



Mr. Max of Scotland Yard

A SERIES OF SIX DETECTIVE STORIES.

By CHARLES OLIVER

I. The Great Galcore Diamond

SOME five years ago, I was putting up at the Arundel Arms, in Devonshire. I was on furlough, and had come down for the fishing. For the first few days the sport was perfect; then towards the end of April the weather had broken up, and the little river Camel was swollen into an ugly yellow torrent. The prospects were hopeless indeed that afternoon of May 1st as I stood at my window watching the rain driving over the sodden moor.

At last I could stand it no longer, I went out into the sand-strewn bar-room, where old Doidge, the landlord, was nodding among his bottles.

"Here's weather to make a man hang himself, Mr. Doidge," I said.

"You've hit the right nail on the head, Captain," he answered, "and we're in for a pretty spell of it, too."

He walked to the door, looked out, and came back shaking his head.

"Have you got any books about?" I asked.

"No," he said, "that I haven't. I don't seem to set much store on books. But perhaps—yes, that's an idee—perhaps Mr. Max could lend you some."

"And who is Mr. Max?"

"Ah! of course, you don't know him," answered Doidge. "He's come into the neighbourhood since you were here last. He was one of these detective fellows, but he's retired now. Lives right out beyond the village all by himself. You must have seen the house—stands far back up the Red Combe?"

"I know," I said. "Well, would he like to see me, do you think?"

"I lay he would, Captain. It isn't so precious gay up there. He lives quiet enough, but he likes his crack—as I have reason to know. Say I sent you, or wait—"

The old man rummaged out an ancient hotel card, and wrote on it in his sprawling hand:

"To interduce Cap. Grensley. Mr. Doidge."

"Here," said he, "that'll be enough. Lor', he'll jaw your head off."

Facing this terrible prospect, of which the alternative was to yawn my head off, I left the inn and soon arrived at the top of the Red Combe, which I descended to the solitary habitation of Mr. Max. It was a one-storeyed house of apparently three or four rooms, and stood all among the heather, from which it was separated by no sort of hedge or wall. The door and windows were wide open, and on the threshold sat solemnly the very ugliest bulldog I have ever seen. When I turned up the rough path towards the door he began to growl thunderously, and immediately a man appeared at one of the windows.

"Wait a minute," he said. "The dog isn't too safe."

He went into the house and came out from the door to meet me.

"Mr. Max?" I asked.

"I'm Mr. Max," he said. "Mr. Max of Scotland Yard."

He was a clean-shaven, light-complexioned man, of about middle height, pale and fragile looking. His face was in no way remarkable, and was singularly devoid of animation; but I soon discovered that he had his features marvellously under control, and that his countenance was only expressionless when he meant that it should be so. His eyes were of faint blue; in them, too, there was no more to be read than he wished. He was dressed in a quiet tweed suit, and was altogether a man that you would pass without much notice.

"Come in, Captain Grensley," he said, when I had explained the reason of my visit. "Come in. I am very glad to see you. Oh, that will be all right, Salewski," he added to the bulldog, who was growling suggestively.

Mr. Max led the way into a kind of study, furnished plainly but comfortably, and pulled forward a big arm-chair for me.

"Well, now as to books," he said, pointing to his shelves. "I'm afraid I haven't got much that would interest you. All those volumes up there are highly technical—police cases, pathological studies, and so on. Do you read French? No? That's a pity. I have got some fine French criminal literature—blood and mud, ad lib. Well, then, what is to be done? We can smoke at any rate."

He got out a box of cigars and we lit up.

"That's a fine dog of yours," I remarked.

"Yes—Salewski."

The great beast who was sitting by his master pricked up his ears on hearing his name.

"That's right, we are talking of you, old man," said Mr. Max. "And perhaps, as we cannot lend Captain Grensley any books and he likes romances, we might tell him how you came by such a hideous name."

That would be very good of you, Mr. Max."

"It isn't much of a story, I warn you," said my host. "But perhaps it will interest you as much as looking out of your window at the rain, which is all you can do at the Arundel Arms. Are you alight? Good, then!"

"You see, in my profession, as in all others, a man learns a great deal from his mistakes. So it was not a bad thing for me that my career began with a good bang thumping failure; otherwise I might never have risen to the top of the tree. That sounds odd, coming from my own lips, but if I don't say it of myself, as I can say honestly, that I was the best man in the service, no one will ever say it of me. The jealousies, the meanesses, the injustices of our profession, Captain Grensley! You haven't an idea."

"Well, one day my chief sent for me. There was a fat, flabby, smooth-faced Jew in his office, trembling all over, mopping his forehead, and moaning every now and then."

"This is Mr. Isaac Salewski," says my chief. 'He runs a secondhand shop in Aldersgate, and he reports