

This Week

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FOR A BETTER AMERICA

By SAX ROHMER

Illustrated by Robert Fawcett

The Case Of The Missing Heirloom

For three centuries the fabulous diamond had been a treasured possession. Then, one night in the darkened manor house, in the presence of eight guests, it vanished



A hushed silence fell when Sir John stopped speaking. Every eye in the coffee room of the old manor house remained focused on the glittering ornament.

Jill broke the spell. "But, Daddy!" she protested. "The Luck of the Malmseys has never left the family since King Charles gave it to us!"

"If you'd been a boy, Jill," Sir John answered, "it would have come to you tonight by the old tradition. You're a girl and the last of us. So the Luck is yours."

Jill Malmsey, staring at the wonderful jewel known as the Luck of the Malmseys, grasped the arm of Molly Hatherton, her old school friend. "Isn't it lovely, Molly?" she whispered, then turned to her maternal aunt, Mrs. Ordley. "I have never seen anything like it, Aunt Prue!"

Mrs. Ordley was not what you would call a soft woman. Her conversation had the flavor of a crab apple. "I have seen it many times, child, when your poor mother wore it. I've always thought it a sinful jewel."

Dr. Don Greydon watched Jill Malmsey's expressive features. He remembered her mother well, for the two families were neighbors. Lady Malmsey had died during his first term at Oxford, and it was at that sorrowful reunion when he began to realize how he felt about Jill. Their engagement would be announced at the same time as his appointment to an important research post at London University.

Don stared at the Luck again and noticed that Phil Engold, the big city man who had bought near-by Rowall Hall, was examining it closely.

"An exceptionally fine diamond, Doctor," Engold said. "Rose-cut with the rare blue tint. I can detect no flaw. I should judge it close on eighty carats."

Sir John grinned sardonically. "My dear Engold . . ." He lifted up the jewel—a pendant suspended on a slender chain. "Even cut up, it would fetch a small fortune."

"And here we are," Jill broke in, "camping out in the old manor house. Twenty-nine rooms, twenty-two locked—and a diamond worth a million!"

"At least enough," Engold conceded, "to make you, and the fortunate man you marry, independent for life."

Don noted that it was at him, and not at Jill, that Engold was looking.

At that moment the lights began to flicker.

"Daddy!" It was a cry of mock despair from Jill. "That wretched engine—Oh, it's awful to live so far in the backwoods we have to generate our own electricity!"

The light expired entirely, leaving the room in complete darkness. There was a concerted gasp. Then came Mrs. Ordley's voice, on a note of nervous irritation. "Jack Malmsey! Is this one of your fool tricks?"

Sir John's sardonic chuckle responded in the darkness. "It's a fool trick of the fellow who installed a lighting system which flops on the slightest provocation. Anybody carry matches? Can't find mine."

There was the sound of muffled movements and fumbling; then a clicking sound and finally someone struck a match. Its faint glow revealed the face of William Ordley, docile husband of the formidable Prudence.

"Candles behind you, Willy," Sir John directed, and Ordley lighted three candles set on the mantel.

Sir John picked up a box of matches from a coffee table and lighted several more. He turned in a flash, at the sound of Don's cry: "The pendant's gone!"

The faces of most of the eight persons present registered various degrees of alarm and embarrassment. Sir John was glaring from one to another and he swore fluently. Dick Hatherton looked around with a nervous smile. Molly's husband was a young chartered accountant and, alone among them, he and Phil Engold seemed to regard the incident as a joke. But all eyes kept turning furtively toward the empty jewel case.

The case was on a large table near the center of the room. The room's only window overlooked the garden and it was fastened and draped. The door was closed. "It's quite clear," Engold stated smilingly, "that wherever the Luck has gone, it can't have gone far." "I agree, Engold," Sir John's deep voice had a nasty edge to it.

There was a rap on the door, and Searle, the butler-handyman-gardener who, with his wife, constituted the entire staff of the old manor house, appeared carrying a three-branched candlestick. Sir John signaled to his guests to be silent.

"Thanks, Searle. But we have light enough until you get the infernal machine to function again. Switch off everything upstairs and cut on down the garden to the engine shed."

"Very good, sir."

And Searle, who had been Sir John's batman in World War I days, turned and went out, reclosing the door. Don looked from face to face. "May I suggest," he said, "that we search the room first?"

"All right," Sir John agreed. "Except that the luck, not being a frog, can't very well have jumped away." They searched the coffee room—a simple matter. The search was completed in a few minutes. The electric lights revived reluctantly, expired again, and then burst into a startling brilliance.

"Good old Searle!" Jill said. "He's fixed them."

Don was watching her father, Sir John, in silence, as he snuffed out all the candles. He turned. "Greydon, the switch controlling the lights is beside the door. When I say 'Lights out,' be good enough to switch them off . . . Now, I'm going to give whoever played this silly practical joke just half a minute to put the pendant back again. Lights out!"

Don put the lights out. In the sudden darkness all he could see was the dimly illuminated dial of Sir John's watch. An almost unendurable sense of tension pervaded the room. He knew his seven unseen and silent companions must feel it, too.

"Ten seconds!"

The tension mounted. But Don could detect no sound of movement.

"Twenty!"

Now, he could hear people breathing around him. He thought he could hear his own heartbeats.

"Thirty . . . lights up!"

He pressed the switch—stared across the room. There came a sort of frightened murmur, a muffled cry of consternation.

The open jewel case remained empty . . .

Sir John seemed to be in imminent danger of exploding, so Don put the situation into words.

"Very well," he said, "the pendant is still here. If the ladies will stand on the hearthrug and turn their backs, we must all submit to being searched."

"Really, Dr. Greydon!" Mrs. Ordley's voice was even more acid than usual.

"I know it's terrible, Auntie," Jill said. "But can't you see that what Don says is true? The Luck simply must be in this room. None ——— Continued on page 26

Cast of Characters

SIR JOHN MALMSEY — *Jill's father*
 JILL MALMSEY — *the new owner of the fabulous diamond*
 DR. DON GREYDON — *Jill's fiancé*
 MOLLY HATHERTON — *an old school friend of Jill's*
 DICK HATHERTON — *her husband; a young accountant*
 PHIL ENGOLD — *a near neighbor of the Malmseys*
 MRS. ORDLEY — *Jill's acid Aunt Prue*
 WILLIAM ORDLEY — *Aunt Prue's docile husband*



"YES," Don said, kneeling at the side of the unconscious butler. "It was a very sudden stroke — a stroke on the back of his head." The Inspector looked on in silence

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The Police Arrive

of us could possibly want to leave until it has been found."

"Play the game, Prudence!" Sir John peeled off his dinner jacket and tossed it to Don. "Empty everything on the table, Greydon. Give me a thorough going-over."

The examination was completed, and Sir John put his coat on. "Now, go over me," Don invited, and went through the same procedure, as did the other men.

Philip Engold was the last to be searched, and when he took his coat off Don drew his attention to the fact that his right shirt cuff was unfastened. Part of one link — they were of the press-stud pattern, onyx with a platinum monogram — had snapped open and was missing.

There was a brief search, but it couldn't be found. More serious problems awaited solution. Although everybody knew it to be a physical impossibility for the diamond pendant to have been removed from the coffee room, it was not in the possession of any of the five men present.

So, over shrill protest, Jill led the ladies into the adjoining library where they, too, submitted to a thorough search that yielded nothing.

Later, when Sir John had called the police, an awkward fifteen minutes followed. Mercifully, the party split up.

Mrs. Ordley, and the subdued Willy, retired to their room. Dick and Molly Hatherton sat side by side in the library pretending to read magazines. They looked like patients in a dentist's waiting room.

As Don passed them, Dick started up nervously. "I say, Greydon," he said, "do you suppose I could have a word with you later?"

"Any time you like, Hatherton."

Sir John sat in his favorite leather armchair in the coffee room, pipe in mouth, deep in thought. He didn't stir when Searle came in, collected stray cups and glasses, reassembled a nest of tables and retired silently with the laden tray.

Phil Engold wandered about the house hunting for the missing stud of his onyx cuff link. And Don and Jill were in a cozy, cushioned alcove which adjoined the dining room.

"You know, Jill," Don murmured presently, "this is a devilish serious business, and utterly mystifying."

"Yes," Jill's tone changed. "I know. And it frightens me. . . Heavens! What was that?"

"What?"

"Didn't you hear sort of a thud?"

"No. You're getting jumpy. But I hear the police car on the drive. Here they are."

The muted ringing of a bell sounded from the direction of the kitchen. Nothing happened. The ringing was repeated.

"I bet Searle has gone down to look at the engine," Don stood up. "I'll go and let them in."

As he entered the lobby, Engold came out of the cloakroom and started for the front door. Voices were audible outside. Engold turned, hearing Don.

"Hullo, Greydon! I was searching the pockets of my topcoat when I heard the police arrive. I wonder where Searle has got to?"

Don opened the door to admit two men and a woman. "I'm Inspector Rigley," the taller man announced. "This is Sergeant Lake and Detective Officer Mary Rollins. Sir John Malmsey?"

"He's expecting you." Don nodded. "I'm Dr. Greydon, a guest. Will you come this way?"

The Inspector, a red- — Continued on next page

SAX ROHMER'S reputation as a leading figure in the mystery writing field has been more than firmly established by his creation of the fabulous character, Dr. Fu Manchu. The evil doctor is now appearing on a television program in most parts of the country.



Continued from preceding page

The Unconscious Butler Is Discovered

haired, businesslike country officer, insisted upon the attendance of Mr. and Mrs. Ordley. "This," Aunt Prudence proclaimed, "is the ultimate insult."

The party being completed, they were all directed to sit, or stand, in the positions they had occupied when the light went out.

"Did any of you hear any sound?" Rigley asked.

"Yes," Don told him. "I heard a click-sing sound."

"That was me!"

All eyes turned to Dick Hatherton. The young financial expert had taken out his lighter. He looked pathetically embarrassed.

"What were you doing?" the Inspector asked, suspiciously.

"Trying to spark this beastly thing! It let me down."

"Hm! It will be necessary for everyone to submit to a further search," the Inspector announced. "What servants do you employ, Sir John?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Searle."

"I should like to see them, sir."

"Mrs. Searle is out, Inspector," Jill told him. "After she had cleaned and washed

up the dinner things, I let her go down to the village to visit her niece."

"She can be written off, then. Would you mind ringing for the man, sir?"

But there was no response from Searle. Sir John rang a second time — a third. Still no sign of the butler.

"Shall I go and look for him?" Don volunteered.

"Yes," Rigley nodded. "We'll go together, Doctor." He turned to the sergeant.

"Lake, you can search the gentlemen present. A mere formality, of course. And Mrs. Rollins, take the ladies upstairs and do likewise."

Don led the way to the kitchen. In the doorway he pulled up — so suddenly that the Inspector bumped into him.

Searle lay face downward on the floor, his arms at his side. A tray, with decanter and liqueur glasses, stood on the drain board, a silver coffeepot lay in the sink.

"What the devil's this?" Rigley sprang forward. "Has he had a sudden stroke?"

"Yes," Don knelt beside the prone man.

"Very sudden. . . Stroke on the back of his head!"

It was all of two hours after the discovery of Searle before a conviction of the truth began to dawn upon Don. He had attended to Searle, who had quickly revived from the blow on his skull. The butler's sleeping quarters were next to the kitchen. Don had put him to bed and told his wife, when she returned later, to stay up until he had paid the patient a final visit. "And don't wash or clear anything away," he added. "Disturb nothing. Leave it just as you see it."

Searle's evidence led the police nowhere. He had just put the tray down, he told Rigley, and was about to empty the coffeepot when he got a sickening blow on the skull from someone who had crept in behind him, unseen and unheard. He knew no more until he woke up in bed. The kitchen door had been found locked, with no key inside or out. But this was explained by Searle. His wife had taken the key with her.

Inspector Rigley had a theory that someone had planned to escape that way, but had been baffled by the locked door. He insisted that no one must leave the house; and so accommodation had to be found for Engold, who — *Continued on next page*

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The Jewel Is Found

displayed a certain reluctance to, as he put it, impose.

Midnight was near when the police completed their search of the guest rooms and visitors' luggage. They found nothing. Posting Sergeant Lake on duty on the porch, the Inspector and his female assistant left.

Don had just said good night to Jill and was on his way to Searle's quarters when Dick Hatherton detained him. And it was what Hatherton had to tell him, added to certain things observed personally, which suggested a solution of the mystery.

Don found Mrs. Searle knitting in the kitchen and her husband sleeping soundly. She had had several visitors, she reported, to inquire about Searle. "Mr. Engold, he was particularly worried about him. Came in three times. A very kind gentleman he is. Offered to help me wash up, if you please. But I told him I had other orders."

"Quite right, Mrs. Searle." He nodded his approval, and she retired.

At the moment he heard the faint click of the Searles' lock, Don partly closed the kitchen door and stepped across to the sink. Even if his theory proved to be correct, the odds were a hundred to one against finding the evidence.

Some coffee still remained in the silver pot. He tried to pour it out, but the spout seemed to be stopped up. He turned the pot upside down, emptied it, and looked at the dregs and then inside. He found nothing. He took a thin wire brush from a hook and poked it down the curved spout. It met some obstruction at the bend. He went on pushing until the obstruction moved and something rattled down into the empty pot.

He had just pulled this small object out, when a faint sound brought him to the alert. Footsteps on the stairs, furtive footsteps. . .

He replaced the wire brush, switched off the light, snapped on a small pocket flashlight, and stepped into the capacious broom closet, snapping the light out. He hadn't long to wait.

The kitchen door was pushed open by someone he couldn't see. Then, the intruder put the light on. He wore pajamas and a silk robe. On a shelf stood a row of white enameled canisters. The man took down one labeled "Rice."

Removing the lid, he pulled out a glittering object. It was the Luck of the Malmseys.

The pendant was evidently wet, for he dried it on a roller towel attached to the door. Don remembered that he had noted dark stains on this towel when he and Rigley had discovered Searle. But the Inspector had attached no importance to them.

Now came the expected move. Dropping the pendant into a pocket of his robe, the visitor crossed to the sink. He bent over the coffeepot, shook it, peered down into the grating of the drain in the sink. Then, noticing the wire brush, he unhooked it and poked it into the spout of the pot as Don had done.

Don stepped out.

"Hullo, Engold!" Engold spun around. "Thanks for showing me where you had hidden the Luck," Don said. "Don't bother about the broken link. I have that. . . And don't start any funny business. If you try to run for it you won't get far. There's a constable outside. . ."

Gray light had begun to steal in through the slats of the blinds before the conference of three in Sir John Malmsey's study broke up.

"He deserves whatever happens to him," Jill said firmly. "It was such a crazy thing to attempt, Don."

"No doubt a sudden impulse, Jill. The blackout made the temptation too strong. He grabbed the pendant, realized at once we'd all be searched, and dropped it in the coffeepot. If found there, he reasoned any one of us could be responsible. If not, he hoped to recover it. What he didn't know, until later, was that the act of pulling his sleeve up so that he could reach down into the pot had snapped his link open, and that half of it, ——— *Continued on next page*

THE CASE OF THE MISSING HEIRLOOM

Continued from preceding page

as well as the pendant, had dropped into the coffee!"

"I wonder when he began to suspect what had become of it?" Sir John chuckled. "The blackguard!"

"Whenever he saw what I had seen: A thin, brown stain on his short cuff. The cuff must have touched the coffeepot when he lowered the Luck into the pot! Engold had only one chance before the police arrived. You, Sir John, never left the coffee room. But when Searle took the tray away, Engold *had* to act. He was faced by certain exposure. Naturally, he was keeping an eye on Searle, and when Searle took the pot away, he followed him.

"**W**ith Searle safely put to sleep, Engold tipped up the coffeepot, and out fell the pendant . . . but no link! He may have decided he was wrong — that the link had been lost somewhere else. In any case, he had to get away — the police had arrived. He dropped the Luck in the rice can."

"Why didn't he keep it?"

"He couldn't hope to get free, with the police at the door, and he knew everybody would be searched again. So he scooted out to the lobby and into the cloakroom. You know the rest. Only tonight I got a line on his motives."

"What were they?" Sir John growled.

"In the first place, according to Dick Hatherton, Engold's reputation in the City is more than shady. Some of his recent transactions have attracted the attention of Scotland Yard. They suspect he's an illicit diamond buyer. His credit is nil . . . and he's on the verge of bankruptcy!"

"In the second place, Hatherton told me he had it from Molly that Engold had asked you to marry him, Jill."

"I didn't want you to know, Don," Jill explained. "I thought it might — uh — upset you."

"It did! But after all, he's lost two jewels — the Luck and you. . ."

— The End