

TINKER AND THE SATANISTS

By Edgar Jepson



HILDEBRAND ANNE BEAULEIGH, his angel face ashine with joyous excitement, came hurrying through the rose-gardens of Beauleigh Court, and found his father smoking a cigarette on the terrace from which you get that wonderful view down the vale of the White Horse.

"Monsieur Fournier is waiting to see you, sir, in the smoking-room," cried Hildebrand Anne. "He's come straight from Paris! It looks as though it's something very big, or very delicate, or they'd have done it themselves."

"Thank goodness!" said Sir Tancred, "Since I married, I've done nothing. I was beginning to think that there was no work left in the world. Tinker, you are the bringer of good news!"

"And you'll let me help, sir?"

"Don't I always let you help?" said Sir Tancred, and he went quickly to the house. When he came into the smoking-room, a stout Frenchman whose face beamed with a perpetual good humour, sprang up from an easy chair with a lightness which showed that, for all his fat, his muscle was good, and came forward with outstretched hands.

"How are you, Fournier?" said Sir Tancred, shaking both of them. "It's like old times seeing you again."

"That's what I've been wondering. Is it old times?" said the famous chief of police, anxiously. "I find you living in a house like this, of the most magnificent; and I say to myself, will Sir Beauleigh care to help us any longer?"

"Oh, the house," said Sir Tancred, lightly. "It was a whim of my wife's

to restore Beauleigh Court to its old magnificence. She is a millionaire, you know. But I am always ready to help you fight the old fight against the criminal, and there is no sport like man-hunting."

"Good," said M. Fournier; and they sat down in facing easy chairs.

"It is a matter of Satanism of the worst," M. Fournier began. "You know the Duke of Morbihan."

"One does not know the Duke of Morbihan; one knows of him," said Sir Tancred with a sudden coldness.

"Precisely," said M. Fournier. "Three years ago he married a lady—of Martinique ancestry."

"A Creole?"

"Precisely. Before his marriage we had our eyes on him. There were four affairs in which we had reason to suppose that he was in the background. But he is very cunning and very rich. Always the evidence disappeared. Then we lost sight of him. He seemed to have arranged himself on his marriage. Two months ago one of our agents, investigating the disappearance of a child, came into contact with a Sebastien Bonpré, a negro of the French Congo, and servant of the Morbihans. Sebastien talked when he was drunk; and when he was sober by threats and promises our agent made him go on talking. He told a tale, *ma foi!* a tale. I know my Paris, but it surprised even me. Conceive of that."

Sir Tancred nodded gravely.

"You know the Satanists—imbeciles. We laugh at their magic, and their sabbaths, and their black mass. Games, Sir Beauleigh, unpleasant games, but

games. Imbecility and hysteria; and sooner or later the convent or the mad-house. They only hurt themselves: we can do nothing. But this—this was another matter—the real thing—infant sacrifice.”

“The deuce!” said Sir Tancred.

“Nineteen cases. It was a horrible tale. We sent Sebastien Bonpré to Sevres in charge of a man we thought we could trust, and sought further evidence. At Sevres a mulatto woman, Eglantine, maid of the Duchess, contrived an interview with him. She paid seven thousand francs a minute for it.”

“Ah, they spend their money then,” said Sir Tancred.

“It was cheap for them—dirt cheap; for in three days Sebastien Bonpré developed the Berri-berri disease. He became very interesting to the doctors, but as a witness useless. He is dead.”

“And now?” said Sir Tancred.

“And now we are in a *cul-de-sac*. There is no evidence. Yet the negro’s tale was true. Also the Morbihans know that for them there is no more infant sacrifice in France; no, nor in Europe. But the thirst for blood in these diseased is a frenzy; they stick at nothing to glut it. They are going the day after to-morrow under the names of M. and Madame Silvestre, to Barbados, to a place called Pleasant Hill.”

“Pleasant Hill? Why, that is next to my estate, Beauleigh!” said Sir Tancred.

“You have an estate in Barbados?” cried Fournier.

“If you can call a thing that brings in no revenue, an estate,” said Sir Tancred.

“It is Providence,” said Fournier, gravely. “Ah! well, look you, what could we do in an English colony? I ask you.”

“You would be hampered.”

“Hampered? We could do nothing—nothing at all. Will you act?”

“Of course I will. What do you want me to do?”

“Do? Bring them to justice! Shoot them like dogs!” cried the Frenchman, his pleasant face suddenly grey and terrible. “Look you, Sir Beauleigh, it is a disgrace to France that such fiends

should have stained her soil with the blood of these innocents! While they live we feel ourselves disgraced! We have failed in our duty to humanity! I conferred with M. Le Président and the Minister of Justice. They are agreed. These creatures are French subjects. However they die, France will not say a word!

“I understand,” said Sir Tancred.

“But if they are brought to justice, or if they die, we should like it done as quietly as possible. We would not parade this shame before the nations.”

“Naturally.”

“Will you do it?”

“With the greatest pleasure in the world.”

“Good: then it is done,” said M. Fournier; and he wiped the sweat from his forehead. “We thought for expenses a hundred thousand francs.” And he took from his pocket a charming stamped leather note case, with the notes in it.

“It should be enough,” said Sir Tancred thoughtfully; and he took it. “And now for a brandy and soda; you need it, my friend; and then lunch.”

At lunch M. Fournier was charming, full of the gayest, lightest talk. In the middle of it Sir Tancred announced that he must go to Barbados on the day after the morrow, to see to his sugar estate. At once Lady Beauleigh said that she was coming; Elsie, his adopted sister, said that where Tinker went she went. M. Fournier launched into a panegyric on the delights of travelling in a family party; and Sir Tancred saw in a flash that the most suspicious would never look for danger from such a quarter. In the afternoon he drove M. Fournier to the station, wired to Southampton for berths, and cabled to his attorney in Barbados to make Beauleigh habitable.

The Thursday morning found them on board the *Atrato* with Ushant on their quarter. They were all good sailors, soon at home on the steamer, and on the way to become very popular with their fellow-passengers. For the first five days Sir Tancred saw nothing of the Morbihans, though he had learned that they were on board; but four or five times he met a tall, gaunt, mulatto

woman, loose-lipped, fierce-eyed, moving with a swift, catlike tread in the saloon or the passages between the state-rooms, and was sure that she was the Eglantine who had infected Sebastian Bonfré with the Berri-berri disease.

Then, on the sixth morning, she came on deck with a negro valet, both of them loaded with cushions, which they arranged in two deck chairs. Sir Tancred saw them, and dropped into a chair hard by, as the prey he hunted came on deck and sat down. In casual glance after casual glance he examined them carefully; and at the first sight they looked, in all conscience, a harmless couple. Big, heavily-smoked glasses hid much of the duke's pale face; but his short, thick, curved nose, coming right down on to his thick lips, between which stuck out protruding teeth, gave him a curiously animal look, not in the least lessened by his scanty, pointed beard. The duchess was the very picture of languid sleekness. Her sleek and shining black hair was plastered down about her head; she looked at the world with lazy eyes; her turned-up nose was thick, the nostrils were wide; her sleek cheeks were full, and the skin of them of a singular lustre; her lips, thick in the middle and thin at the corners, were of an intense scarlet; and her short face, triangular from the cheek-bones to the little pointed chin, was like a cat's.

Sir Tancred studied the sinister, disquieting pair for a while; then he rose and sauntered forward in search of his little son. Tinker had been his close and constant companion almost from his babyhood, for his mother, Sir Tancred's first wife, had died when he was a baby. The child's intelligence had made the companionship far closer than it is generally between father and little son; and when an accident had enabled Sir Tancred to be of use to M. Fournier, and that judge of men had begged his help in two or three affairs too delicate, or in too remote regions on the heights of European Society for the ordinary detectives, Sir Tancred had let Tinker help him, and found him of the greatest use, since a small boy of engaging manners awoke no suspicion in any one's mind. Insensibly, too, as his heart

had warmed to the noble sport of man-hunting, he had set about cultivating in Tinker qualities which are usually allowed to lie dormant in the young till they grow atrophied from disuse, but which are of the greatest value in the modern battle of life, above all the habit of keen observation of his fellow men, until the boy had grown able to tell more about a man or woman from a casual scrutiny, than most men could tell after half a day's intercourse with them.

Sir Tancred found Tinker watching a game of bull, and called him. As they walked back he said, "I want to show you the people I am hunting. Here they are in the two end chairs, the man in goggles."

Tinker was at once all dreamy abstraction; and as he passed he gazed at the Morbihans with lack-lustre eyes. But at the sight of his angel face and far-away gaze, their faces filled with an eager light, and with one accord they bent forward whispering quickly.

When Sir Tancred and Tinker had strolled round to the other side of the deck out of sight behind the deck-cabins, Tinker said slowly, weighing his words, "The man looks like a goat in spectacles. But the woman's cheeks—shining like that—I've seen before. Where now? Oh, I know—butcher's wives. Their cheeks shine like that. I suppose it's living with meat."

Sir Tancred laughed a short laugh: "By Jove, you do see things," he said. "If only I'd been taught to see things at your age!"

"You taught me, sir," said Tinker, simply. "What have these people been up to?"

"Black magic—infant sacrifice. Murdering little children."

Tinker's angel face went suddenly black and stern, curiously like his father's at its most saturnine. "Oh, that must be stopped, don't you know? That must be stopped," he said.

"Well, it is stopped for them in Europe; and we are going to stop it for them in the West Indies. The French Government have given me a free hand," said Sir Tancred, with a gentle, disquieting laugh.

"That's all right," said Tinker. "We could burn them if we wanted to."

They came round, and passed the Silvestres again; they were talking quickly with Eglantine, who leaned over her mistress's chair. The three of them fixed eager eyes on Tinker as he passed.

"I interest them," said Tinker. "I hope they don't think I'm digestible, because I'm not."

For the next two days nothing happened. The Silvestres kept to themselves, taking their meals in one of their three staterooms, talking to no one. Then, on the third afternoon, as Tinker sauntered past them, the duchess said, "Leetle boy, will you do something for me?"

"With pleasure," said Tinker, raising his cap. "What is it?"

"It is noding—a game;" said the Duchess; and she stammered in her eagerness. "I want you to look in the creestal for me, a glass ball. And look, I veel geeve you dis preety reeng; it has a ruby in it."

Tinker disliked her thick, purring voice; but he saw a chance of learning something. He took the ring, slipped it on his finger, and said, "Shall I do it now?"

In five minutes he was sitting in the Morbihan's state room in a thick cloud of incense, peering into a crystal sphere lighted by a candle set beyond it, while the Duke and Duchess sat on a couch against the steamer's side.

Presently the Duchess said, "Do you see anything, leetle boy?"

"Clouds," said Tinker in a hollow, far-away voice: he had seen crystal-gazing before, and knew what you saw, and how you said you saw it.

He was silent again, then keeping his voice hollow and far away, he said, "I see a room—no, it is a passage with a door at the end of it. There are men in it—prison warders in uniform—and a man in black. You are there—both of you—and—yes, your hands are tied behind your backs." There was a sudden rustle, and he was aware that the Silvestres were sitting upright, stiff and rigid. "The man in black is putting a white cap over your head,

Madam—it covers your face. He opens the door, and takes you through it. I cannot see what is through the door. The door shuts."

There was a loud gasp, and the bump of a head against the ship's side.

"Two of the warders are holding you up sir," the remorseless Tinker went on. "Your legs seem"—

A gurgling cry of "Stop! Stop!" from the Duke interrupted him.

"Eglantine! Eglantine! Eglantine!" cried the Duchess on a quavering, rising note; and the mulatto rushed in.

"It's gone! Why did you interrupt? It was most interesting!" cried Tinker, angrily, and he turned and surveyed his victims.

The Duchess lay in a huddled heap on the floor, the Duke lay back on the couch, his face an even tint of bluish grey, the lower part of it, mouth, nose, and chin, working like a goat munching grass. Eglantine bustled about, propping them up, and giving them brandy.

With a grim content in his heart, and a pained anxiety on his face, Tinker surveyed the result of this little effort of his imagination. He was sanguine enough to believe that he had given them a fright which would cure them of their evil practices for some time. When the brandy had braced them up a little he said, with extreme politeness, "Are you ready for me to go on?"

"No! No!" They gasped in one voice. Tinker rose sadly.

"You will not—you will not say a word of this to anyone?" said the Duchess, faintly.

"Certainly not, if you don't wish it," said Tinker; and he took his leave of them.

While the shuddering Morbihans were discussing with pale faces the terrible fate he had foretold for them, Tinker was dancing his newly-acquired horn-pipe with the blithest energy, to the extreme pleasure of his fervent admirers, the other children on board the steamer; he found it the most fitting way of working off the high spirits induced by his satisfactory dealing with the black art.

When they next appeared on deck, he was quick to perceive that the sight of him set them shivering; and he was careful to indulge them with as many such sights as could be got into the short, tropical day. On the eve of reaching Barbados, he had made one of his disquieting descents into their field of vision, when the Duchess said, in her thick, purring voice, "Leetle boy, were those men, those wardares you saw in the crystal, white men or black?"

"White men—they looked like Englishmen," said Tinker, thoughtlessly.

He caught her sudden look of relief; and walked down the deck with a very glum face, bitterly angry with himself. He had undone the good he had done, and given them the West Indies as a fair field.

The next evening saw the Beauleighs installed in the Barbadian Beauleigh, a great, square, two-storied, tiled house, set in a hollow among many strange trees. A relict of the palmy days of the Island, its broad verandah was paved with marble imported straight from Carrara, its lofty, spacious rooms were floored with teak from the East Indies. Pleasant Hill, the abode of the Morbihans, stood on the ridge above Beauleigh, the best part of a mile away. A staring, white building, roofed with shingles, it stood bare to the trade wind, save for a wind-swept clump of mahoganies, and three tall cabbage palms. This lack of trees made it hardly a convenient residence for persons who wished to celebrate the rites of black magic in their proper open air; but three parts of the way down the ridge, a quarter of a mile above Beauleigh, ran a deep, thickly-wooded gully, some thousands of years ago the bed of a river, which, as is the habit of Barbadian rivers, had sunk below the surface, and now ran its course through a series of limestone caverns. Neither for money nor fair words would a negro set foot in the gully at night; it was haunted by duppies. From the edge of it up to Pleasant Hill ran a lane, a gap as the Barbadians call it, between fields of tall canes.

The Beauleighs did not easily grow used to West Indian life. The atmosphere of their hollow was often that of

a vapour-bath. The common mosquito bit them by night, and the more venomous Scots grey bit them by day, covering the fine skins of their hands and faces with ugly red scars. The din of shrill myriads of whistling frogs at first prevented them from hearing one another speak in the evenings; and a great number of terrifying and poisonous centipedes had taken up their quarters in the long empty house.

They were quicker growing popular with the neighbouring planters, a genial, hospitable race, especially with a young widower, Stuart of Glenorchy, the next estate on the side opposite to Pleasant Hill. Tinker and Elsie made a great pet of his little daughter, Annette, a pretty child of four; they pitied her that she had to be left to the care of negro servants; and either she came over to Beauleigh or else Elsie went over to Glenorchy nearly every day in the week. Also, as soon as they outgrew the first discomfort of tropical life, Sir Tancred and Lady Beauleigh were often in Bridgetown, at the tennis clubs, the garrison, Government House, at dinners and at dances.

But Sir Tancred never let these diversions relax the close watch he kept on Pleasant Hill. Every night he or Tinker, hidden in the edge of the canes which ran to within fifty yards of the house, watched with tireless eyes; a fruitless watch, for never once did they see a sign of mischief afoot. Every night they saw the Morbihans reading and smoking cigarettes on the verandah from nine to eleven. At eleven they went to bed; at a quarter past the lights were out. They received no visitors, and returned no calls. The story spread abroad that Madame Silvestre had come to the island for the good of her health; and in a month their neighbours had forgotten them.

Only one day driving into Bridgetown, Sir Tancred saw the mulatto, Eglantine, talking with three privates of the 1st West India Regiment, men of a bulk and blackness which showed them recruits from the West Coast. There was nothing unnatural in their foregathering—for anything he knew, Eglan-

tine might have been a West African herself—but it disquieted him.

Then came, sudden and startling, a sure proof that their watch had not been close enough. A little negro boy of two was missing from a village near Beauleigh, and though every corner of the country was searched not a trace was found of him. When Sir Tancred and Tinker heard of it, they looked at one another blankly. For a while Sir Tancred paced the verandah with eyes that grew fiercer and fiercer. Of a sudden he stood still, stamped his foot and cried, "The full moon! Of course! Of course! What a fool I've been!"

"Why, what's the matter with the moon?" said Tinker.

"All this magic is a matter of the moon; the rites are always celebrated at the new moon or the full."

"Ah, then we know where we are," said Tinker, thoughtfully, "At the next full moon we shall catch them."

The pleasant days passed quickly; Tinker drew more and more amusement from his surroundings, especially from the negroes; and he and Elsie spent more and more of their time on the petting and training of little Annette Stuart, to the great pleasure of her father, who was very pleased that she should be so much with white children. They kept their close watch on Pleasant Hill, and as the moon drew near the full they redoubled their carefulness.

On the eve of the full moon, Sir Tancred and Lady Beauleigh were dining at Government House, and before he went he bade Tinker be especially watchful, since the Satanists must surely be making some of their preparations this night. Tinker therefore, spent his time moving inside the edge of the canes in a watchful prowling round three sides of Pleasant Hill, but there was assuredly nothing afoot. At eleven the Morbihans went to bed, and he saw the black butler put out the lights downstairs.

He came slowly back to Beauleigh, ate some biscuits, changed into his pyjamas, and cast a last look up to Pleasant Hill before getting into bed. Even as he looked a tall white figure came out of the canes above the gully,

and went down into it; another followed, and another, till five had gone down. He could see that they were negroes, from the white clothes muffled round their heads to prevent the moon giving them cold; and either they were men of great bulk, or the intense moonlight exaggerated their stature.

In five seconds Tinker had his shoes and jacket on, thrust his revolver into his pocket, and, his eyes sparkling, his breath coming quickly, stood at the window for a moment doubtful; should he go at once? should he wait for his father?

He was just turning to go, when he heard the rattle of galloping hooves; his father had got wind of mischief afoot, and had come.

Tinker ran into his father's bedroom, took his heavy revolver from its case and a dozen cartridges, ran downstairs, and stood on the lighted verandah loading it. The galloping hooves were clattering up the avenue nearer and nearer; a horse plunged out of the darkness into the light, was reigned in with a slithering rattle, and Tinker looked into the anxious face of Stuart.

"Annette?" said the planter, panting. "Is she here? She's been missing since eight o'clock. It just occurred to me that she might have strayed over here."

His eyes blinked in the lamplight; but they did not miss the sudden wild terror in Tinker's face; and his ears caught his choking gasp. He swung himself out of the saddle, crying hoarsely, "What is it? For God's sake, what is it?"

Tinker thrust the revolver into his hand; gasped, "Come! and oh, come quickly, and shoot straight!" turned, and raced through the garden up the ridge. Stuart followed without a word: Tinker's terror left no need for questions. Stuart was a heavy man; but he kept close on the child's flying heels.

Tinker was racing for the point at which the white figure had descended into the gully, when his quick eye caught a faint, thin column of smoke curling above the trees fifty yards higher up. He swerved to the smoke, and on the edge of the gully paused, and listened;

a shrill, raucous voice rose from the depths in a curious sing-song.

"Quietly, quietly," said Tinker, and went down the side of the gully like a cat. The planter kicked off his shoes and followed him. Swiftly and noiselessly they made their way to the glimmer of a fire, and peered into a little pit-like glade. Tinker gripped the planter's wrist, holding him quiet. A fire burned on a rude altar of heaped up stones in the middle of the glade; before it knelt or crouched eight figures; nothing was to be seen of their faces but the gleam of teeth and white eyeballs in the firelight. Upright beside the altar stood the mulatto, Eglantine, chanting a curious clicking gibberish; as she chanted she let things fall from her hand into the fire, and the crouching figures swayed from side to side in unison with her chant. Holding the wondering planter still, Tinker watched with all his eyes, assured that they were in time. Suddenly the fire burned brighter, and he saw the Duke on the right of the altar, the Duchess on the left. Slowly the chant turned to a call of four clicking words, repeated with an insistent, frenzied clamour; and the crouching figures knelt upright, rigid. The call hushed suddenly; there was a rustle as the Duke and Duchess rose to their feet; and a long knife shone in the Duke's hand. The Duchess stepped back, stooped among the bushes, and came forward with a little white bundle in her arms; she held it out to the Duke, and the firelight fell on the white face, and scared eyes of little Annette.

"Shoot! Shoot!" screamed Tinker, and ere the revolver banged in his ears, the side of the Duke's head seemed to cave in, and he pitched sideways. The negroes sprang to their feet, and Tinker fired at the shoulder of the biggest. With the roar of a wounded beast, the man turned and plunged into the bushes, his companions after him. The Duchess dropped the child and followed them shrieking, but Eglantine stooped, tore the knife from the Duke's hand, and came leaping towards the ambush. Stuart's revolver banged out again, and she went down in a heap as Tinker

sprang past her and caught up the child.

"Quick!" he cried thrusting her into Stuart's arms, "Let's get out of it!" And he hurried up the side of the gully.

Out of it, and in the canes beyond, Tinker untied the handkerchief bound across Annette's mouth, and she began to scream with a lusty, reassuring vehemence.

"She's all right," said Tinker, with a sigh of relief. "And now, you get off home quietly and quickly. You were quite right to shoot those brutes; but it would be hard and expensive to prove it. The thing to do is to sit as tight as wax. See!"

Stuart shook his head. "No," he said, in a dazed way. "I don't understand anything about it."

"I'll tell you all about it to-morrow. Now, the thing to do is to keep out of a mess. Get off! Get home!"

Tinker's vehemence had its effect; the planter kissed Annette and hurried off through the canes to his horse. In three minutes Tinker had the child soothed, and as he led her down to the house, she was babbling of the nasty brown woman who had carried her away. He took her upstairs; awoke Elsie, and while she fed Annette on biscuits and milk, explained that for the next few days the child must not be allowed to speak to anyone but them.

He went into his own room, and was cleaning the revolver, when the carriage returned, and his father hurried upstairs.

"What's happened?" he said quickly, when he saw what he was doing.

"The Duke's dead, and Eglantine's dead, and there goes the Duchess," said Tinker, and he pointed up the ridge.

Along the lane to Pleasant Hill between the cane-fields a white figure went staggering along from side to side; once it fell and lay still awhile, then staggered up and stumbled on. As it passed out of sight, Tinker said, "She can't do much harm without the other two." And he told his father of the happenings of the night.

When he had finished, Sir Tancred heaved a great sigh of relief, and said, "Thank goodness; I can breathe easily again. Those brutes; they were a weight on me. It's fifty thousand francs to your banking account," he added.

"It was worth it," said Tinker, firmly. "That gully was not nice; no, it was not at all nice."

They kept Annette at Beauleigh the next day; she got no word with any servant; and a new doll and cradle filled her mind. Her father came over in the middle of the morning, and was told enough to understand the fate she had so narrowly escaped, and the debt he owed Tinker.

After dark Sir Tancred and Tinker stole through the canes down into the gully. As they came near the glade, they heard the sound of a spade grating against pebbles. Creeping very quietly up, they peered into it. In the middle was a big hole, and beside it two bodies wrapt in

sheets. Up to his waist in the hole was a negro digging with feverish vigour; and they could hear his quick, panting gasps. Now and again he would stop and listen, his eyeballs rolling in frightened glances that strove to pierce the bushes on this side and that; his chattering teeth almost rattled against one another. It was the Duke's black valet. Noiselessly, with infinite caution, they stole away.

Three days later Sir Tancred was riding out, when he met the doctor of the neighbourhood in his buggy. At the sight of Sir Tancred he stopped, and Sir Tancred reined in his horse.

"I've just been seeing your neighbour, Madame Silvestre. The poor woman's lost her reason. The servants tell me that her scoundrel of a husband slipped away last mail, and deserted her. I'm off to arrange her admission into the asylum."

"What a scoundrel!" said Sir Tancred.

