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Tenth Raffles Story---Tenth Raffles Story---Tenth Raffles Story

a decent soul, and it's lucky for me I got a word with him before they trussed me up. I've promised to set him up in life, and I will, but I don't want him out of my sight for the moment. "If you squared him last night," I exclaimed, "why the blazes didn't he come to me till the eleventh hour?" "Ah, I knew he'd have to cut it fine, though I hoped not quite so fine as all that. But all's well that ends well, and I declare I don't feel so much the worse. I shall be sore about the gills for a bit--and what do you think?" "He pointed to the long black ruler with the bronze stain; it lay upon the floor. He held out his hand for it and I gave it to him. "The same one I gagged him with," said Raffles, with his still ghastly smile. "It was a bit of an artist, old Corbucci, after all!" "Now let's hear how you fell into his clutches," said I briskly, for I was anxious to hear as he seemed to tell me, only for my part I was waited until we were safe in the flat. "I do want to set it off my chest, Bunny," old Raffles admitted, "and yet I hardly can tell you after all. I followed your friend with the velvet eyes. I followed him all the way here. Of course I came up to have a good look at the house when he'd let him self in, and damn me if he hadn't left the door ajar? Who could resist that? I had pushed it half open, and had just one foot on the mat when I got such a crack on the head as I hope never to get again. When I came to my wits were hauling me up to that ringbolt by the handle, and old Corbucci himself was bowing to me, but how he got here I don't know yet."

could it interest me then? But interested I was in Raffles; never more so in my life. He had been tormented all night and half a day, yet he could sit and talk like this the moment we sat him down. He had been within a minute of his death, yet he was as full of life as ever; ill-treated and defeated at the best, he could still smile through his blood as though the boot were on the other leg. I had imagined that I knew my Raffles at last. I was not likely so to flatter myself again. "But what has happened to these villains?" I burst out, and my indignation was not only against them for their cruelty, but also against their victim for his phlegmatic attitude toward them. It was difficult to believe that this was Raffles. "Oh," said he, "they were to go off to Italy instantly; they should be crossing now. But do listen to what I am telling you; it's interesting, my dear man. This old stinner Corbucci turns out to have been no end of a boss in the Camorra--says so himself. One of the capitanis, my boy, no less; and the velvet Johnny a giovano

corato, Anglice, fresher. This fellow here was also in it, and I've sworn to protect him from them evermore; and it's just as I said, half the organ grinders in London belong, and the whole lot of them were put on my tracks by secret instructions. This excellent youth, manufacturer, head poison on Saffron Hill when he's at home. "And why on earth didn't he come to me quicker?" "Because he couldn't talk to you. He could only fetch you, and it was as much as his life was worth to do that before our friends had departed. They were going by the 11 o'clock from Victoria, and that didn't leave much chance, but he certainly oughtn't to have run it as fine as he did. Still, you must remember that I had to fix things up with him in the fewest possible words in a single minute that the other two were indiscreet enough to leave us alone together." "The ragamuffin in question was watching us with all his solitary eye, as though he knew that we were discussing him. Suddenly he broke out in agonized accents, his

hands clasped and a face so full of fear that every moment I expected to see him on his knees. But Raffles answered kindly, reassuringly. I could tell from his tone, and then turned to me with a compassionate shrug. "He says he couldn't find the mansions, Bunny, and really it's not to be wondered at. I had only time to tell him to hunt you up and bring you here by hook or crook before 12 today, and after all, he has done that. But now the poor devil thinks you're riled with him and that we'll give him away to the Camorra." "Oh, it's not with him I'm riled," I said frankly, "but with those other backstairs, and--and with you, old chap, for taking it all as you do, while such infamous scoundrels have the last laugh and are safely on their way to France." Raffles looked up at me with a curiously open eye--an eye that I never saw when he was not in earnest. I fancied he did not like my last expression. After all it was no laughing matter to him. "But are they?" said he. "I'm not so

sure." "You said they were." "I said they should be." "Didn't you hear them go?" "I heard nothing but the clock all night. It was like Big Ben striking at the last--striking 9 to the fellow on the drop." "And in that open eye I saw at last a deep glimmer of the ordeal through which he had passed. "But my dear old Raffles, if they're still on the premises--" "The thought was too thrilling for a finished sentence. "I hope they are," he said grimly, going to the door. "There's a gas on! Was that burning when you came in?" "Now that I thought of it, yes, it had been, and there's a frightfully foul smell," I added as I followed Raffles down the stairs. He turned to me gravely, with his hand upon the front room door, and at the same moment I saw a coat with an astrakhan collar hanging on the pegs. "They are in here, Bunny," he said, and turned the handle.

The door would only open a few inches. But a detestable odor came out, with a broad bar of yellow gaslight. Raffles put his handkerchief to his nose. I followed his example, signing to our ally to do the same, and in another minute we had all three squeezed into the room. The man with the yellow boots was lying against the door, the count's great carcass sprawled upon the table, and at a glance it was evident that both men had been dead some hours. The old Camorrist had the stem of a liqueur glass between his swollen blue fingers, one of which had been cut in the breakage, and the livid flesh was also brown with the last blood that that would ever shed. His face was on the table, the huge moustache projecting from under either leaden cheek, yet looking itself strangely alive. Broken bread and scraps of frozen macaroni lay upon the cloth and at the bottom of two soap plates and a tureen. The macaroni had a tinge of tomato, and there was a crimson print left in the tumbler, with an empty flask to show whence it came. But near the great

gray head upon the table another liqueur glass stood, unbroken, and still full of some white and sparkling liquid, and near that a tiny silver flask, which made me recoil from Raffles as I had not from the dead, for I knew it to be his. "Come out of this poisonous air," he said sternly, "and I will tell you how it has happened." So we all three gathered together in the hall. But it was Raffles who stood nearest the street door, his back to it, his eyes upon us two. And though it was to me only that he spoke at first he would pause from point to point and translate into Italian for the benefit of the one-eyed alien to whom he owed his life. "You probably don't even know the name, Bunny," he began, "of the deadliest poison yet known to science. It is cyanide of cadocyl, and I have carried that small flask of it about with me for months. Where I got it matters nothing; the whole point is that a mere sniff reduces flesh to clay. 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