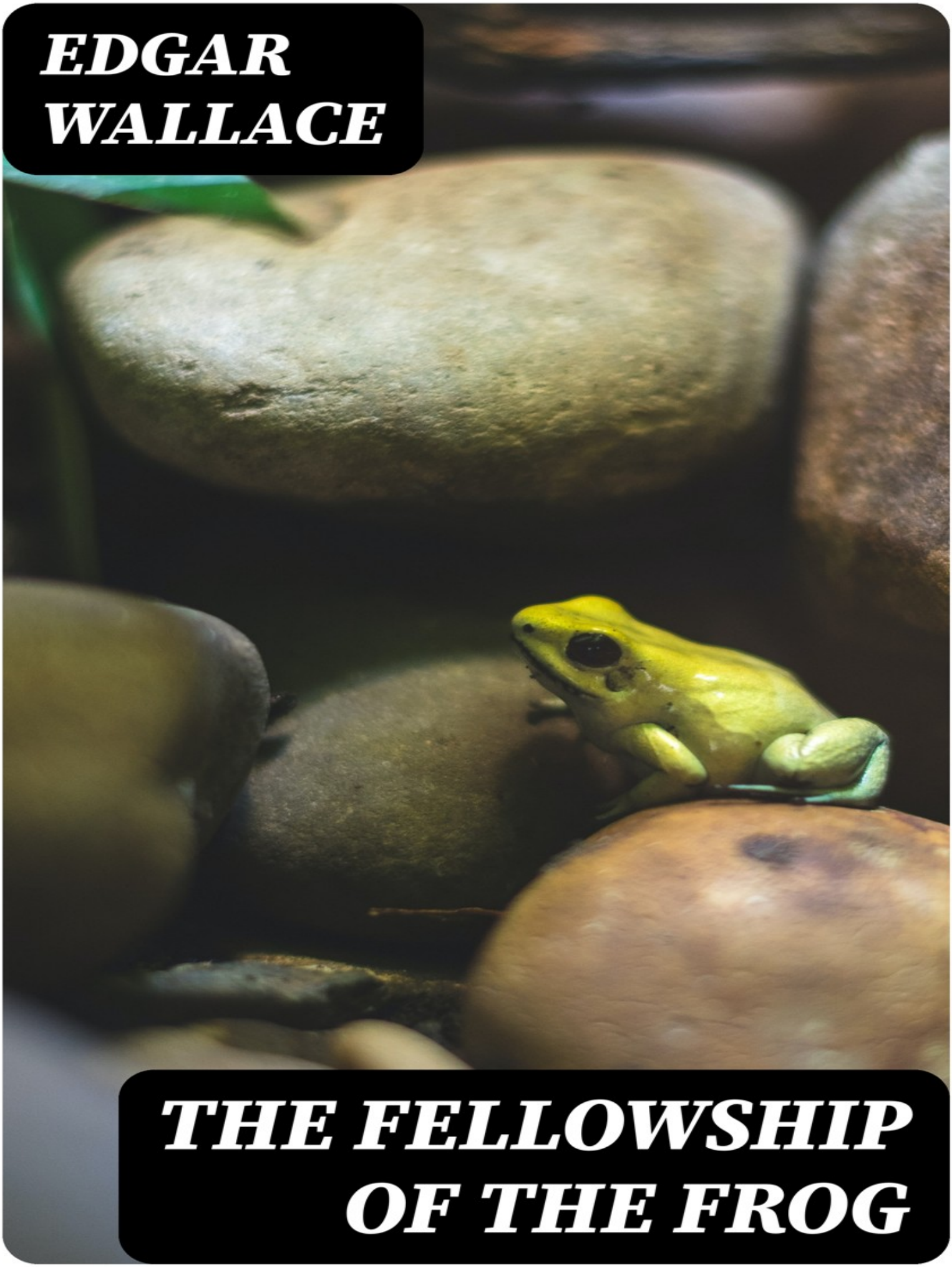
EDGAR WALLACE



THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FROG

Edgar Wallace

The Fellowship of the Frog

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CHAPTER XLII
JOSHUA BROAD EXPLAINS

FOREWORD

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THE FROGS

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IT was of interest to those who study the psychology of the mass that, until the prosperous but otherwise insignificant James G. Bliss became the object of their attention, the doings and growth of the Frogs were almost unnoticed. There were strong references in some of the country newspapers to the lawless character of the association; one Sunday journal had an amusing article headed

"Tramps' Trade Union Takes Frog for
Symbol of Mystic Order"

and gave a humorous and quite fanciful extract from its rules and ritual. The average man made casual references:

"I say, have you seen this story about the tramps' Union —every member a walking delegate? ..."

There was a more serious leading article on the growth of trade unionism, in which the Frogs were cited, and although from time to time came accounts of mysterious outrages which had been put to the discredit of the Frogs, the generality of citizens regarded the society, order, or whatever it was, as something benevolent in its intentions and necessarily eccentric in its constitution, and, believing this, were in their turn benevolently tolerant.

In some such manner as the mass may learn with mild interest of a distant outbreak of epidemic disease, which slays its few, and wake one morning to find the sinister malady tapping at their front doors, so did the world become alive and alarmed at the terror-growth which suddenly loomed from the mists.

James G. Bliss was a hardware merchant, and a man well known on exchange, where he augmented the steady profits of the Bliss General Hardware Corporation with occasional windfalls from legitimate speculation. A somewhat pompous and, in argument, aggressive person, he had the advantage which mediocrity, blended with a certain expansive generosity, gives to a man, in that he had no enemies; and since his generosity was run on sane business principles, it could not even be said of him, as is so often said of others, that his worst enemy was himself. He held, and still holds, the bulk of the stock in the B.G.H. Corporation—a fact which should be noted because it was a practice of Mr. Bliss to manipulate from time to time the price of his shares by judicious operations.

It was at a time coincident with the little boom in industrials which brought Bliss Hardware stock at a jump from 12.50 to 23.75, that the strange happening occurred which focussed for the moment all eyes upon the Frogs.

Mr. Bliss has a country place at Long Beach, Hampshire. It is referred to as “The Hut,” but is the sort of hut that King Solomon might have built for the Queen of Sheba, had that adventurous man been sufficiently well acquainted with modern plumbing, the newest systems of heating and lighting, and the exigent requirements of up-to-date

chauffeurs. In these respects Mr. Bliss was wiser than Solomon.

He had returned to his country home after a strenuous day in the City, and was walking in the garden in the cool of the evening. He was (and is) married, but his wife and two daughters were spending the spring in Paris—a wise course, since the spring is the only season when Paris has the slightest pretensions to being a beautiful city.

He had come from his kennels, and was seen walking across the home park toward a covert which bordered his property. Hearing a scream, his kennel man and a groom ran toward the wood, to discover Bliss lying on the ground unconscious, his face and shoulders covered with blood. He had been struck down by some heavy weapon; there were a slight fracture of the parietal bone and several very ugly scalp wounds.

For three weeks this unfortunate man hovered between life and death, unconscious except at intervals, and unable during his lucid moments to throw any light on, or make any coherent statement concerning, the assault, except to murmur, “Frog ... frog ... left arm ... frog.”

It was the first of many similar outrages, seemingly purposeless and wanton, in no case to be connected with robbery, and invariably (except once) committed upon people who occupied fairly unimportant positions in the social hierarchy.

The Frogs advanced instantly to a first-class topic. The disease was found to be widespread, and men who had read, light-heartedly, of minor victimizations, began to bolt

their own doors and carry lethal weapons when they went abroad at nights.

And they were wise, for there was a force in being that had been born in fear and had matured in obscurity (to the wonder of its creator) so that it wielded the tyrannical power of governments.

In the centre of many ramifications sat the Frog, drunk with authority, merciless, terrible. One who lived two lives and took full pleasure from both, and all the time nursing the terror that Saul Morris had inspired one foggy night in London, when the grimy streets were filled with armed policemen looking for the man who cleaned the strong-room of the S.S. *Mantania* of three million pounds between the port of Southampton and the port of Cherbourg.

THEFELLOWSHIPOFTHEFROG

CHAPTER I

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AT MAYTREE COTTAGE

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A DRY radiator coincided with a burst tyre. The second coincidence was the proximity of Maytree Cottage on the Horsham Road. The cottage was larger than most, with a timbered front and a thatched roof. Standing at the gate, Richard Gordon stopped to admire. The house dated back to the days of Elizabeth, but his interest and admiration were not those of the antiquary.

Nor, though he loved flowers, of the horticulturist, though the broad garden was a patchwork of colour and the fragrance of cabbage roses came to delight his senses. Nor was it the air of comfort and cleanliness that pervaded the place, the scrubbed red-brick pathway that led to the door, the spotless curtains behind leaded panes.

It was the girl, in the red-lined basket chair, that arrested his gaze. She sat on a little lawn in the shade of a mulberry tree, with her shapely young limbs stiffly extended, a book in her hand, a large box of chocolates by her side. Her hair, the colour of old gold, an old gold that held life and sheen; a flawless complexion, and, when she turned her head in his direction, a pair of grave, questioning eyes, deeper than grey, yet greyer than blue....

She drew up her feet hurriedly and rose.

“I’m so sorry to disturb you,”—Dick, hat in hand, smiled his apology—“but I want water for my poor little Lizzie. She’s developed a prodigious thirst.”

She frowned for a second, and then laughed.

“Lizzie—you mean a car? If you’ll come to the back of the cottage I’ll show you where the well is.”

He followed, wondering who she was. The tiny hint of patronage in her tone he understood. It was the tone of matured girlhood addressing a boy of her own age. Dick, who was thirty and looked eighteen, with his smooth, boyish face, had been greeted in that “little boy” tone before, and was inwardly amused.

“Here is the bucket and that is the well,” she pointed. “I would send a maid to help you, only we haven’t a maid, and never had a maid, and I don’t think ever shall have a maid!”

“Then some maid has missed a very good job,” said Dick, “for this garden is delightful.”

She neither agreed nor dissented. Perhaps she regretted the familiarity she had shown. She conveyed to him an impression of aloofness, as she watched the process of filling the buckets, and when he carried them to the car on the road outside, she followed.

“I thought it was a—a—what did you call it—Lizzie?”

“She is Lizzie to me,” said Dick stoutly as he filled the radiator of the big Rolls, “and she will never be anything else. There are people who think she should be called ‘Diana,’ but those high-flown names never had any attraction for me. She is Liz—and will always be Liz.”

She walked round the machine, examining it curiously.

“Aren’t you afraid to be driving a big car like that?” she asked. “I should be scared to death. It is so tremendous and ... and unmanageable.”

Dick paused with a bucket in hand.

“Fear,” he boasted, “is a word which I have expunged from the bright lexicon of my youth.”

For a second puzzled, she began to laugh softly.

“Did you come by way of Welford?” she asked.

He nodded.

“I wonder if you saw my father on the road?”

“I saw nobody on the road except a sour-looking gentleman of middle age who was breaking the Sabbath by carrying a large brown box on his back.”

“Where did you pass him?” she asked, interested.

“Two miles away—less than that.” And then, a doubt intruding: “I hope that I wasn’t describing your parent?”

“It sounds rather like him,” she said without annoyance. “Daddy is a naturalist photographer. He takes moving pictures of birds and things—he is an amateur, of course.”

“Of course,” agreed Dick.

He brought the buckets back to where he had found them and lingered. Searching for an excuse, he found it in the garden. How far he might have exploited this subject is a matter for conjecture. Interruption came in the shape of a young man who emerged from the front door of the cottage. He was tall and athletic, good-looking…. Dick put his age at twenty.

“Hello, Ella! Father back?” he began, and then saw the visitor.

“This is my brother,” said the girl, and Dick Gordon nodded. He was conscious that this free-and-easy method of getting acquainted was due largely, if not entirely, to his youthful appearance. To be treated as an inconsiderable boy had its advantages. And so it appeared.

“I was telling him that boys ought not to be allowed to drive big cars,” she said. “You remember the awful smash there was at the Shoreham cross-roads?”

Ray Bennett chuckled.

“This is all part of a conspiracy to keep me from getting a motor-bicycle. Father thinks I’ll kill somebody, and Ella thinks I’ll kill myself.”

Perhaps there was something in Dick Gordon’s quick smile that warned the girl that she had been premature in her appraisement of his age, for suddenly, almost abruptly, she nodded an emphatic dismissal and turned away. Dick was at the gate when a further respite arrived. It was the man he had passed on the road. Tall, loose-framed, grey and gaunt of face, he regarded the stranger with suspicion in his deep-set eyes.

“Good morning,” he said curtly. “Car broken down?”

“No, thank you. I ran out of water, and Miss—er——”

“Bennett,” said the man. “She gave you the water, eh? Well, good morning.”

He stood aside to let Gordon pass, but Dick opened the gate and waited till the owner of Maytree Cottage had entered.

“My name is Gordon,” he said. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Ella had turned back and stood with her brother within earshot. “I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness.”

The old man, with a nod, went on carrying his heavy burden into the house, and Dick in desperation turned to the girl.

“You are wrong when you think this is a difficult car to drive—won’t you experiment? Or perhaps your brother?”

The girl hesitated, but not so young Bennett.

“I’d like to try,” he said eagerly. “I’ve never handled a big machine.”

That he could handle one if the opportunity came, he showed. They watched the car gliding round the corner, the girl with a little frown gathering between her eyes, Dick Gordon oblivious to everything except that he had snatched a few minutes’ closer association with the girl. He was behaving absurdly, he told himself. He, a public official, an experienced lawyer, was carrying on like an irresponsible, love-smitten youth of nineteen. The girl’s words emphasized his folly.

“I wish you hadn’t let Ray drive,” she said. “It doesn’t help a boy who is always wanting something better, to put him in charge of a beautiful car ... perhaps you don’t understand me. Ray is very ambitious and dreams in millions. A thing like this unsettles him.”

The older man came out at that moment, a black pipe between his teeth, and, seeing the two at the gate, a cloud passed over his face.

“Let him drive your car, have you?” he said grimly. “I wish you hadn’t—it was very kind of you, Mr. Gordon, but in Ray’s case a mistaken kindness.”

“I’m very sorry,” said the penitent Dick. “Here he comes!”

The big car spun toward them and halted before the gate.

“She’s a beauty!”

Ray Bennett jumped out and looked at the machine with admiration and regret.

“My word, if she were mine!”

“She isn’t,” snapped the old man, and then, as though regretting his petulance: “Some day perhaps you’ll own a fleet, Ray—are you going to London, Mr. Gordon?”

Dick nodded.

“Maybe you wouldn’t care to stop and eat a very frugal meal with us?” asked the elder Bennett, to his surprise and joy. “And you’ll be able to tell this foolish son of mine that owning a big car isn’t all joy-riding.”

Dick’s first impression was of the girl’s astonishment. Apparently he was unusually honoured, and this was confirmed after John Bennett had left them.

“You’re the first boy that has ever been asked to dinner,” she said when they were alone. “Isn’t he, Ray?”

Ray smiled.

“Dad doesn’t go in for the social life, and that’s a fact,” he said. “I asked him to have Philo Johnson down for a week-end, and he killed the idea before it was born. And the old philosopher is a good fellow and the boss’s confidential secretary. You’ve heard of Maitlands Consolidated, I suppose?”

Dick nodded. The marble palace on the Strand Embankment in which the fabulously rich Mr. Maitland operated, was one of the show buildings of London.

“I’m in his office—exchange clerk,” said the young man, “and Philo could do a whole lot for me if dad would pull out an invitation. As it is, I seem doomed to be a clerk for the rest of my life.”

The white hand of the girl touched his lips.

“You’ll be rich some day, Ray dear, and it is foolish to blame daddy.”

The young man growled something under the hand, and then laughed a little bitterly.

“Dad has tried every get-rich-quick scheme that the mind and ingenuity of man——”

“And why?”

The voice was harsh, tremulous with anger. None of them had noticed the reappearance of John Bennett.

“You’re doing work you don’t like. My God! What of me? I’ve been trying for twenty years to get out. I’ve tried every silly scheme—that’s true. But it was for you——”

He stopped abruptly at the sight of Gordon’s embarrassment.

“I invited you to dinner, and I’m pulling out the family skeleton,” he said with rough good-humour.

He took Dick’s arm and led him down the garden path between the serried ranks of rose bushes.

“I don’t know why I asked you to stay, young man,” he said. “An impulse, I suppose ... maybe a bad conscience. I don’t give these young people all the company they ought to have at home, and I’m not much of a companion for them. It’s too bad that you should be the witness of the first family jar we’ve had for years.”

His voice and manner were those of an educated man. Dick wondered what occupation he followed, and why it should be so particularly obnoxious that he should be seeking some escape.

The girl was quiet throughout the meal. She sat at Dick's left hand and she spoke very seldom. Stealing an occasional glance at her, he thought she looked preoccupied and troubled, and blamed his presence as the cause.

Apparently no servant was kept at the cottage. She did the waiting herself, and she had replaced the plates when the old man asked:

"I shouldn't think you were as young as you look, Mr. Gordon—what do you do for a living?"

"I'm quite old," smiled Dick. "Thirty-one."

"Thirty-one?" gasped Ella, going red. "And I've been talking to you as though you were a child!"

"Think of me as a child at heart," he said gravely. "As to my occupation—I'm a persecutor of thieves and murderers and bad characters generally. My name is Richard Gordon ——"

The knife fell with a clatter from John Bennett's hand and his face went white.

"Gordon—Richard Gordon?" he said hollowly.

For a second their eyes met, the clear blue and the faded blue.

"Yes—I am the Assistant Director of Prosecutions," said Gordon quietly. "And I have an idea that you and I have met before."

The pale eyes did not waver. John Bennett's face was a mask.

"Not professionally, I hope," he said, and there was a challenge in his voice.

Dick laughed again as at the absurdity of the question.

"Not professionally," he said with mock gravity.

On his way back to London that night his memory worked overtime, but he failed to place John Bennett of Horsham.

CHAPTER II

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A TALK ABOUT FROGS

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MAITLANDS Consolidated had grown from one small office to its present palatial proportions in a comparatively short space of time. Maitland was a man advanced in years, patriarchal in appearance, sparing of speech. He had arrived in London unheralded, and had arrived, in the less accurate sense of the word, before London was aware of his existence.

Dick Gordon saw the speculator for the first time as he was waiting in the marble-walled vestibule. A man of middle height, bearded to his waist; his eyes almost hidden under heavy white brows; stout and laborious of gait, he came slowly through the outer office, where a score of clerks sat working under their green-shaded lamps, and, looking neither to the right nor left, walked into the elevator and was lost to view.

“That is the old man: have you seen him before?” asked Ray Bennett, who had come out to meet the caller a second before. “He’s a venerable old cuss, but as tight as a soundproof door. You couldn’t pry money from him, not if you used dynamite! He pays Philo a salary that the average secretary wouldn’t look at, and if Philo wasn’t such an easygoing devil, he’d have left years ago.”

Dick Gordon was feeling a little uncomfortable. His presence at Maitlands was freakish, his excuse for calling as feeble as any weak brain could conceive. If he had spoken

the truth to the flattered young man on whom he called in business hours, he would have said: “I have idiotically fallen in love with your sister. I am not especially interested in you, but I regard you as a line that will lead me to another meeting, therefore I have made my being in the neighbourhood an excuse for calling. And because of this insane love I have for your sister, I am willing to meet even Philo, who will surely bore me.” Instead he said:

“You are a friend of Philo—why do you call him that?”

“Because he’s a philosophical old horse—his other name is Philip,” said the other with a twinkle in his eye. “Everybody is a friend of Philo’s—he’s the kind of man that makes friendship easy.”

The elevator door opened at that moment and a man came out. Instinctively Dick Gordon knew that this bald and middle-aged man with the good-humoured face was the subject of their discussion. His round, fat face creased in a smile as he recognized Ray, and after he had handed a bundle of documents to one of the clerks, he came over to where they were standing.

“Meet Mr. Gordon,” said Ray. “This is my friend Johnson.”

Philo grasped the extended hand warmly.

“Warm” was a word which had a special significance in relation to Mr. Johnson. He seemed to radiate a warming and quickening influence. Even Dick Gordon, who was not too ready to respond, came under the immediate influence of his geniality.

“You’re Mr. Gordon of the Public Prosecution Department—Ray was telling me,” he said. “I should like you to come

one day and prosecute old man Maitland! He is certainly the most prosecutable gentleman I've met for years!"

The jest tickled Mr. Johnson. He was, thought Dick, inclined to laugh at himself.

"I've got to get back: he's in a tantrum this morning. Anyone would think the Frogs were after him."

Philo Johnson, with a cheery nod, hurried back to the lift. Was it imagination on Dick's part? He could have sworn the face of Ray Bennett was a deeper shade of red, and that there was a look of anxiety in his eyes.

"It's very good of you to keep your promise and call ... yes, I'll be glad to lunch with you, Gordon. And my sister will also, I'm sure. She is often in town."

His adieux were hurried and somewhat confused. Dick Gordon went out into the street puzzled. Of one thing he was certain: that behind the young man's distress lay that joking reference to the Frogs.

When he returned to his office, still sore with himself that he had acted rather like a moon-calf or a farm hand making his awkward advances to the village belle, he found a troubled-looking chief of police waiting for him, and at the sight of him Dick's eyes narrowed.

"Well?" he asked. "What of Genter?"

The police chief made a grimace like one who was swallowing an unpleasant potion.

"They slipped me," he said. "The Frog arrived in a car—I wasn't prepared for that. Genter got in, and they were gone before I realized what had happened. Not that I'm worried. Genter has a gun, and he's a pretty tough fellow in a rough house."

Dick Gordon stared at and through the man, and then:

"I think you should have been prepared for the car," he said. "If Genter's message was well founded, and he is on the track of the Frog, you should have expected a car. Sit down, Wellingdale."

The grey-haired man obeyed.

"I'm not excusing myself," he growled. "The Frogs have got me rattled. I treated them as a joke once."

"Maybe we'd be wiser if we treated them as a joke now," suggested Dick, biting off the end of a cigar. "They may be nothing but a foolish secret society. Even tramps are entitled to their lodges and pass-words, grips and signs."

Wellingdale shook his head.

"You can't get away from the record of the past seven years," he said. "It isn't the fact that every other bad road-criminal we pull in has the frog tattooed on his wrist. That might be sheer imitation—and, in any case, all crooks of low mentality have tattoo marks. But in that seven years we've had a series of very unpleasant crimes. First there was the attack upon the *chargé d'affaires* of the United States Embassy—bludgeoned to sleep in Hyde Park. Then there was the case of the President of the Northern Trading Company—clubbed as he was stepping out of his car in Park Lane. Then the big fire which destroyed the Mersey Rubber Stores, where four million pounds' worth of raw rubber went up in smoke. Obviously the work of a dozen fire bugs, for the stores consist of six big warehouses and each was fired simultaneously and in two places. And the Frogs were in it. We caught two of the men for the Rubber job; they were both 'Frogs' and bore the totem of the tribe—they were both

ex-convicts, and one of them admitted that he had had instructions to carry out the job, but took back his words next day. I never saw a man more scared than he was. And I can't blame him. If half that is said about the Frog is true, his admission cost him something. There it is, Mr. Gordon. I can give you a dozen cases. Genter has been two years on their track. He has been tramping the country, sleeping under hedges, hogging in with all sorts of tramps, stealing rides with them and thieving with them; and when he wrote me and said he had got into touch with the organization and expected to be initiated, I thought we were near to getting them. I've had Genter shadowed since he struck town. I'm sick about this morning."

Dick Gordon opened a drawer of his desk, took out a leather folder and turned the leaves of its contents. They consisted of pages of photographs of men's wrists. He studied them carefully, as though he were looking at them for the first time, though, in truth, he had examined these records of captured men almost every day for years. Then he closed the portfolio thoughtfully and put it away in the drawer. For a few minutes he sat, drumming his fingers on the edge of the writing-table, a frown on his youthful face.

"The frog is always on the left wrist, always a little lob-sided, and there is always one small blob tattooed underneath," he said. "Does that strike you as being remarkable?"

The Superintendent, who was not a brilliant man, saw nothing remarkable in the fact.

CHAPTER III

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THE FROG

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IT was growing dark when the two tramps, skirting the village of Morby, came again to the post road. The circumvention of Morby had been a painful and tiring business, for the rain which had been falling all day had transformed the ploughed fields into glutinous brown seas that made walking a test of patience.

One was tall, unshaven, shabby, his faded brown coat was buttoned to his chin, his sagged and battered hat rested on the back of his head. His companion seemed short by comparison, though he was a well-made, broad-shouldered man, above the average height.

They spoke no word as they plodded along the muddy road. Twice the shorter man stopped and peered backward in the gathering darkness, as though searching for a pursuer, and once he clutched the big man’s arm and drew him to hiding behind the bushes that fringed the road. This was when a car tore past with a roar and a splattering of liquid mud.

After a while they turned off the road, and crossing a field, came to the edge of a wild waste of land traversed by an ancient cart track.

“We’re nearly there,” growled the smaller man, and the other grunted. But for all his seeming indifference, his keen eyes were taking in every detail of the scene. Solitary building on the horizon ... looked like a barn. Essex County

(he guessed this from the indicator number on the car that had passed); waste land probably led to a disused clay pit ... or was it quarry? There was an old notice-board fixed to a groggy post near the gate through which the cart track passed. It was too dark to read the faded lettering, but he saw the word “lime.” Limestone? It would be easy to locate.

The only danger was if the Frogs were present in force. Under cover of his overcoat, he felt for the Browning and slipped it into his overcoat pocket.

If the Frogs were in strength, there might be a tough fight. Help there was none. He never expected there would be. Carlo had picked him up on the outskirts of the city in his disreputable car, and had driven him through the rain, tacking and turning, following secondary roads, avoiding towns and hamlets, so that, had he been sitting by the driver’s side, he might have grown confused. But he was not. He was sitting in the darkness of the little van, and saw nothing. Wellingdale, with the shadows who had been watching him, had not been prepared for the car. A tramp with a motor-car was a monstrosity. Even Genter himself was taken aback when the car drew up to the pavement where he was waiting, and the voice of Carlo hissed, “Jump in!”

They crossed the crest of a weed-grown ridge. Below, Genter saw a stretch of ground littered with rusting trollies, twisted Decourville rails, and pitted with deep, rain-filled holes. Beyond, on the sharp line of the quarry’s edge, was a small wooden hut, and towards this Carlo led the way.

“Not nervous, are you?” he asked, and there was a sneer in his voice.

“Not very,” said the other coolly. “I suppose the fellows are in that shack?”

Carlo laughed softly.

“There are no others,” he said, “only the Frog himself. He comes up the quarry face—there’s a flight of steps that come up under the hut. Good idea, eh? The hut hangs over the edge, and you can’t even see the steps, not if you hang over. I tried once. They’d never catch him, not if they brought forty million cops.”

“Suppose they surrounded the quarry?” suggested Genter, but the man scoffed.

“Wouldn’t he know it was being surrounded before he came in? He knows everything, does the Frog.”

He looked down at the other’s hand.

“It won’t hurt,” he said, “and it’s worth it if it does! You’ll never be without a friend again, Harry. If you get into trouble, there’s always the best lawyer to defend you. And you’re the kind of chap we’re looking for—there is plenty of trash. Poor fools that want to get in for the sake of the pickings. But you’ll get big work, and if you do a special job for him, there’s hundreds and hundreds of money for you! If you’re hungry or ill, the Frogs will find you out and help you. That’s pretty good, ain’t it?”

Genter said nothing. They were within a dozen yards of the hut now, a strong structure built of stout timber bulks, with one door and a shuttered window.

Motioning Genter to remain where he was, the man called Carlo went forward and tapped on the door. Genter heard a voice, and then he saw the man step to the window,

and the shutter open an inch. There followed a long conversation in an undertone, and then Carlo came back.

“He says he has a job for you that will bring in a thousand—you’re lucky! Do you know Rochmore?”

Genter nodded. He knew that aristocratic suburb.

“There’s a man there that has got to be coshed. He comes home from his club every night by the eleven-five. Walks to his house. It is up a dark road, and a fellow could get him with a club without trouble. Just one smack and he’s finished. It’s not killing, you understand.”

“Why does he want me to do it?” asked the tall tramp curiously.

The explanation was logical.

“All new fellows have to do something to show their pluck and straightness. What do you say?”

Genter had not hesitated.

“I’ll do it,” he said.

Carlo returned to the window, and presently he called his companion.

“Stand here and put your left arm through the window,” he ordered.

Genter pulled back the cuff of his soddened coat and thrust his bare arm through the opening. His hand was caught in a firm grip, and immediately he felt something soft and wet pressed against his wrist. A rubber stamp, he noted mentally, and braced himself for the pain which would follow. It came, the rapid pricking of a thousand needles, and he winced. Then the grip on his hand relaxed and he withdrew it, to look wonderingly on the blurred design of ink and blood that the tattooer had left.

“Don’t wipe it,” said a muffled voice from the darkness of the hut. “Now you may come in.”

The shutter closed and was bolted. Then came the snick of a lock turning and the door opened. Genter went into the pitch-black darkness of the hut and heard the door locked by the unseen occupant.

“Your number is K 971,” said the hollow voice. “When you see that in the personal column of *The Times*, you report here, wherever you are. Take that....”

Genter put out his hand and an envelope was placed in his outstretched palm. It was as though the mysterious Frog could see, even in that blackness.

“There is journey money and a map of the district. If you spend the journey money, or if you fail to come when you are wanted, you will be killed. Is that clear?”

“Yes.”

“You will find other money—that you can use for your expenses. Now listen. At Rochmore, 17 Park Avenue, lives Hallwell Jones, the banker——”

He must have sensed the start of surprise which the recruit gave.

“You know him?”

“Yes—worked for him years ago,” said Genter.

Stealthily, he drew his Browning from his pocket and thumbed down the safety catch.

“Between now and Friday he has to be clubbed. You need not kill him. If you do, it doesn’t matter. I expect his head’s too hard——”

Genter located the man now, and, growing accustomed to the darkness, guessed rather than saw the bulk of him.