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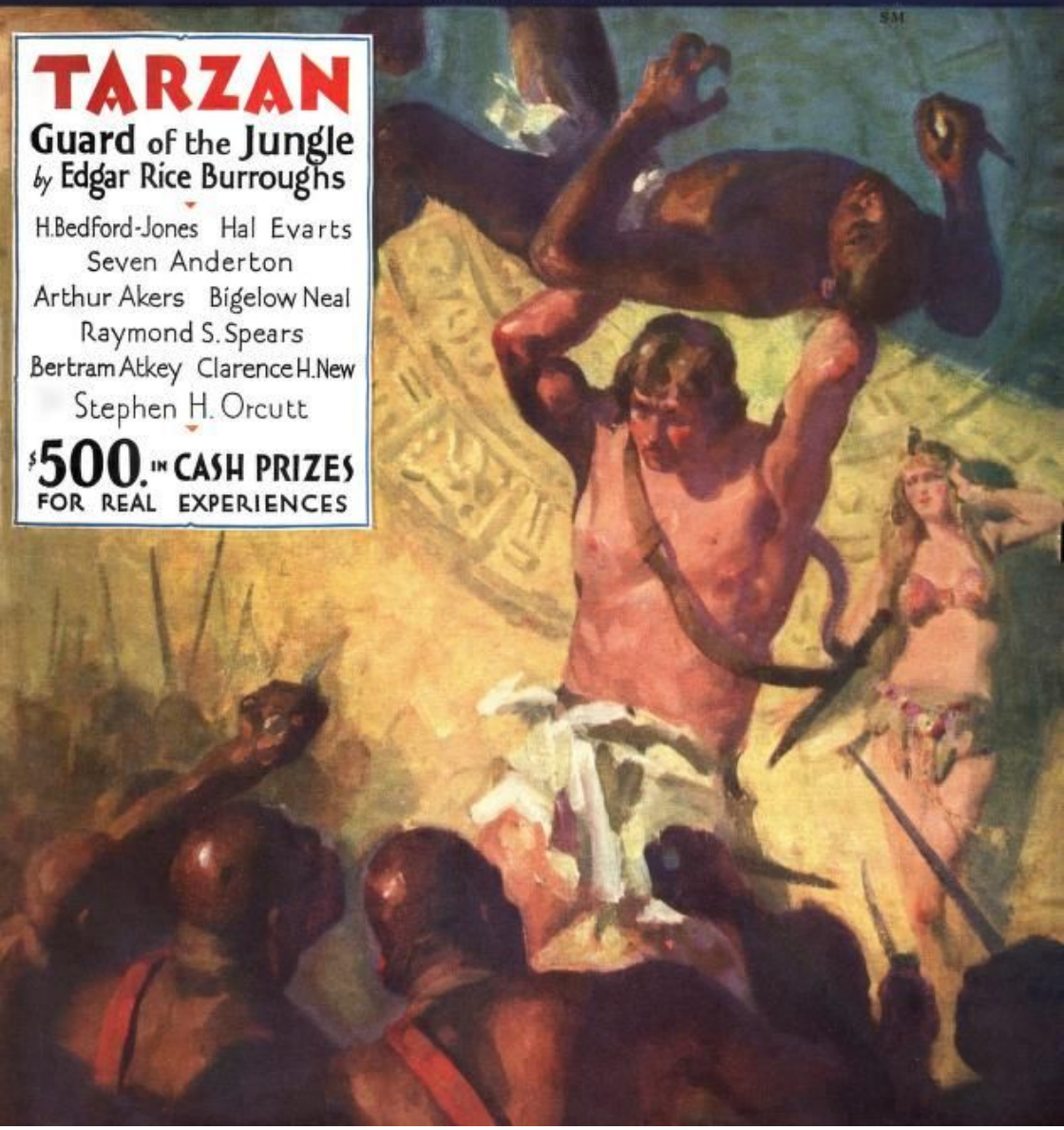

TARZAN

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The Phoenix Tourmaline

By

H. Bedford-Jones

Illustrated by Joseph Maturo

First published *Blue Book Magazine*, November 1930.

The author of many well-remembered Blue Book successes, like "Madagascar Gold" and "The Ship of Shadows" here offers a captivating mystery of life in the European colony of Saigon.

Freeman walked ashore at Saigon, went to the Continental Hotel, registered, and looked at his watch. It was four o'clock.

"Send my luggage to my room," he said. "If I do not return tonight, hold it for me."

He went next to the offices of the Compagnie des Charbons, which owned the big coal-mines that fed all the coastwise steamers, sent in his card to the president, M. Maignien, and in less than one moment was in the presence of that gentleman—a thin-cheeked, dark-eyed man with an untidy grayish beard that was struggling to engulf his sharp-nosed features.

"I received your cable at Singapore, M. Maignien," said Freeman in French. "I did not cable you of my arrival, lest the business be of a private nature."

Maignien shook hands very joyfully, then glanced at his watch. "You have luggage?"

"It is at the hotel."

"Good; I'll send for it. This is Friday—excellent! Now, pardon me for a few moments while I arrange for my absence; we shall go to my villa in the hills, and return on Monday. Be seated, M. Freeman, be at home; a few details to arrange, no more!"

Freeman sat down and lighted a cigarette in his calm way. He was Asiatic buyer for the great firm of Haldeman & Co., whose establishments in Fifth Avenue and Rue de la Paix handle the largest jewel business in the world. Freeman knew all there was to know about precious stones. His draft on the firm was good for practically any amount. From a Malay sultan in Singapore he had bought for his firm the famous Nurmahal pearls, paying half a million in cold cash.

Maignien bustled in and out; he was a rather fussy gentleman, and nervous. When he had cleared his desk and finished his directions, he closed the door and sat down.

"I cabled your firm, monsieur, and they gave me your address; so I cabled you," he said. "If we can arrange a price, I desire to sell my collection—all of it. For twenty years I have been here in Saigon, and my investments have been fortunate. I have some good stones."

"I know them well," said Freeman, "although I have never seen them. You have the Siamese Twins, probably the most perfectly matched pair of perfect black pearls in the world; you have the seven rubies that disappeared from Burma in 1867, called the Tears of Buddha. You have the lapis-lazuli pendant made for the Dowager Empress of China; you have the

fourteen absolutely flawless, but unluckily table-cut, diamonds that belonged to the Emperor of Annam. You—"

"How—how do you know all this?" asked M. Maignien.

"That is my business," said Freeman.

"Well, there is something you do not know, then—something rarer, if not actually more valuable, than all the rest."

"Rarity makes value for my firm," said Freeman.

"That is why I cabled."

"And what is this supreme wonder? A new acquisition?"

"I have had it for two years," said Maignien. "You must wait until you see it. I do not wish my family to know your business; my wife and her brother, to be exact. It is better for you to be interested in coal for an American or Singapore shipping firm."

Freeman merely nodded. In his business of buying, not merely jewels, but rare jewels, he had long since learned that those who sold to him usually did not want his business advertised. Not that Freeman would have dealt for an instant with any but the legitimate owners of stones; but these owners seldom wanted anyone to know that they were selling.

He knew of Maignien's collection; as he said, that was his business. Any flawless gem can of course be sold by Haldeman & Co., but they can more readily sell at a far higher price a stone which has association or history. And such things formed the collection of Maignien—a very rich man since the war. Fourteen flawless diamonds of antique cut would not fetch a great price; but if those fourteen had belonged to the Emperor of Annam, they would go for a prince's ransom.

Oddly enough, as he sat there, Freeman was curious about that villa in the hills. For he was well aware that there are no hills anywhere near Saigon, which is set in the midst of wide rice-paddies and mangrove flats. Being acquainted with French psychology, he waited half-amusedly to see what M. Maignien's "hills" would prove to be.

He was so interested in this point that he forgot about the great rarity he was shortly to see. . . .

The conveyance in which Freeman traveled upriver with his host was a very handsome motor-launch in which Maignien commuted to and from the city. The two men sat beneath the awning, and the elderly Frenchman went into some detail as to his reasons for selling his collection. It was rather nervous detail, Freeman noted.

"My wife is a trifle younger than I am," he said, pawing at his beard. "She is, in fact, my second wife, and she longs to return to Paris. I am comfortable here, but after all, I have attained a certain age, and Paris beckons; it will be good to go back. I am not poor, and there will always be an income from the coal mines. But Paul—my wife's brother, you comprehend—well, my friend, I must confess that I do not care greatly for this Paul."

Freeman smoked and said little, listening with a rather cynical comprehension of what the situation must be.

"Paul has been with us for two months," said Maignien, his gaze flitting along the river's bank. Mention of Paul disturbed him, apparently. "He has a little money, a trifling income; not a great deal. He came out to take a position in the mines, but his health would not stand it, so he is with us. *Nom de Dieu!* He will not be with us long. Three days ago I told him he would take the next boat for France, or resume his position up north in the mines. This is his last week with us. My wife was tragic about it, but what would you? My home is my home."

“The position,” observed Freeman, “has its difficulties; but it would have much greater ones, were you not a man of firmness and decision.”

“I am not weak—I can be imposed upon to a certain point, no farther,” returned Maignien, and this was true. “Me, I have never liked this *vaurien* Paul, nor has he liked me. No trouble, you comprehend; but the feeling is there below the surface. And as for these jewels, they represent wealth, which is safer in the bank. Here it is very nice to have them, to play with them, to show them to my friends; but of late I have lost my taste for them, to be honest. Twice there have been attempts made upon them.”

“If you keep them in your home,” said Freeman, “you are most unwise. A good many people know of your collection, my friend.”

Maignien gestured vaguely. “That is why I cabled you.”

Freeman perceived that this man had lost his self-confidence, realized the fact, resented it, and was helpless about it. Age, perhaps; domestic worries, the exigencies of a younger wife in a far country.

“How long have you been married?” asked Freeman slowly.

Freemam talked; M. le Préfet listened, astonished.

"A year and a half, this time," returned the other. Freeman said nothing, but his eyes narrowed. He felt vaguely sorry for M. Maignien.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Frenchman suddenly, and lifted an arm. "There—there, my friend! You see the hills, and my house. Is it not a charming scene?"

Eight or ten miles from town, conjectured Freeman. There were indeed hills above the river—gentle little eminences, all of fifty feet in height, with massed jungle behind. The clearing had been nicely done, a number of larger trees being left—great drooping casuarinas, and several vivid flame-trees. Between two of these slight eminences was built the house, with gardens around, a low wall, and boat-house and enclosed swimming-pool at the water's edge. Fountains played, the garden paths had been graveled—expensive work, here—and the finely timbered house was extensive and opulent.

Servants appeared as the launch drew in to the landing; M. Maignien was certainly treated with great respect by his domestics. And with affection by his wife, for she appeared at the entrance to the screened veranda and waved a hand, her husband blowing a kiss in return. Freeman eyed this exchange sardonically, and watched his luggage being taken in hand.

He walked up to the house with his host, and midway met his hostess and was introduced. He was not particularly astonished to find Madame Maignien a good twenty—perhaps more—years younger than her husband. She was a statuesque lady with a large nose, a wide and unhandsome mouth, and a firm chin; plenty of character in that face, thought Freeman. Her greeting was little short of effusive, and the affectionate embrace she tendered her spouse was not at all French in its lack of reserve. Also, Maignien seemed a trifle astonished, though greatly pleased, by her warmth.

"And where is Paul?" he asked.

"Oh, he is mounting his butterflies and packing those already mounted," she returned, and gave Freeman a bright smile. "Paul is my little brother, you understand, monsieur. He loves butterflies, and mounts them beautifully on plaster-of-paris blocks behind glass."

"That is true," said Maignien. "His work is really excellent; you must see his specimens. —By the way, my dear, I have a cabin for him on Monday's boat. He will be glad to hear it."

"You are so good!" And the lady regarded her spouse with glowing affection. Freeman began to feel a trifle uncomfortable. He did not like hypocrites particularly, and his cynical eye perceived that to which Maignien was superbly blind.

The interior of the house was charming in its way, if not in what Freeman considered the best of taste; no expense had been spared upon it, at all events. As the three of them passed through the music-room, Freeman's eye was caught by the portrait of a dark young man, which stood in a silver frame upon the piano.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "And this—"

"My brother," said Mme. Maignien. "Paul Lenormand. Is he not handsome?"

"Very," said Freeman, looking hard at the portrait. "I am envious, madame!"

She laughed pleasantly, made some casual answer, and Freeman went on to his room.

He found his luggage already there, and promised to rejoin his hosts after a bath and a change. The room was large, pleasant, cool, and opened upon the garden; the rattan blinds were triced up, for the sun was already dropping out of sight and a breeze was drifting in. Freeman stood motionless for a long minute, looking out upon the garden. Then he started slightly, hearing a voice that came to him with faint but penetrating clearness—a man's voice, irritated and alarmed.

"*Diantre!* A man—an American, you say? To remain until—"

That was all. Freeman frowned a little as he stared out upon the hillside with its walks and flowers and fountains; then he compressed his lips and turned to his luggage. He opened a suit-case, fingered through its contents with exploring hand, and took up the pistol for which he had obtained a permit before landing. It was empty, but in another moment he had slipped a loaded clip into the butt. Then he put the pistol away again.

"Paul Lenormand, eh?" he said, and his lips curved in the sardonic smile which many men had little liked to see. "Poor Maignien! But why, I wonder, the butterflies?"

"This is not so very old," said Freeman, "but it is the most beautiful tourmaline I have ever seen."

Unfortunately, he had no answer to this question, for some little time. . . .

Freeman shrank from telling Maignien the stark truth. Beneath his ironic outer shell he had, like many Americans, a stratum of sensitive nature that was almost sentimental, and he could well see that his news would give Maignien a mortal blow. Besides, Freeman was in the dark as to certain things and wanted to ferret them out. And there was always the chance that he himself could remedy the situation and avoid wounding poor Maignien: a false mercy, yet a very natural feeling.

Contrary to Freeman's expectation, dinner proved to be not only very pleasant, but even a gay meal; obviously Paul Lenormand had accepted his dismissal with good grace, and there was not a trace of strain between him and his brother-in-law. Lenormand was much younger

than his sister. He was the dark, rather sleek type of man, thin and lissom, which has become associated with the term *gigolo*; his dark, direct eyes held a veiled menace, and his manners were beyond criticism. He said quite frankly that he would be glad to return to Europe, and he spoke of Maignien's kindness to him with a hint of emotion that moved the older man almost to affection. Clearly, Maignien regretted his unkind words to Freeman, regarding this young man.

Freeman talked coal with his host, expressed a vivid desire to see the collection of jewels whose fame had reached him, and showed much interest in the work of Lenormand with butterflies: he accepted an invitation to visit the latter's workshop in the morning. Madame Maignien proved herself a charming woman, and all in all Freeman would have enjoyed himself amazingly—except for what he knew.

"Yet what can the man do?" he asked himself repeatedly. "He cannot steal the jewels; he could not get out of the country at all, and he could not hope to conceal their loss. There can be no question of Maignien's death; in such an event, his widow would inherit—ah, but would she? However, a mere murder would not necessitate this careful preparation. No, there is something behind all this, something I do not yet know."

He knew that his own identity, and his business here, was not suspected by Madame Maignien or her brother.

Dinner over, cigars half finished, brother Paul went to the music-room, where he played the piano with a masterly touch and chatted with his sister. Maignien escorted his guest to view the famous collection of gems.

The two men passed to a small study and smoking-room at the rear of the house, and Maignien paused before a little door in the wall of the study. He had the average Frenchman's faith in locks, provided they were large and cunning enough. From his pocket he drew a key-ring, and smiled at Freeman.

"You see, *mon ami*, I do not leave these things about foolishly," he confided. "This little room is of massive teak, has no other entrance—not even a window—and the only keys are in my pocket. Once inside, the thief finds a massive steel box to which I alone hold the key—a box too heavy to be readily carried off. *Voilà!*"

He flung open the teakwood door to disclose a small room, no larger than a closet. Upon the floor reposed an old-fashioned safe that opened with a key.

From this safe, Maignien brought forth over a dozen boxes and cases, which he disposed upon the table in his study. He selected a large morocco case, retaining it in his hand, then drew up a chair for Freeman.

"There, monsieur, examine at your pleasure: the supreme wonder I reserve until you have seen the others. Here are fresh cheroots; they will fetch us more coffee presently."

So saying, he sank into a chair, and Freeman turned to the jewel-boxes on the table. One by one, pencil and paper at his elbow, he examined the contents of those boxes and jotted down a list of them, together with a code system of letters that represented the probable resale price of each and the price which he was willing to pay. All were here, the famed gems of which he had heard: the Annam diamonds, the Tears of Buddha, the Siamese Twins, and many others, with a number of lesser but highly valuable stones. Last he came to the lapis pendant made for the old Empress Dowager; a pendant of the finest lapis, so exquisitely carved that it had been two years in the making, kept within box after box of gorgeous brocade and wrapped in a fragment of imperial silk tapestry.

At last the inspection was finished, and solemnly Maignien laid before him the morocco case.

"You have seen them all, my friend: but here is something which you have never seen, and of which I doubt if you have ever heard. It was not catalogued with the others."

"Catalogued?" Freeman looked up suddenly. "I did not know these stones had been catalogued at all."

"But yes." Maignien rose and took from a shelf a thin brochure. "This was privately printed for me at the Government printery; the illustrations are life-size. Only a half-dozen copies were struck off, as presents for official friends."

Freeman frowned thoughtfully as he examined the little brochure. He found all the stones listed and described, with what was known of their histories, and each was pictured in very handsome colored plates. He examined the booklet minutely, comparing the illustrations with the actual gems, and their exactitude astonished and startled him. Here in his hand was the answer to his chief problem.

"When was this printed?" he asked abruptly.

"Two years ago. Unfortunately, the supreme wonder was not then in my possession, so it is not shown there."

"What species of butterfly is this?" asked Freeman. "Alas!" Lenormand grimaced. "I am no scientist, Monsieur."

Freeman pushed aside the brochure and opened the morocco case. Maignien remained silent; he knew there was no need of telling this man what he was looking at.

Screwing his glass into his eye, Freeman examined it minutely. It was a small, flat block of crystal, three inches by two, half an inch thick. Each side was carved fantastically with a phœnix design—most intricate work, obviously Chinese in origin. One side of this crystal was a rare and delicate sea-green; the other side was an equally delicate rose pink—the thing was a perfect example of the Chinese love of working up a parti-colored stone into a design wherein the natural colors would play a part. The crystal was pierced to be used as a pendant.

Freeman took the glass from his eye. "This is not so very old," he said, "but it is the most beautiful tourmaline I have ever seen, monsieur. It has a history?"

"I do not know," said Maignien. "I got it from a Chinese refugee from Yunnan. He called it the Phœnix Tourmaline, and would tell me nothing about it. There is a glow to it, eh?"

"More than that," said Freeman, and fondled the tourmaline in his palm.

It deserved the name; used as he was to stones, this crystal of two colors gave him something to think about. There was something fascinating, even to him, in the deep, soft glow. Another close examination showed that it was a flawless gem crystal, not the usual type where the greater flaws and imperfections have been cut out. This must have been a perfect block of Nature's fashioning, and the two colors were fused in an even line.

Then, under the strong glass, Freeman saw something else no casual eye would have noted. Outlining the intricacies of the carving, here and there at the inner points of the design, was a faint line of white. Freeman removed his scarfpin and with the point followed these lines, loosening a fine white powder. He tasted it, but made no comment.

"What is it?" asked Maignien curiously.

"A little dirt," said Freeman. "Perhaps some one polished the thing and did not clean it thoroughly." He laid down the glass and the gem. "Monsieur, you have a remarkable collection here. You have no family to whom you would leave these things—no children by your first marriage, perhaps?"

"But yes, monsieur—two sons, who are in France," said Maignien. "However, in my opinion it would be better to leave them money than such treasures as these, which might be stolen upon my death."

Freeman nodded. He comprehended everything now—or at least, if not everything, then enough to give light upon the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Do you wish to discuss price, monsieur?" he asked courteously. "Or let it wait until tomorrow, perhaps?"

Maignien shook his head, and dabbed at his brow with a silk handkerchief.

"No. I understand how you Americans do business, monsieur; let us do it your way. I must confess to a nervousness, a species of apprehension; it has weighed upon me for some time. Perhaps it is sheer imagination; perhaps it comes from my heart, for which I am undergoing treatment. At all events, let us see!"

For an hour or more they sat there, discussing the collection piece by piece, stone by stone, discussing price and costs and markets. Freeman was astonished by the ease of it; these negotiations should have required weeks, for thrifty Gallic merchantmen long since squeezed the Queen of Scots and all her countrymen out of France, and no matter what his wealth, your Frenchman would sooner haggle than do anything else, except eat.

Maignien, however, showed none of this racial trait. The bargaining was in francs, and it came to a very large sum: but when it was ended, Maignien's figure was within five thousand francs of the figure Freeman had set himself as purchase price. He waived the five thousand, and made his flat offer. Maignien considered a moment, then nodded.

"Good; I accept," he said quietly. "You are a gentleman, monsieur; me, I do not desire to prolong these negotiations. Let us do business in your American way."

"Agreed," said Freeman, and produced pen and paper. "I'll make out a bill of sale, and the stones become my property. They remain in your keeping until you have cabled in regard to the draft I give you—no, I must insist on this detail. You can send a cablegram down to the city tomorrow, and receive an answer at once. I'll give you a sight draft on my firm, which the Banque de l'Indo-Chine will accept at face on Monday. Better, perhaps, to have them send the cable tomorrow."

So it was agreed. The bill of sale, itemizing the collection, was written out and signed, and the gems were Freeman's property.

He joined Maignien in a drink to celebrate the bargain. Yet he showed none of his real exultation; he had done a tremendous stroke of business, but he knew he had an unwelcome task remaining ahead of him.

When he retired that night, he took the automatic pistol from his grip and placed it in his jacket pocket.

"Tomorrow," he murmured, as he turned out the light, "I shall have a brief conversation with M. Paul Lenormand—a very brief conversation, I hope!"

He was to regret most bitterly that he had postponed this conversation until the morrow. But what one of us can see ahead to another day?

Freeman wakened early.

"The collection is now my property," he reflected, as he leisurely dressed. "Therefore I can rightfully take up the matter with Lenormand, give him twenty-four hours to be gone, or less. It will save Maignien the shock and pain which the exposure would cause him. It may even save a tragedy all around."

So thought Freeman, in his simplicity—forgetting that the swift shock of the knife is always better than the slow agony of an ulcer.

When he went downstairs he met a soft-voiced servant who escorted him to the dining-room and there brought him rolls and coffee—they had not known he was up and around. Monsieur Lenormand had been at work for half an hour; his workshop was in a summer-house at the upper end of the garden. Freeman inquired if the young man always rose this early, and found that he did not. He made no comment.

He breakfasted lightly, then strolled out to the garden. He filled and lighted his pipe, and made his way along the graveled path toward the pavilion at the upper end—a little octagon building, gay with vermilion and gilding, being built in the Chinese fashion. As he drew near, his feet crunching on the gravel, Lenormand came into the doorway and looked out at him, then cried cordial greeting.

"Good morning, monsieur! You are about early. Welcome to my little workshop! Come right in and let us see if we can find entertainment for you!"

So saying, the young man ducked out of sight, as though he were engaged at some important work—or had something to conceal. Freeman wondered.

Stopping, he entered at the doorway, and stood gazing around. Before him was a long, wide work-bench at which Lenormand stood. Upon the floor was a half-emptied sack of plaster-of-paris. At one end of the bench were little squares of glass, binding tape, tools, butterflies pinned to cards. Along the bench stood molds, and square cakes of hardened plaster from these molds.

Lenormand waved his hand gayly. "There, monsieur—a touch more, and we have it! Allow me to present you the finished product. Not bad, eh?"

In his hand Freeman took the finished product—a plaster cake five inches square. In the center of this, held in a depression shaped to its general outline in the mold, was a gorgeous blue-and-gold butterfly of large size. Over this had been fitted a glass, held in place by a passe-partout binding. The work was neat, and the result beautiful.

"What species of butterfly is this?" asked Freeman.

"Alas!" Lenormand grimaced. "I am no scientist, monsieur. I collect the beautiful; that is all. It interests me. See, I have nearly sixty completed over there in that pile. These few will be finished before noon: then I pack them all. It interests you?"

Freeman nodded, and looked at the bench. Upon it were nearly twenty molds, into which the plaster had apparently just been poured. Before each was set a butterfly, ready for mounting when the plaster had hardened, also a glass to fit the square of plaster.

"Isn't there danger of breakage?" asked Freeman.

The young man shrugged. "Perhaps; but as you see, each is two inches thick, and they will be well packed. And what would you? It is an amusement; it interests me."

Freeman looked at him, removed his pipe, and was about to ask a question that would most certainly have startled, perhaps even terrified, brother Paul. A sound checked him, however.

This sound was the long, shrill scream of a woman, coming from the house.

Lenormand looked up; the color drained out of his face as he met Freeman's eyes. The plaster-set butterfly in his hands dropped and broke.

Then as the scream was repeated, both men dashed out of the place and ran across the garden. A frightened native servant met them at the door.

"Quickly, messieurs—poor M. Maignien is dead!"

There ensued a very chaotic quarter of an hour.

Lenormand took charge, for Madame Maignien was prostrated temporarily, and Freeman lent a hand. Maignien was dead, indeed; he had fallen asleep and had died peacefully in his sleep, no doubt from the aneurism of the heart to which he was subject. Lenormand summoned Lon-tran, the native boy who ran the launch, and was about to send him to the city when Freeman intervened.

"Perhaps, monsieur," he said quietly, "it might be better if I myself went for the doctor? I could then tell him what I know, on the way back."

"You would be so kind? By all means, then," assented Lenormand, with obvious relief. "I will give you his address—"

So Freeman set off for Saigon in the launch, which was urged to fullest speed. All the way downstream he sat wordless, smoking most of the time, eyes fastened upon the water and the mangrove-bordered rice paddies.

"If I had only warned him!" he thought. "Yet—of what could I have warned him?"

Upon reaching Saigon, he did not go to the address of Maignien's doctor. Instead, he went direct to the Prefecture, sent in his card and certain documents, and was immediately brought to the presence of M. le Préfet, a very trim and soldierly man, who returned his documents and shook hands with him impressively.

For ten minutes Freeman talked, while M. le Préfet listened with every symptom of astonishment.

"But, monsieur!" he exclaimed, when Freeman had finished, "If this is as you say—which I doubt not at all—it is an affair of honor, of domestic life. And there has been no crime."

"That remains to be seen," said Freeman. "You will come?"

"But of a certainty!" The Frenchman rose. "Our own doctor shall accompany us—he can perform the autopsy, while I proceed with the official inquiry."

So the launch sped back up the river, with M. le Préfet, a police surgeon, and six trim native policemen keeping Freeman company, not to mention the secretary of M. le Préfet.

Their arrival created something of a sensation, but Lenormand met them and conducted them into the house. Madame had quieted somewhat, and would be able to appear. While a table was being set up in the salon and M. le Préfet arranged his numerous documents, the surgeon examined the body and returned with word that Maignien had apparently died from a heart-seizure. Then he vanished again, without asking permission from anyone, to conduct the autopsy by himself.

M. le Préfet opened the inquiry, while his secretary wrote rapidly. The servants gave their testimony; then Madame Maignien appeared, and the official greeted her with great sympathy, for grief had ravaged her features and her voice was very feeble.

Yes, she said, she had entered her husband's room to awaken him, as was her daily custom; and upon touching him—

There she broke down, sobbing. M. le Préfet excused her; nay, he forced her to go to her own room and rest, for there was no further immediate need of her testimony. When she had departed, the prefect requested that the clothes and personal effects of the deceased be brought to him, and they were fetched and set upon a chair beside him.

He went through the pockets and laid various articles upon the table: last of all he laid a folded paper. Then he looked at Lenormand and Freeman.

"Now, messieurs! First, M. Freeman, if you please. Your papers?"

Freeman produced them. The prefect looked them over and returned them.

"Correct. Your business?"

"I am a buyer for a firm of jewel merchants," said Freeman. "My business here was to buy the jewel collection of M. Maignien."

Lenormand started, began to speak, then checked himself. His eyes widened upon Freeman, and a slow pallor grew in his cheeks.

"You accomplished this business?"

"Last night. Here is the bill of sale." Freeman laid the signed paper on the table. "I gave M. Maignien a draft for the amount indicated."

"It is here." And M. le Préfet opened the folded paper he had taken from the pocket of Maignien's coat.

"Touching the property which I purchased, monsieur—" began Freeman.

"In due time, monsieur," said the prefect coldly. "M. Lenormand—your papers, please."

Lenormand produced the ever-necessary French identity card.

The prefect studied it, then laid down upon the table and transfixed Lenormand with a quiet stare.

"An excellent forgery," he said. "I believe, monsieur, that your real name is Bourisson?"

Lenormand's face was beaded with perspiration. His eyes were ghastly.

"I—yes, monsieur," he said in a low voice.

"Two years ago," went on the prefect, "you were implicated in a jewel swindle in Kobe, Japan, and expelled from the country?"

The hunted gaze of Lenormand flicked from one to another of the faces around him.

"That—that is true, monsieur," he murmured.

"Then you are not the brother of Madame Maignien?"

Desperately Lenormand pulled himself together. "Monsieur!" he exclaimed in a sudden burst of rapid speech. "Consider—we have loved each other for years! She married this older man—she did not love him in the least—"

"Monsieur," intervened the prefect gravely, "I am concerned only with your offense in bearing a false identity card. Unless a crime has been committed, your love-affairs do not interest me in the least; and apparently no crime has been committed here. That a lover should forge his identity in order to be near his mistress,"—and he shrugged,—"is perhaps an offense which might gain the sympathy of the judge. And I am not the judge."—Then as Lenormand sank back in his chair, the prefect looked at Freeman.

"Monsieur, you can identify these jewels, which are your property?"

"Certainly," said Freeman quietly. "They are itemized on the bill of sale. Also, there is a catalogue with illustrations of them."

"Let us obtain them." And the prefect rose, taking from the table Maignien's keys. "You can assist me, gentlemen, if you will be so kind. Ah—"

The surgeon entered, came to the table, and spoke in a low voice.

"Very good," said the prefect. "You will return to Saigon at once and proceed with the analysis."

And he led the way to the study of Maignien.

There he examined the door of the teakwood room; it was locked, and bore no signs of any forcible opening. He unlocked it. Inside, he unlocked the safe and, with two of his policemen assisting, bore the loads of jewel-boxes to the table in the salon. When everyone was in place again, he motioned to Freeman.

"Very good, monsieur. Will you have the kindness to examine the jewels?"

Freeman opened the case containing the Siamese Twins. They looked up at him, grayish-white, dusky, beautiful. He went from box to box, and the prefect checked off the list on the bill of sale as he proceeded. Last of all he opened the morocco case containing the Phœnix Tourmaline, and named it.

All this while, the gaze of the man called Lenormand remained fastened upon him in a sort of terrified fascination and suspense.

"Then, monsieur," said the prefect, "the collection of jewels is as you left it last night?"

"No," said Freeman. "The jewels have been stolen, and duplicates have been put in their places, monsieur."

There was a tense, startled silence. Then Lenormand leaped to his feet.

"But you, monsieur, are the only person who has left this house today!" he cried out.

Freeman looked at the young man gravely, steadily, but did not reply. M. le Préfet squared around in his chair.

"So! It would appear that a crime has been committed, after all," he observed, and gave Freeman a glance of admiring wonder. "M. Lenormand—"

"You cannot accuse me!" exclaimed Lenormand passionately. "I have not been out of this house except to welcome you. Jewels such as these could not be quickly nor easily hidden—and these jewels were in place last night, as M. Freeman admits! If these are duplicates, how did they get in the boxes? Where are the originals? No one has touched them since last night. The keys have not left the possession of M. Maignien. You cannot accuse me, I tell you—search my room, search everywhere! But—the exchange of false for real might have been made by this American last night; and he might have taken the real stones to Saigon this morning!"

"Quite true," observed M. le Préfet placidly. "What say you, M. Freeman?"

"I have several things to say." And Freeman held a light to his cigar. Then he turned to the prefect. "Will you have the goodness to instruct M. Lenormand to answer my questions? Or wait—perhaps I can reconstruct for you all that has passed."

He paused, examined his cigar, then puffed at it contentedly.

"Two years ago," he said, "M. Maignien was unwise enough to print a few copies of a catalogue describing his jewels in detail, with colored illustrations, life-size. A year and a half ago, he married for the second time. How and where and why, I am not aware. But I would suggest that an investigation into the past of his wife would disclose acquaintance with our friend M. Lenormand."

"You lie!" cried out Lenormand, white with anger—or other emotion. Two of the policemen moved quietly in, one on either side of him.

"Now let us imagine," pursued Freeman calmly, "that a copy of M. Maignien's catalogue fell into the hands of M. Lenormand, whose photograph is very well known to men in the gem trade as that of a gentleman not to be trusted. With such a catalogue, it would be no great trick to have duplicates made of each item in this collection; the work would take a little time, and some money. Then, let us say, Madame Maignien's brother—who very possibly is her lover in reality—shows up here and is made welcome by a simple, unsuspecting old man. In his luggage are concealed the duplicates of the jewels. But what does he find when he arrives here? That, since the catalogue was printed, M. Maignien has acquired another jewel—a jewel almost beyond price for its rarity, if not in its intrinsic value. Possibly the brother sees this jewel—it is this, the Phœnix Tourmaline."

Freeman opened the morocco case and laid bare the duplicate—which was beautiful enough in itself, despite its false coloring.

"You lie!" cried Lenormand, white with anger—or other emotion.

"Being an expert, the brother knows its value, and resolves to have it with the rest," he went on. "But how to make a duplicate? He is a cautious man; he dares not try to photograph it. He knows that there could be no safety in actually stealing the jewels outright. However, he has been able to get access to the keys that unlock the little room and the safe; he has made duplicate keys. So what does he do? He takes the Phœnix Tourmaline, and being a very good workman, makes a cast of it, in plaster-of-paris. Then he brushes it off and puts it back—which was a mistake. He should have washed it very carefully. When we find the real Phœnix Tourmaline, it will show faint but distinct traces of the operation. Now he sends the cast to Japan, where a duplicate is made in colored glass, following the intricate design and so forth.

Receipt of this delays him here in Saigon a full six weeks longer than he had intended to stay. But the duplicate finally arrives—"

Lenormand came to his feet. He was furious, raving denials, accusations, until presently he got himself in hand and, deadly pale, uttered a simple and eloquent rebuttal which was astonishing in its coherence, by contrast with his preceding words. It was as though terror had shocked him into clarity of thought.

Reflectively M. le Préfet listened to him, allowed him to finish, and then turned to Freeman.

"Monsieur, there is much in what this man says. Your hypothetical case has really no objective. Reflect! Supposing such a crime as you depict were contemplated—where would be the reason? The woman in the case would naturally inherit after the death of her husband; there would be no object in all this work, all this trouble and expense, of making duplicates. You have insinuated that the murder of her husband was contemplated—"

"Your pardon, M. le Préfet, I have insinuated no such thing," said Freeman stolidly. "I do not believe that M. Maignien was murdered. I do not believe that his murder was so much as contemplated. Let me remind you that I have not finished my hypothetical case."

The prefect gestured significantly and sat back in his chair, while Lenormand gazed at Freeman with slow astonishment in his eyes.

"The duplicate arrives from Japan," continued Freeman, in his calm, inexorable voice. "All is now complete. The brother-in-law has become a nuisance; the husband fears him, procures him passage for France, kicks him out. He goes, taking the genuine jewels, leaving the false ones in their place; he knows that the husband seldom inspects them, and that by the time the substitution is discovered, he will be safe in Bangkok or elsewhere beyond extradition, even could the theft be proven against him. And later he divides with the woman, his mistress. That is the way the crime was pictured in theory. In actual fact, we know that something went amiss. A man—myself—came casually and recognized Lenormand as a jewel swindler. So!

"You raise the question of motive; very good—I was coming to that. M. Maignien was subject to heart-seizures. He was elderly, excitable; he could not last very long. If he did, the end might be hastened. But if and when he died—would his wife inherit? Not so, as I understand your law, M. le Préfet. By a former marriage, there were two sons, now residing in France. There would be a division of the property, of which the collection formed a large part."

A subdued exclamation escaped the prefect.

Then Lenormand rose, deadly quiet, and spoke in a firm voice.

"M. le Préfet," he said, "all this is very clever; but it is nonsense. My crime is that I loved another man's wife; I confess it, and," he added with a certain impressive dignity, as he glanced around, "I am willing to suffer for it—if the court declares it to be a crime! As for these jewels—that is another matter."

"You are right," said Freeman. "It is another matter altogether. When they were stolen, they were my property. Therefore it is my right to demand that you be arrested for the theft."

"There is no proof, monsieur," said Lenormand firmly. "All you have said is theory. You have brought no proof against me; I deny every word of your fantastic theory! It is I, on the contrary, who demand that *you* be arrested for the theft. You substituted the false stones for the genuine ones. Your next move will be to repudiate the check that you gave in payment."

“Not at all,” said Freeman, looking at the man steadily.

“Come, monsieur,” said the prefect, a trifle uneasily. “This man speaks the truth. There is no proof whatever of your charge. Nothing could establish your theory, except—”

“Except finding the jewels in his possession.” Freeman beckoned to one of the policemen. “With your permission, M. le Préfet—”

He spoke, low-voiced, to the little brown man, who saluted smartly and left the room.

“An impressive bluff, monsieur!” Lenormand uttered a curt laugh. “But I have not those jewels. How could they be hidden? How could they be taken out of the country, indeed?”

“In a very simple fashion which I am about to explain,” said Freeman. “If I am wrong, it will be shown, and my whole theory will then fall to pieces.”

With a grunt, Lenormand resumed his chair; across his face swept waves of suspicion, startled doubt, swift incredulity and hope. Sweat sprang on his brow, and he wiped it away. . . .

The policeman reëntered the room, came to the table, saluted, and laid down one of the molds from the work-bench in the summer-house. At sight of it, Lenormand’s eyes dilated with terror.

“If I wanted to get the jewels away,” said Freeman quietly, “I would collect butterflies and mount them—in this manner.”

He twisted the wooden screws at the sides of the mold, which opened. Upon the table rested a white block of plaster, bearing a depression in the shape of a butterfly. Freeman picked it up—then suddenly dashed it down upon the floor.

The plaster was shattered. From its fragments came a shaft of light; there in the afternoon sunlight lay the Phœnix Tourmaline.

Lenormand fell back in his chair in a dead faint. . . . .

“But, monsieur, how on earth did you know?” exclaimed M. le Préfet, regarding Freeman with a certain awe. “You had no previous knowledge—how could you have evolved this theory, so accurate in each detail?”

“That,” returned Freeman, with a faint smile, “is my business, monsieur!”

[The end of *The Phoenix Tourmaline* by Henry Bedford-Jones]