

The Montezuma Emerald

Rodrigues Ottolengui

Table of Contents

<u>The Montezuma Emerald</u>	1
<u>Rodrigues Ottolengui</u>	1

The Montezuma Emerald

Rodrigues Ottolengui

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.

<http://www.blackmask.com>

"Is the Inspector in?"

Mr. Barnes immediately recognised the voice, and turned to greet the speaker. The man was Mr. Leroy Mitchel's English valet. Contrary to all precedent and tradition, he did not speak in cockney dialect, not even stumbling over the proper distribution of the letter W throughout his vocabulary. That he was English, however, was apparent to the ear, because of a certain rather attractive accent, peculiar to his native island, and to the eye because of a deferential politeness of manner, too seldom observed in American servants. He also always called Mr. Barnes "Inspector", oblivious of the fact that he was not a member of the regular police, and mindful only of the English application of the word to detectives.

"Step right in, Williams," said Mr. Barnes. "What is the trouble?"

"I don't rightly know, Inspector," said Williams. "Won't you let me speak to you alone? It's about the master."

"Certainly. Come into my private room." He led the way and Williams followed, remaining standing, although Mr. Barnes waved his hand towards a chair, as he seated himself in his usual place at his desk. "Now then," continued the detective; "what's wrong? Nothing serious, I hope?"

"I hope not, sir, indeed! But the master's disappeared!"

"Disappeared, has he!" Mr. Barnes smiled slightly. "Now, Williams, what do you mean by that? You did not see him vanish, eh?"

"No, sir, of course not. If you'll excuse my presumption, Inspector, I don't think this is a joke, sir, and you're laughing."

"All right, Williams," answered Mr. Barnes, assuming a more serious tone. "I will give your tale my sober consideration. Proceed!"

"Well, I hardly know where to begin, Inspector. But I'll just give you the facts, without any unnecessary opinions of my own."

Williams rather prided himself upon his ability to tell what he called "a straight story". He placed his hat on a chair, and, standing behind it, with one foot resting on a rung, checked off the points of his narrative, as he made them, by tapping the palm of one hand with the index finger of the other.

"To begin then," said he. "Mrs. Mitchel and Miss Rose sailed for England, Wednesday morning of last week. That same night, quite unexpected, the master says to me, says he, 'Williams, I think you have a young woman you're sweet on down at Newport?' 'Well, sir,' says I, 'I do know a person as answers that description,' though I must say to you, Inspector, that how he ever came to know it beats me. But that's aside, and digression is not my habit. 'Well, Williams,' the master went on, 'I shan't need you for the rest of this week, and if you'd like to take a trip to

The Montezuma Emerald

the seashore, I shan't mind standing the expense, and letting you go.' Of course, I thanked him very much, and I went, promising to be back on Monday morning as directed. And I kept my word, Inspector; though it was a hard wrench to leave the young person last Sunday in time to catch the boat; the moon being bright and everything most propitious for a stroll, it being her Sunday off and all that. But as I said, I kept my word, and was up to the house Monday morning only a little after seven, the boat having got in at six. I was a little surprised to find the master was not at home, but then it struck me as how he must have gone out of town over Sunday, and I looked for him to be in for dinner. But he did not come to dinner, nor at all that night. Still, I did not worry about it. It was the master's privilege to stay away as long as he liked. Only I could not help thinking I might just as well have had that stroll in the moonlight, Sunday night. But when all Tuesday and Tuesday night went by, and no word from the master, I must confess that I got uneasy; and now here's Wednesday noon, and no news; so I just took the liberty to come down and ask your opinion in the matter, seeing as how you are a particular friend of the family, and an Inspector to boot."

"Really, Williams," said Mr. Barnes, "all I see in your story is that Mr. Mitchel, contemplating a little trip off somewhere with friends, let you go away. He expected to be back by Monday, but, enjoying himself, has remained longer."

"I hope that's all, sir, and I've tried to think so. But this morning I made a few investigations of my own, and I'm bound to say what I found don't fit that theory."

"Ah! You have some more facts! What are they?"

"One of them is this cablegram that I found only this morning under a book on the table in the library." He handed a blue paper to Mr. Barnes, who took it and read the following, on a cable blank:

"Emerald. Danger. Await letter."

For the first time during the interview, Mr. Barnes's face assumed a really serious expression. He studied the dispatch silently for a full minute, and then, without raising his eyes, said:

"What else?"

"Well, Inspector, I don't know that this has anything to do with the affair, but the master had a curious sort of jacket, made of steel links, so tight and so closely put together, that I've often wondered what it was for. Once I made so bold as to ask him, and he said, said he: 'Williams, if I had an enemy, it would be a good idea to wear that, because it would stop a bullet or a knife.' Then he laughed, and went on, 'Of course, I shan't need it for myself. I bought it when I was abroad once, merely as a curiosity.' Now, Inspector, that jacket's disappeared also."

"Are you quite sure?"

"I've looked from dining-room to garret for it. The master's derringer is missing, too. It's a mighty small affair. Could be held in the hand without being noticed, but it carries a nasty-looking ball."

"Very well, Williams, there may be something in your story. I'll look into the matter at once. Meanwhile, go home, and stay there so that I may find you if I want you."

"Yes, sir; I thank you for taking it up. It takes a load off my mind to know you're in charge, Inspector. If there's harm come to the master, I'm sure you'll track the party down. Good morning, sir!"

"Good morning, Williams."

The Montezuma Emerald

After the departure of Williams, the detective sat still for several minutes, lost in thought. He was weighing two ideas. He seemed still to hear the words which Mr. Mitchel had uttered after his success in unravelling the mystery of Mr. Goldie's lost identity. "Next time I will assign myself the chief rôle," or words to that effect, Mr. Mitchel had said. Was this disappearance a new riddle for Mr. Barnes to solve? If so, of course, he would undertake it, as a sort of challenge which his professional pride could not reject. On the other hand, the cable dispatch and the missing coat-of-mail might portend ominously. The detective felt that Mr. Mitchel was somewhat in the position of the fabled boy who cried "Wolf" so often, that when at last the wolf really appeared, no assistance was sent to him. Only Mr. Barnes decided that he must chase the "wolf", whether it be real or imaginary. He wished, though, that he knew which.

Ten minutes later he decided upon a course of action, and proceeded to a telegraph office, where he found that, as he had supposed, the dispatch had come from the Paris firm of jewellers from which Mr. Mitchel had frequently bought gems. He sent a lengthy message to them, asking for an immediate reply.

While waiting for the answer, the detective was not inactive. He went direct to Mr. Mitchel's house, and once more questioned the valet, from whom he obtained an accurate description of the clothes which his master must have worn, only one suit being absent. This fact alone, seemed significantly against the theory of a visit to friends out of town. Next, Mr. Barnes interviewed the neighbours, none of whom remembered to have seen Mr. Mitchel during the week. At the sixth house below, however, he learned something definite. Here he found Mr. Mordaunt, a personal acquaintance, and member of one of Mr. Mitchel's clubs. This gentleman stated that he had dined at the club with Mr. Mitchel, on the previous Thursday, and had accompanied him home, in the neighbourhood of eleven o'clock, parting with him at the door of his own residence. Since then he had neither seen nor heard from him. This proved that Mr. Mitchel was at home one day after Williams went to Newport.

Leaving the house, Mr. Barnes called at the nearest telegraph office and asked whether a messenger summons had reached them during the week, from Mr. Mitchel's house. The record slips showed that the last call had been received at twelve-thirty a.m. on Friday. A cab had been demanded, and was sent, reaching the house at one o'clock. At the stables, Mr. Barnes questioned the cab-driver, and learned that Mr. Mitchel alighted at Madison Square.

"But he got right into another cab," added the driver. "It was just a chance I seen him, 'cause he made as if he was goin' into the Fifth Avenoo; but luck was again him, for I'd scarcely gone two blocks back, when I had to get down to fix my harness, and while I was doin' that, who should I see but my fare go by in another cab."

"You did not happen to know the driver of that vehicle?" suggested Mr. Barnes.

"That's just what I did happen to know. He's always by the Square, along the curb by the Park. His name's Jerry. You'll find him easy enough, and he'll tell you where he took that fly bird."

Mr. Barnes went down town again, and did find Jerry, who remembered driving a man at the stated time, as far as the Imperial Hotel; but beyond that the detective learned nothing, for at the hotel no one knew Mr. Mitchel, and none recollected his arrival early Friday morning.

From the fact that Mr. Mitchel had changed cabs, and doubled on his track, Mr. Barnes concluded that he was after all merely hiding away for the pleasure of baffling him, and he felt much relieved to divest the case of its alarming aspect. However, he was not long permitted to hold this opinion. At the telegraph office he found a cable dispatch awaiting him, which read as follows:

"Montezuma Emerald forwarded Mitchel tenth. Previous owner murdered London eleventh. Mexican suspected. Warned Mitchel."

The Montezuma Emerald

This assuredly looked very serious. Casting aside all thought of a practical joke, Mr. Barnes now threw himself heart and soul into the task of finding Mitchel, dead or alive. From the telegraph office he hastened to the Custom House, where he learned that an emerald, the invoiced value of which was no less than twenty thousand dollars, had been delivered to Mr. Mitchel in person, upon payment of the custom duties, at noon of the previous Thursday. Mr. Barnes, with this knowledge, thought he knew why Mr. Mitchel had been careful to have a friend accompany him to his home on that night. But why had he gone out again? Perhaps he felt safer at a hotel than at home, and, having reached the Imperial, taking two cabs to mystify the villain who might be tracking him, he might have registered under an alias. What a fool he had been not to examine the registry, as he could certainly recognise Mr. Mitchel's handwriting, though the name signed would of course be a false one.

Back, therefore, he hastened to the Imperial, where, however, his search for familiar chirography was fruitless. Then an idea occurred to him. Mr. Mitchel was so shrewd that it would not be unlikely that, meditating a disappearance to baffle the men on his track, he had registered at the hotel several days prior to his permanently stopping there. Turning the page over, Mr. Barnes still failed to find what he sought, but a curious name caught his eye.

"Miguel Palma City of Mexico."

Could this be the London murderer? Was this the suspected Mexican? If so, here was a bold and therefore dangerous criminal who openly put up at one of the most prominent hostelrys. Mr. Barnes was turning this over in his mind, when a diminutive newsboy rushed into the corridor, shouting:

"Extra Sun! Extra Sun! All about the horrible murder. Extra!"

Mr. Barnes purchased a paper and was stupefied at the headlines.

ROBERT LEROY MITCHEL DROWNED! His Body Found Floating in the East River. A DAGGER IN HIS BACK INDICATES MURDER. Mr. Barnes rushed out of the hotel, and, quickly finding a cab, instructed the man to drive rapidly to the Morgue. On the way, he read the details of the crime as recounted in the newspaper. From this he gathered that the body had been discovered early that morning by two boatmen, who towed it to shore and handed it over to the police. An examination at the Morgue had established the identity by letters found on the corpse and the initials marked on the clothing. Mr. Barnes was sad at heart, and inwardly fretted because his friend had not asked his aid when in danger.

Jumping from the cab almost before it had fully stopped in front of the Morgue, he stumbled and nearly fell over a decrepit-looking beggar, upon whose breast was a printed card soliciting alms for the blind. Mr. Barnes dropped a coin, a silver quarter, into his outstretched palm, and hurried into the building. As he did so he was jostled by a tall man who was coming out, and who seemed to have lost his temper, as he muttered an imprecation under his breath in Spanish. As the detective's keen ear noted the foreign tongue an idea occurred to him which made him turn and follow the stranger. When he reached the street again he received a double surprise. The stranger had already signalled the cab which Mr. Barnes had but just left, and was entering it, so that he had only a moment in which to observe him. Then the door was slammed, and the driver whipped up his horses and drove rapidly away. At the same moment the blind beggar jumped up, and ran in the direction taken by the cab. Mr. Barnes watched them till both cab and beggar disappeared around the next corner, and then he went into the building again, deeply thinking over the episode.

He found the Morgue-keeper, and was taken to the corpse. He recognised the clothing at once, both from the description given by Williams, and because he now remembered to have seen Mr. Mitchel so dressed. It was evident that the body had been in the water for several days, and the marks of violence plainly pointed to murder. Still sticking in the back was a curious dagger of foreign make, the handle projecting between the shoulders. The blow must have been a powerful stroke, for the blade was so tightly wedged in the bones of the spine that it

The Montezuma Emerald

resisted ordinary efforts to withdraw it. Moreover, the condition of the head showed that a crime had been committed, for the skull and face had been beaten into a pulpy mass with some heavy instrument. Mr. Barnes turned away from the sickening sight to examine the letters found upon the corpse. One of these bore the Paris post-mark, and he was allowed to read it. It was from the jewellers, and was the letter alluded to in the warning cable. Its contents were:

"Dear Sir As we have previously advised you, the Montezuma emerald was shipped to you on the tenth instant. On the following day the man from whom we had bought it was found dead in Dover Street, London, killed by a dagger-thrust between the shoulders. The meagre accounts telegraphed to the papers here, state that there is no clue to the assassin. We were struck by the name, and remembered that the deceased had urged us to buy the emerald, because, as he declared, he feared that a man had followed him from Mexico, intending to murder him to get possession of it. Within an hour of reading the newspaper story, a gentlemanly-looking man, giving the name of Miguel Palma, entered our store, and asked if we had purchased the Montezuma emerald. We replied negatively, and he smiled and left. We notified the police, but they have not yet been able to find this man. We deemed it our duty to warn you, and did so by cable."

The signature was that of the firm from which Mr. Barnes had received the cable in the morning. The plot seemed plain enough now. After the fruitless murder of the man in London, the Mexican had traced the emerald to Mr. Mitchel, and had followed it across the water. Had he succeeded in obtaining it? Among the things found on the corpse was an empty jewel-case, bearing the name of the Paris firm. It seemed from this, that the gem had been stolen. But if so, this man, Miguel Palma, must be made to explain his knowledge of the affair.

Once more visiting the Imperial, Mr. Barnes made inquiry, and was told that Mr. Palma had left the hotel on the night of the previous Thursday, which was just a few hours before Mr. Mitchel had undoubtedly reached there alive. Could it be that the man at the Morgue had been he? If so, why was he visiting that place to view the body of his victim? This was a problem over which Mr. Barnes puzzled, as he was driven up to the residence of Mr. Mitchel. Here he found Williams, and imparted to that faithful servant the news of his master's death, and then inquired the address of the family abroad, that he might notify them by cable, before they might read the bald statement in a newspaper.

"As they only sailed a week ago to-day," said Williams, "they're hardly more than due in London. I'll go up to the master's desk and get the address of his London bankers."

As Williams turned to leave the room, he started back amazed at the sound of a bell.

"That's the master's bell, Inspector! Someone is in his room! Come with me!"

The two men bounded upstairs, two steps at a time, and Williams threw open the door of Mr. Mitchel's boudoir, and then fell back against Mr. Barnes, crying:

"The master himself!"

Mr. Barnes looked over the man's shoulders, and could scarcely believe his eyes when he observed Mr. Mitchel, alive and well, brushing his hair before a mirror.

"I've rung for you twice, Williams," said Mr. Mitchel, and then, seeing Mr. Barnes, he added: "Ah, Mr. Barnes! You are very welcome. Come in. Why, what is the matter, man? You are as white as though you had seen a ghost."

"Thank God you are safe," fervently ejaculated the detective, going forward and grasping Mr. Mitchel's hand. "Here, read this, and you will understand." He drew out the afternoon paper and handed it to him.

The Montezuma Emerald

"Oh, that!" said Mr. Mitchel carelessly. "I've read that. Merely a sensational lie, worked off upon a guileless public. Not a word of truth in it, I assure you."

"Of course not, since you are alive; but there is a mystery about this which is yet to be explained."

"What? A mystery, and the great Mr. Barnes has not solved it! I am surprised. I am, indeed. But then, you know, I told you after Goldie made a fizzle of our little joke that if I should choose to play the principal part you would not catch me. You see, I have beaten you this time. Confess. You thought that was my corpse which you gazed upon at the Morgue?"

"Well," said Mr. Barnes reluctantly, "the identification certainly seemed complete, in spite of the condition of the face, which made recognition impossible."

"Yes; I flatter myself the whole affair was artistic."

"Do you mean that this whole thing is nothing but a joke? That you went so far as to invent cables and letters from Paris just for the trifling amusement of making a fool of me?"

Mr. Barnes was evidently slightly angry, and Mr. Mitchel, noting this fact, hastened to mollify him.

"No! No! It is not quite so bad as that," he said. "I must tell you the whole story, for there is yet important work to do, and you must help me. No, Williams, you need not go out. Your anxiety over my absence entitles you to a knowledge of the truth. A short time ago I heard that a very rare gem was in the market, no less a stone than the original Emerald which Cortez stole from the crown of Montezuma. The Emerald was offered in Paris, and I was notified at once by the dealer, and authorized the purchase by cable. A few days later I received a dispatch warning me that there was danger. I understood at once, for similar danger has lurked about other large stones which are now in my collection. The warning meant that I should not attempt to get the Emerald from the Custom House until further advices reached me, which would indicate the exact nature of the danger. Later, I received the letter which was found on the body now at the Morgue, and which I suppose you have read?"

Mr. Barnes nodded assent.

"I readily located the man Palma at the Imperial, and from his openly using his name I knew that I had a dangerous adversary. Criminals who disdain aliases have brains, and use them. I kept away from the Custom House until I satisfied myself that I was being dogged by a veritable cut-throat, who, of course, was the tool hired by Palma to rob, perhaps to kill me. Thus acquainted with my adversaries, I was ready for the enterprise."

"Why did you not solicit my assistance?" asked Mr. Barnes.

"Partly because I wanted all the glory, and partly because I saw a chance to make you admit that I am still the champion detective baffler. I sent my wife and daughter to Europe that I might have time for my scheme. On the day after their departure I boldly went to the Custom House and obtained the Emerald. Of course I was dogged by the hireling, but I had arranged a plan which gave him no advantage over me. I had constructed a pair of goggles which looked like simple smoked glasses, but in one of these I had a little mirror so arranged that I could easily watch the man behind me, should he approach too near. However, I was sure that he would not attack me in a crowded thoroughfare, and I kept in crowds until time for dinner, when, by appointment, I met my neighbour Mordaunt, and remained in his company until I reached my own doorway late at night. Here he left me, and I stood on the stoop until he disappeared into his own house. Then I turned, and apparently had much trouble to place my latch-key in the lock. This offered the assassin the chance he had hoped for, and, gliding stealthily forward, he made a vicious stab at me. But, in the first place, I had put on a chain-armour vest, and, in the second, expecting the attack to occur just as it did, I turned swiftly and with one blow with a club I knocked the weapon

The Montezuma Emerald

from the fellow's hand, and with another I struck him over the head so that he fell senseless at my feet."

"Bravo!" cried Mr. Barnes. "You have a cool nerve."

"I don't know. I think I was very much excited at the crucial moment, but with my chain armour, a stout loaded club in one hand and a derringer in the other, I never was in any real danger. I took the man down to the wine cellar and locked him in one of the vaults. Then I called a cab, and went down to the Imperial, in search of Palma; but I was too late. He had vanished."

"So I discovered," interjected Mr. Barnes.

"I could get nothing out of the fellow in the cellar. Either he cannot or he will not speak English. So I have merely kept him a prisoner, visiting him at midnight only, to avoid Williams, and giving him rations for another day. Meanwhile, I disguised myself and looked for Palma. I could not find him. I had another card, however, and the time came at last to play it. I deduced from Palma's leaving the hotel on the very day when I took the Emerald from the Custom House, that it was prearranged that his hireling should stick to me until he obtained the gem, and then meet him at some rendezvous, previously appointed. Hearing nothing during the past few days, he has perhaps thought that I left the city, and that his man was still upon my track. Meanwhile I was perfecting my grand coup. With the aid of a physician, who is a confidential friend, I obtained a corpse from one of the hospitals, a man about my size whose face was battered beyond recognition. We dressed him in my clothing, and fixed the dagger which I had taken from my would-be assassin so tightly in the backbone that it would not drop out. Then one night we took our dummy to the river and securely anchored it in the water. Last night I simply cut it loose and let it drift down the river."

"You knew of course that it would be taken to the Morgue," said Mr. Barnes.

"Precisely. Then I dressed myself as a blind beggar, posted myself in front of the Morgue, and waited."

"You were the beggar?" ejaculated the detective.

"Yes! I have your quarter, and shall prize it as a souvenir. Indeed, I made nearly four dollars during the day. Begging seems to be lucrative. After the newspapers got on the street with the account of my death, I looked for developments. Palma came in due time, and went in. I presume that he saw the dagger, which was placed there for his special benefit, as well as the empty jewel-case, and at once concluded that his man had stolen the gem, and meant to keep it for himself. Under these circumstances he would naturally be angry, and therefore less cautious, and more easily shadowed. Before he came out, you turned up and stupidly brought a cab, which allowed my man to get a start of me. However, I am a good runner, and as he only rode as far as Third Avenue, and then took the Elevated Railroad, I easily followed him to his lair. Now I will explain what I wish you to do, if I may count on you?"

"Assuredly!"

"You must go into the street, and when I release the man in the cellar, you must track him. I will go to the other place, and we will see what happens when the men meet. We will both be there to see the fun."

An hour later, Mr. Barnes was skilfully dogging a sneaking Mexican, who walked rapidly through one of the lowest streets on the East side, until finally he dodged into a blind alley, and before the detective could make sure which of the many doors had allowed him ingress, he had disappeared. A moment later a low whistle attracted his attention, and across in a doorway he saw a figure which beckoned to him. He went over and found Mr. Mitchel.

The Montezuma Emerald

"Palma is here. I have seen him. You see I was right, This is the place of appointment, and the cut-throat has come here straight. Hush! what was that?"

There was a shriek, followed by another, and then silence. "Let us go up," said Mr. Barnes. "Do you know which door?"

"Yes; follow me."

Mr. Mitchel started across, but just as they reached the door footsteps were heard rapidly descending the stairs. Both men stood aside and waited. A minute later a cloaked figure bounded out, only to be gripped instantly by those in hiding. It was Palma, and he fought like a demon, but the long, powerful arms of Mr. Barnes encircled him, and, with a hug that would have made a bear envious, the scoundrel was soon subdued. Mr. Barnes then manacled him, while Mr. Mitchel ascended the stairs to see about the other man. He lay sprawling on the floor, face downward, stabbed in the heart.