How should I, the penniless wanderer in New York, get to Bolivar Lodge at Newport? It takes money in this sordid country to get about, even as it does in Britain—in sorry truth, things in detail differ little whether one lives under a king or a president; poverty is quite as hard to bear, and free passes on the railroad are just as scarce.

"Curses on these plutocrats!" I muttered, as I thought of the railway directors rolling in wealth, running trains filled with empty seats to and from the spot that might contain my fortune, and I unable to avail myself of them for the lack of a paltry dollar or two. But suddenly the thought flashed over me—telegraph collect. If it is she, she will respond at once.

And so it was that an hour later the following message was ticked over the wires:

> "Personal to-day's *Herald* received. Telegraph railway fare and I will go to you instantly.
>
> (Signed), BUNNY
>
> ."

For three mortal hours I paced the streets feverishly awaiting the reply, and at two-thirty it came, disconcerting enough in all conscience:

> "If you are not a bogus Bunny you will know how to raise the cash. If you are a bogus Bunny I don't want you."

It was simple, direct, and convincing, and my heart fluttered like the drum-beat's morning call to action the moment I read it.