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might all change our minds about these matters. Sir Robert is coming and I am sure that your cousin Barbara will be very disappointed if you do not turn up, for she understands nothing about these city things, which are Greek to her."

At the mention of the name of Bar-At the mention of the name of Bar-bara Sir Robert Aylward looked up from the papers which he affected to be tidying, and Alan thought that there was a kind of challenge in his eyes. A moment before he had made up his mind that no power on earth would induce him to spend a Sunday with his late partners at the Court Now, acting upon some instinct or impulse, he reversed his opinion.
"Thanks," he said, "if that is under-

stood, I shall be happy to come. I will drive over from Yarleys in time for dinner to-morrow. Perhaps you

will say so to Barbara."

"She will be glad, I am sure," answered Mr. Haswell, "for she told me the other day that she wants to consult you about some outdoor theatri-

cals that she means to get up in July."

"In July!" answered Alan with a little laugh. "I wonder where I shall be in July."

Then came another pause, which seemed to affect even Sir Robert's nerves, for, abandoning the papers, he walked down the room till he came to the golden object on the stand that has been described, and for the second time that day stood there contemplat-

ing it.

"This thing is yours, Vernon," he said, "and now that our relations are at an end, I suppose that you will want to take it away. What is its You never told me.' history?

"Oh, that's a long story," answered Alan in an absent voice. "My uncle, who was a missionary, brought it from West Africa. I rather forget the facts, but Jeeki, my old negro servant, knows them all, for as a lad my uncle saved him from sacrifice, or something, in the place where they worship these things, and he has been with us ever since. It is a fetish with magical powers and all the rest of it. I believe they call it the Swimming Head and other names. If you look at it, you will see that it seems to swim between the shoulders, doesn't

"Yes," said Sir Robert, "and I admire the beautiful beast. She is cruel and artistic, like—like finance. Look here, Vernon, we have quarrelled, and of course henceforth are enemies, for it is no use mincing matters, only fools do that. But in a way you are being hardly treated. You could get £20 apiece to-day for those shares of yours on the market, and I am paying you £1. I understand your scruples there is no reason why we should not square things. This fetish of yours has brought me luck, so let's do a deal. Leave it here, and instead of a cheque for £1,700, I will make you one out for £17,000."

"That's a very liberal offer," said Vernon. "Give me a moment to think it over."

Then he also walked into the cor ner of the room and contemplated the golden mask that seemed to float between the frog-like shoulders. The shimmering eyes drew his eyes, though what he saw in them does not matter. Indeed he could never re-

member.

"No, thank you," he said presently.

"I don't think I will sell the Yellow
God, as Jeeki calls it. Perhaps you will kindly keep her here for a week or so, until I make up my mind where to stow her."

Alan was outside at last. The mas sive granite portal vanished behind him in the evening mists, much as a nightmare vanishes. He, Alan Ver-non, who for a year or more had been in bondage, was a free man again. He remembered that this step of his

meant that, sooner or later, within a year or two at most, Yarleys, where his family had dwelt for centuries, must go to the hammer. Why had he not accepted Aylward's offer and sold that old fetish to him for £17,000? There was no question of share-dealing there, and if a very wealthy man chose to give a fancy price for a curiosity, he could take it without doubt or shame. At least, it would have sufficed to save Yarleys, which after all was only mortgaged for £20,000. For the life of him he could not tell. He had acted on impulse, a very curious impulse, and there was an end of it, perhaps because his uncle had told him as a boy that the thing was unique, or perhaps because old Jeeki, his negro servant, venerated it so much and swore that it was "lucky." At any rate, he had declined, and there was an end. But another and a graver matter remained. He had desired wealth to save Yarleys, but he desired it still more for a different purpose. Above everything on earth he loved Barbara, his distant cousin, and the niece of Mr. Champers-Haswell, who until an hour ago had been his partner. Now she was a great heiress, and without fortune he could not marry her, even if she would marry him, which remained in doubt. For one thing, her uncle and guardian, Haswell, under her father's will, had absolute discretion in this matter until she reached the age of twenty-five,

and for another, he was too proud. When Alan had left the office, Sir Robert turned to Mr. Champers-Haswell and asked abruptly, "What the

devil does this mean?"

Mr. Haswell looked up at the ceiling and whistled in his own peculiar fashion, then answered, "I cannot say for certain, but I tell you that of late our luck has been too good to last. The boom, the real boom, came in with Vernon, and with Vernon I think

that it will go."
"At any rate it must leave something pretty substantial behind it this time, Aylward, my friend. Whatever

time, Aylward, my friend. Whatever happens, within a week we shall be rich, really rich for life."

"For life, Haswell, yes, for life. But what is life? A bubble that any pin may prick. Oh! I know that you do not like the subject, but it is as well to look it in the face sometimes. There, let's get out of this before I grow superstitious. Got your hat and grow superstitious. Got your hat and coat? So have I, come on," and he switched off the light, so that the room was left in darkness except for

the faint glimmering of the fire.

"Good Lord deliver us," chimed in
Mr. Haswell in a shaking voice behind him. "What the devil's that?"

Sir Robert looked round and saw,

or thought that he saw, something very strange. From the pillar on which it stood, the golden fetish with a woman's face appeared to have floated. The firelight showed it gliding towards them across, but a few inches above, the floor of the great room. It came very slowly, but it came. Now it reached them and paused, and now it rose into the air until it attained the beight of Mariane. until it attained the height of Mr. Champers-Haswell and stayed there, staring into his face and not a hand's breadth away, just as though it were a real woman glaring at him.

He uttered a sound, half whistle and half groan, and fell back, as it chanced on to a morocco covered seat behind him. For a moment or two the gleaming, golden mask floated in the air. Then it turned very deliberately, rose a little way, and moving sidelong to where Sir Robert stood, hung in front of his face.

Aylward staggered to the mantel-piece and began to fumble for the switch. He found it at last, and next instant the office broke into a blaze of light.

(To be continued)



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