# STORY of the SMUGGLED SAPPHIRES

BY GEORGE BARTON

THE CHIEF OPENED IT AND DREW OUT A MAGNIFICENT SAPPHIRE NECKLACE.

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BARNES looked at the two cablegrams again. The first one, from Paris, informed him that the celebrated Versailles sapphires set in a splendid necklace, had been stolen; the second was a notification that Bill Snyder, smuggler, had sailed from Cherbourg on the Sylvania. Naturally the chief had put the two shreds together and expected to pull off the trick without a struggle.

But the Sylvania had arrived and Snyder was not on the passenger list. No sapphires had been declared, and the examination of the baggage, now almost completed, disclosed no gems. Barnes bit his lips vexatiously. The Versailles sapphires were numbered among the world's greatest gems. The thought of permitting them to slip through his fingers was maddening. At one time they had ranked with the state jewels of France. Their distinction came not so much through their value—although that was more than $20,000—as from their perfection. The cut was the finest ever turned out by a lapidary. They were known to gem experts as the blue cornflower. The cut of each stone made an opalescent star of six rays, which, held in a certain light, glittered like pure diamonds. There were forty perfect stones in the necklace, none less than a carat and a half.

Barnes determined to make a second tour of the boat, and in the course of his wanderings came within the rays of a pair of piercing black eyes. The owner of the bright orbs raised a small white manicured hand, very much beringed, and drew it across a narrow forehead. The next moment the same hand wearily stroked a luxuriant black mustache, betraying by the movement two rows of even, white, glistening teeth. He was one of a little group which, besides himself, included a young man and a young woman and an elderly person who might have been—as she was—the aunt of the girl. Barnes quickly learned through the captain of the boat that the stout, elderly person was Mrs. Harrington, a widow, with a comfortable income, whose consuming ambition was to wed her niece, Elsie, to a title. The young man was John Hasson, a strong-limbed, clean-faced American lawyer. The man with the piercing black eyes was addressed as the Count de Vontain.

Sea voyages are conducive to quick intimacies. Hence the captain of the Sylvania was able to tell many things to the chief of the customs. The most entertaining was the fact that the nobleman and the lawyer were keen rivals for the affections of Elsie Harrington. It did not require a second sight to discover that the girl loved the American, and that the count was the aunt's choice. Indeed she had taken the girl abroad a year before in the hope of breaking off the attachment with Hasson, but fate or the persistence and ingenuity of a love smitten young man had decreed that the two should return to the United States on the same vessel.

After learning these things, Barnes devoted his attention exclusively to the little party. The girl was unmistakably beautiful. She was tall and slender, with great brown eyes and a whimsical droop of the mouth, which looked as if it might, instantaneously, turn either to sadness or to laughter. Hasson gazed at her with a look of adoration. The older woman and the count stepped aside for a moment. Immediately the young man grasped the girl by the hand.

"Elsie!" he exclaimed, with a significant squeeze.

Her white face crimsoned; the drooping mouth suggested joy.

"Please don't, John; not here!" she cried.

Mrs. Harrington returned with the count, Elsie and John discreetly gazed into space. The count looked flurried. He wore the fashionably trimmed cloak and the high silk hat with flat brim popularly associated with Frenchmen of the higher class. He began to talk with the aunt in animated tones. In the meantime Barnes had been attending to routine business, keeping the group in sight, always. Presently he summoned Con Clancy, his assistant, to his side.

"Have the count and the ladies made out their papers?"

"Yes."

"Did they declare any gems?"

"No."

"Make the investigation of their baggage rigid. After that make a careful examination of the count's stateroom."

The buzz of expectation was everywhere. The thought of home caused the travelers to bubble over with eager good humor. The ship's officers ran about hurriedly, performing the last civilities to those who had been their guests for more than six days. The chief was standing on a little platform directing the disposition of the luggage, when someone grasped the sleeve of his coat. He looked around. The count was by his side, his small eyes exuding indignation.

"You are the chief inspector?" he queried in marvellously good English.

"I have that honor," was the bland reply.

"Well," continued theother hurriedly, "your men are flinging the things out of our trunks."

"Not flinging 'em out."

"Well, emptying 'em out."

"That's why they're here," was the good natured rejoinder.

"But," protestingly, "this sort of examination is most unusual; the baggage is always examined without taking it out of the trunks."

"Not always," corrected the chief. "In this instance we hope to expedite your landing by finishing the work in a systematic manner."

"Oh," said the count, disappointedly. "Then the men have been ordered to do this?"

Yes," said Barnes, with a queer look. Then very slowly, "Count, this isn't your first voyage over."

"How do you know?" angrily asked the man, his face flushing.

"Because," ironically, "you're so well posted on American customs business."

The count made no reply to this thrust, but irritably stalked away.

The Sylvania's dock was crowded with friends and relatives of the returning tourists. Waving handkerchiefs brightened the scene; shouts of recognition floated across the roped off portion of the pier.

Clancy approached the chief, who was absently listening to the complaint of a passenger who could not locate his trunk. Barnes instantly stepped aside to hear from his assistant. Clancy wasted no time in preliminaries.

"It's no use," he exclaimed in a whispered voice. "I can't find the sapphires. I've searched everywhere."

"And the stateroom; you didn't forget that?" reminded the chief, speaking to the inspector, but gazing intently in the direction of Count de Vontaine and the ladies.

"No," replied Clancy. "I didn't forget anything."

The chief did not appear to hear this reply. He was still watching the little group only a few yards away. Mrs. Harrington was standing alone. She held a fur lined coat over her left arm. He made a profound bow to the woman, and without an explanation whatever took the coat from her arm. She looked at him amazed, and was about to expostulate, when he said in his softest voice:

"Permit me to assist you on with this coat."

She had not requested his assistance, did not desire it, and was going to say so, but the masterful look in the man's eyes checked the protest on her lips. She held out her arms obediently. He slipped the coat on easily until it reached the nape of her neck. At that point he paused and deliberately raised the handsome, closely woven lace collar that covered her dress and hung around her neck and shoulders. His hand struck a hard, glittering substance. The look of triumph that flashed across his face told its own story.

Mrs. Harrington was wearing the Versailles sapphires!

No words were spoken, but at the very instant he discovered the necklace she realized what had happened. The natural pallor of her countenance became intensified. A half sob escaped her. The next instant she looked up, her gray eyes filled with fright. The chief was equal to the occasion.

"You needn't be frightened; there will be no public exposure."

Elsie, happening to glace that way, noticed her aunt's agitation. She walked over.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing, madam," replied the chief, with the easy manner which had won for him in the service the title of the Prince of Politeness. "Your aunt has forgotten to declare some gems. You will come with me to my office on the dock and the business will be quietly adjusted."

"This is outrageous," began the older woman, recovering herself. But the chief cut her short.

"It is," he observed, "and I'm sorry you attempted it."

The count came up at this moment, and when he saw what had happened his gimlet-like eyes appeared to be almost turning in their sockets. Instantly Barnes called Clancy to his side. There was a whispered conversation. As it was concluded the count disappeared in the crowd. Clancy was at his very heels.

"Come right this way, ladies." And the chief led the two women to the little office near the end of the wharf.

After they had been seated the chief gently released the sapphires from Mrs. Harrington's neck and laid them on his desk. They answered perfectly the description of the Versailles sapphires. There were forty of the stones, all cut with the exquisite art of the skilled lapidary. Mrs. Harrington sat silent, with the look of injured dignity common to those who violate the customs laws. The girl buried her face in her hands, weeping. The appraiser, who had entered in the meantime, looked at the gems listlessly. Later he would be called upon for his official opinion. Presently the older woman spoke harshly:

"Now, if you are quite done, perhaps—"

The chief silenced her sternly but politely.

"Not now, Mrs. Harrington. Your opportunity may come later. Now, if you will all step aside for a moment, I should like to speak to Mrs. Harrington alone."

"But I—"

"It's necessary," said the chief, with that compelling wave of the hand.

"Now, Mrs. Harrington," said Barnes, when the others had obeyed, "all I will say is that you should make a full, frank and explicit statement."

It took her some time to get her courage screwed up to the striking point. Finally, half tearfully, she burst out:

"The dear count gave them to me."

"The dear count, eh?" mimicked Barnes. "Do you know the value of these gems?"

"I haven't the faintest idea," she said. "I will be frank and tell you that I know the count is desperately in love with Elsie, and I have tried to help his suit. He is to be our guest in the city. Just before the customs officers came aboard, in a burst of gratitude, he bade me wear the sapphires, as a little souvenir of my kindness to him. I naturally felt flattered. I accepted and"—

"Didn't you know they were dutiable?" Barnes asked sternly.

"I wasn't sure. I thought a present—a thing you wore"—

"But you tried to conceal them under your lace collar."

"The government hasn't any right"—she began angrily, and then stopped short, her face as red as a rose.

All the time they were speaking the chief had his eye on the sapphires, which lay on the desk before him. He now examined them critically by means of a little magnifying glass he had pulled from a drawer of his desk. As he took the instrument from his eye he smiled in an enigmatic manner. He was about to speak when the door burst open suddenly and John Hasson bolted into the room.

"Elsie!" he shouted at sight of the girl again.

"John!" she cried, with unmistakable delight.

They would have been in each other's arms had not Mrs. Harrington arisen and interposed.

"Stop!" she exclaimed, angrily.

The young lawyer retreated before his natural enemy. The girl looked at her aunt defiantly.

"What would Count de Vontain say?" she queried, turning to Elsie.

"I don't know, and I don't care," cried the girl passionately. "We're not in France now; we're in the United States."

"Bravo!" whispered the chief in her ear.

"Sir!" said the aunt, turning to Barnes, "I trust you will not detain us any longer."

"Where is the count?" asked the chief.

"The count," replied Mrs. Harrington, with some dignity, "has an engagement to dine with us at 8 o'clock this evening."

"Madam," said the chief, bowing ironically, "I can assure you that the government would not think of interfering with your social duties. You can call in the morning to dispose of this business."

"Thank you," she said, gratified at his condescending manner. "Come, Elsie."

"I go on one condtion," said Elsie stoutly, "and it is that John—that Mr. Hasson—shall dine with us."

The aunt was about to break out in a rage, but she relented, as if making the best of a bad situation.

"All right," she said doggedly.

As they were leaving the ambitious woman sighed heavily.

"The county will be disappointed at seeing me without the sapphires."

The chief was on his feet in an instant.

"My dear madam," he said in his softest tones, "if it is any moment you can take the sapphires with you, and I will call for them later in the evening."

"Thank you very much," she said, with the first sign of graciousness she had shown. "I will avail myself of your kind offer."

"Are you going mad?" cried the appraiser, turning to Barnes after the little party had left the room. "You'll never get those sapphires again."

"I don't care."

"Don't care? Why?"

"Because," said the chief, speaking deliberately, "those stones are bogus; they're a cheap imitation of the Versailles sapphires."

The appraiser gasped for breath.

"Are you sure?" he asked finally.

"Positive. You don't suppose I've earned a reputation as a gem expert for nothing, do you? My suspicions were aroused at the start. My magnifying glass confirmed them. Oxide of cobalt has been used to color those imitations."

"But the sparkle?"

"Has been produced by the direct use of bicromate of potassium."

"Then they're worthless?"

"Well, I shouldn't say that. It probably cost $80 or $90 to make 'em so perfect looking."

"Quite a difference from $20,000," grinned the appraiser, adding, after a pause:

"But what about the originals?"

"Meet me at the New Amsterdam at 10 tonight," replied the chief significantly, "and you may get the sequel of this seizure."

It was about 9:30 that night when the chief was ushered into Mrs. Harrington's exquisitely appointed apartments at the New Amsterdam. The bogus gems reposed on Mrs. Harrington's ample bosom. Elsie was in splendid spirits. The presence of Hasson evidently helped to drive the pallor from her cheeks. Hasson seemed half defiant. Mrs. Harrington looked uncomfortable.

"Where's the count?" queried the chief after the first greetings were over.

"The count failed to keep his appointment," said Mrs. Harrington stiffly.

No one appeared to share her disappointment over this catastrophe. Indeed, Elsie and John, by a species of wireless telegraphy, were exchanging glances which were distinctly charged with joy.

"May I use your telephone?" asked Barnes.

Without waiting for a reply he lifted the receiver and called up the custom house.

"Is that you, Con?" he asked.

The reply must have been in the affirmative, for he immediately followed it with another question:

"Can you get into communication with Count de Vontain?"

Those in the room heard a mumbling sound come over the wire.

"Well," continued the chief, "tell him he's committed an unpardonable offence. He's kept two American ladies waiting. That may be permissible in France, but we'll not tolerate it here. Bring the count to the New Amsterdam at once."

During the next twenty minutes the chief charmed the ladies with the extent and variety of his conversation. Anecdotes flowed from his lips like crystal water from an everlasting spring. So interested did they become that they almost forgot the existence of Count de Vontain. It was Mrs. Harrington who reverted to the painful topic of the sapphires. The chief was profuse in his protestations.

"No legal censure can attach to you, ladies," he concluded.

"But the dear count?" inquired the elder woman.

"The dear count," said the chief, grimly, looking at his watch, "is a very unpunctual man."

At that moment a scuffling sound was heard on the stairway; the door opened and a man entered in the custody of two customs officers. His clothing was disarranged and he showed to disadvantage. He scowled fiercely at Barnes, but refused to notice the other occupants of the room. Cornelius Clancy, who brought up the rear of this strange group, saluted his chief.

"The count!" gasped Mrs. Harrington at the prisoner.

"Did you get the gems?" asked Barnes eagerly, not noticing this salutation.

"We did," said the little man, with a broad grin.

"Where were they?"

"He had 'em sewed up in the lining of his cloak."

"Where are they?"

Clancy advanced and laid a long narrow box on the table in front of Barnes. The chief opened it and drew out a magnificent sapphire necklace. The forty superbly cut stones scintillated beneath the bright rays of the incandescent lights. Mrs. Harrington, Elsie and Hasson involuntarily closed in around the chief. The moment the older woman saw the sapphires her gaze reverted to the other set hanging about her neck and her emotions found vent in a piercing scream. Elsie was too much astonished for words and Hasson looked on in amazement

"Tell me your story," said the chief, addressing Clancy and ignoring the inquiring glances about him.

"We followed your instructions literally," replied the man, "and didn't permit him to get out of our sight for a second. The crisis came when he entered the office of Crompton, the gem broker. I posted an officer in the front and one in the rear of the place and hten entered in time to see him rip open his cloak and turn the sapphires over to Crompton."

"Was there a struggle?"

"Yes," replied Clancy, modestly; "but it was one sided. Crompton has already been turned over to the United States district attorney."

"What does this mean?" cried Mrs. Harrington, unable to suppress herself any longer.

"It means," said Barnes sternly, "that your social ambition has made you the credulous victim of a scoundrel. This man has been using you and your niece for his own base purposes. He has forced those counterfeit gems on you to deflect suspicion from himself and to enable him to escape with the real sapphires."

"Counterfeit!" gasped the woman.

She gazed fixedly at the count, but he did not return her glance. He seemed bored. A small, white, manicured hand, very much re-ringed, was raised languidly and drawn across a narrow forehead. The next moment the same hand wearily stroked a luxuriant black mustache, betraying by the movement two rows of even, white, glistening teeth.

"Counterfeit!" gasped the woman for the second time.

"Yes, counterfeit!" cried the chief, his voice rising with indignation. "The man himself is a counterfeit. He's no Frenchman. He has no chateau; he's no count. The cables have been working and I find the title he claims is extinct. Stripped of his Parisian top hat, his Parisian cloak and his Parisian manner, you'll find him to be, as I have found him to be—after piecing my bits of information together—plain 'Bill' Snyder, the best dressed, the best groomed and the most ingenious professional smuggler of the present generation."

"What'd you bring me here for?" asked the erstwhile count, yawning.

"To humiliate you before these ladies—if such a thing's possible—as you've already humiliated them," thundered the chief. "As for the rest, the law will give you all that's coming to you."

Five minutes later the prisoner, still languidly stroking his mustache, was in a carriage with the officers on his way to prison. The appraiser entered at this juncture and was invited to join Clancy and the chief in taking the Versailles sapphires to a place of safety.

Mrs. Harrington was in a state of collapse. Every vestige of her normally aggressive manner disappeared. She looked at the chief imploringly.

"We will be disgraced!" she cried. "The story of how I was duped by this imposter will make us the laughing stock of society."

The chief walked over and placed his hand gently on her shoulder. He looked in the direction of John Hasson, who held his arms protectingly about Elsie, and his face softened.

"Are you reconciled to that?" he asked, pointing to the happy couple.

She nodded her head.

"Then," he said stoutly, "I'll never give the newspapers the real story of the attempt to smuggle the Versailles sapphires."

And later on, when the reporters visited him, he lied like a gentleman.

# Entertaining Little Stories for Little People

### Coaxing Bird Guests.

IT IS well to begin to make preparations for bird guests at least as early as the middle of November. In the first place it takes some time for the news of one's hospitality to spread among the feathered folk, and the sooner it starts the better. Then, most people prefer to work out doors in November rather than in December. But January is not too late. It is very desirable that some of the birds should be induced to feed where they may be observed by their hosts.

Generally speaking, there are two kinds of birds to prepare for—those which eat seed or grain and those which prefer animal food of some kind. There is another class, well represented by the bluejays, which will eat almost anything, but no special preparations need be made for the birds belonging to it, since they will fare riotously on the food set out for the others. First of all we will consider the insectivorous birds. Their natural fare is rarely attainable in winter, but beef suet will be found a very good and convenient substitute for it. All things considered suet is the best thing I have tried for this purpose.

If these happen to be trees near the house, the problem of the bird-feeder is simple; all he has to do is to tie the suet securely to the trunks and prominent branches and await the arrival of his guests. If there are no trees, he should go out into the woods and cut down as large a dead one as he can handle, and set it in the ground exactly where he wants it. A sapling will answer, but a larger tree is more interesting.

For the seed-eating birds it is well to have a variety of food. Mixed bird seed is excellent for the smaller birds, but to it should be added such things as oats, wheat, buckwheat, corn and sunflower seeds. If there are no cats in the neighborhood, the best place to scatter the seed is on the ground, where seed-eating birds usually get their food. First of all, however, the snow should be cleared away; otherwise the food is liable to sink in out of sight; and besides, it is very difficult for small birds to get about on foot in soft, deep snow. If there are cats about, the food may be placed on shallow trays or tin pans, which may be set on posts or fastened to the trunks and branches of trees.—St. Nicholas Magazine.

### Hen Language.

In Forest and Stream L. R. Merphew thinks that the hen has not received due consideration from those who are studying the language of the lower creatures. He declares that this despised fowl has a greater variety of sounds conveying different meanings than any animal, which, of course, does not except even the monkey. Here is a portion of what he says:

"Let us follow a mother hen with very young chicks, keeping back far enough to leave her to her own devices, but looking constantly at the flock and listening to every tone.

"'Hold! Don't go so far away! Keep near me—keep near me!' she frequently says, and some heedless boy chick shows too great an enthusiasm. It doesn't sound a bit like that, but we know instantly that that is what she means, by her manner and the behavior of her family—although the prodgal may hesitate to obey; for he looks back, seems to say, 'I'm not going out of sight, don't get anxious,' and the others gather nearer, peeping self-complacently. 'We obey our mother, don't we?' "

### The Baby Burro.

Cousin Horace had a little baby burro all his very own. Where he lives, out in Denver, they call burros Rocky mountain canaries. They are very clever and quite gentle and docile, learn any number of cunning little tricks and are so strong that they can carry as many children as their backs will hold.

This dear little baby ate out of Horace's hand and followed him about just as a dog would. In the morning he would wait patiently at the door until Horace came out from Breakfast with a roll or lump of sugar. If he did not see it in his hand Jerry would snuff at his pockets to find it there, and was so disappointed if he did not find any that Horace seldom forgot to bring it to him.

Jessie, the mother burro, at first followed them all about for fear some harm might come to her baby, but when she found how kind Horace was to him she left them playing together, while she was busy about her work.

Little Elsie—Why doesn't the baby speak, mamma?

Mamma—He's too young, dear.

Little Elsie—Oh, ain't he got any speaking tube yet?