

THE MYSTERY  
—OF—  
A HANSON CAB.

BY FERGUS W. HUME.

CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

Madge did not say anything, but could not help thinking that there was more in it than the music. Presently Julia ceased, and she proposed to go in.

"Why?" asked Brian, who was lying back in a comfortable seat, smoking a cigarette. "It's nice enough here."

"I must attend to my guests," she answered rising. "You stop here and finish your cigarette," and with a gay laugh she flitted into the house like a shadow.

Brian sat and smoked, staring out into the moonlight meanwhile. Yes, the man was certainly watching the house, for he sat on one of the seats, and kept his eyes fixed on the brilliantly lighted windows. Brian threw away his cigarette and shivered slightly.

"Could any one have seen me?" he muttered, rising easily. "Pshaw! of course not, and the cabman would never recognize me again, Curse Whyte, I wish I'd never set eyes upon him."

He gave one glance at the dark figure on the seat, and then, with a shiver, passed into the warm, well-lighted room. He did not feel easy in his mind, and he would have felt still less so had he known that the man on the seat was one of the cleverest of the Melbourne detectives.

Mr. Gorby had been watching the Frettlby mansion the whole evening and was getting rather annoyed. Moreland did not know where Fitzgerald lived, and as the detective wanted to find out, he determined to watch Brian's movements and trace him home.

"If he's that pretty girl's lover, I'll wait till he leaves the house," argued Mr. Gorby to himself when he first took his seat on the Esplanade. "He won't stay long away from her, and once he leaves the house, I'll follow him up till I find out where he lives."

When Brian made his appearance early in the evening on his way to Mark Frettlby's mansion, he was in evening dress, with a light coat over it, and also had on a soft hat.

"Well, I'm dashed!" ejaculated Mr. Gorby, when he saw Fitzgerald disappear; "if he isn't a fool I don't know who is, to go about in the very clothes he wore when he polished Whyte off, and think he won't be recognized. Melbourne ain't Paris or London, that he can afford to be so careless, and when I put the darbies on him he will be astonished. Ah, well," he went on, lighting his pipe and taking a seat on the Esplanade. "I suppose I'll have to wait here till he comes out."

Mr. Gorby's patience was pretty severely tried, for hour after hour passed and

no one appeared. Then he saw Madge and Brian come out on the veranda, and heard Miss Featherweight's shrill voice singing, which sounded weird and unearthly in the stillness of the night. He saw Madge go in, and then Brian, the latter turning and staring at him for a minute or so.

"Ah!" said Gorby to himself, relighting his pipe, "your conscience is a-smiting you, is it? Wait till you are in jail."

Then the guests came out of the house and disappeared one by one, black figures in the moonlight, after kisses and handshaking. Shortly afterwards Brian came down the path with Frettlby by his side and Madge hanging on to her father's arm. Frettlby opened the gate and held out his hand.

"Good-night, Fitzgerald," he said in a hearty voice; "come down soon again."

"Good-night, Brian, dearest," said Madge, kissing him, "and don't forget tomorrow."

Then father and daughter closed the gate, leaving Brian outside, and walked back to the house.

"Ah!" said Gorby to himself, "if you only knew what I know, you wouldn't be so precious kind to him."

Brian walked, strolled along the Esplanade, and then crossing over, passed by Gorby and walked on till he was opposite the Esplanade hotel. Then he lighted a cigarette and walked down the steps on to the pier.

"Suicide, is it?" muttered Gorby to himself, as he saw the tall, black figure striding resolutely on, a long way ahead. "Not if I can help it." So he lighted his pipe, and strolled down the pier in an apparently aimless manner.

He found Brian leaning over the parapet at the end of the pier, and looking at the glittering waters beneath, which kept rising and falling in a dreamy rhythm, that soothed and charmed the ear. "Poor girl! poor girl!" the detective heard him mutter as he came up. "If she only knew all! If she

At this moment he heard the approaching step, and turned round sharply. The detective saw that his face was ghastly pale in the moonlight, and his brows wrinkled angrily.

"What the devil do you want?" he burst out, as Gorby paused. "What do you mean by following me all over the place?"

"Saw me watching the house," said Gorby to himself. "I'm not following you, sir," he said aloud. "I suppose the pier ain't private property. I only came down here for a breath of fresh air."

Fitzgerald did not answer, but turned sharply on his heel, and walked quickly up the pier, leaving Gorby staring after him.

"He's getting frightened," soliloquized the detective to himself, as he strolled easily along, keeping the black figure in front well in view. "I'll have to keep a sharp eye on him or he'll be clearing out of Victoria."

Brian walked quickly up to the St. Kilda station, for

on looking at his watch he found he would just have time to catch the last train. He arrived a few minutes before it started, so, getting in to the smoking carriage at the near end of the platform, he lit a cigarette, and, leaning back in his seat, watched late comers hurrying into the station. Just as the last bell rang he saw a man rush along, who seemed likely to miss the train. It was the same man who had been watching him the whole evening, and Brian felt confident that he was following him. He comforted himself, however, with the thought that this pertinacious follower would lose the train, and, being in the last carriage himself, he kept a lookout along the platform, expecting to see his friend of the Esplanade standing disappointed on it. There was no appearance of him, however, so Brian, sinking back into his seat, cursed his ill-luck in not having shaken off the man who kept him under such strict surveillance.

"D—him!" he muttered, softly. "I expect he will follow me to East Melbourne, and find out where I live, but he sha'n't if I can help it."

There was no one in the carriage except himself, on which he felt a sense of relief, for he was in that humor which comes on men sometimes of talking to himself.

"Murdered in a cab," he said, lighting a fresh cigarette, and blowing a cloud of smoke. "A romance in real life, which beats Miss Bradon hollow. There is one thing certain he won't come between Madge and me again. Poor Madge!" with an impatient sigh. "If she only knew all, there would not be much chance of our marriage; but she can never find out, and I don't suppose any one else ever will."

Here a sudden thought struck him, and rising out of his seat, he walked to the other end of the carriage and threw himself on the cushions as if desirous to escape from himself.

"What grounds can that man have for suspecting me?" he said aloud. "No one knows I was with Whyte on that night, and the police can't possibly bring forward any evidence to show that I was. Pshaw!" he went on, impatiently buttoning up his coat. "I am like a child, afraid of my shadow—the fellow on the pier was only some one out for a breath of fresh air as he said himself—I am quite safe."

All the same he did not feel easy in his mind, and when the train arrived at the Melbourne station he stepped out on to the platform with a shiver and a quick look round, as if he expected to feel the detective's hand on his shoulder. He saw no one, however, at all like the man he had met on the St. Kilda pier, and with a sigh of relief, left the station. Mr. Gorby, however, was on the watch, and followed him at a safe distance along the platform. Brian left the station, and walked slowly along Flinders street apparently in deep thought. When he got to Russell street he turned up there, and did not stop until he came close to the Burge and Wills monument, in the

very place where the cab had stopped on the night of Whyte's murder.

"Ah!" said the detective to himself, as he stood in the shadow on the opposite side of the street. "You're going to have a look at it, are you? I wouldn't, if I were you—it's dangerous."

Fitzgerald stood for a few minutes at the corner and then walked up Collins street. When he got to the cabstand, opposite the Melbourne club, still suspecting he was followed, he hailed a hansom and drove away in the direction Spring street. Gorby was rather perplexed at this sudden move, but without delay he hailed another cab and told the driver to follow the first cab till it stopped.

"Two can play at that game," he said, settling himself back in the cab, "and I'll get the better of you, clever as you are—and you are clever," he went on in a tone of admiration, as he looked round the luxurious hansom. "I choose such a convenient place for a murder: no disturbance and plenty of time for escape after you had finished; it's a pleasure going after a chap like you instead of men who tumble down like ripe fruit, and ain't got any brains to keep their crime quiet."

While the detective thus soliloquized his cab, following on the trail of the other, had turned down Spring street and was being driven rapidly along the Wellington parade in the direction of East Melbourne. It then turned up Powlett street, at which Gorby exulted.

"Ain't so clever as I thought," he said to himself. "Shows his nest right off, without any attempt to hide it."

The detective, however, had reckoned without his host, for the cab in front kept driving on, through an interminable maze of streets, until it seemed as if Brian was determined never to stop the whole night.

"Look 'ere, sir!" cried Gorby's cabman, looking through his trapdoor in the roof of the hansom. "How long is this 'ere game a-goin' to last! My 'oss is knocked up, 'e is, and 'is blessed old legs a-givin' away under 'im!"

"Go on! go on!" answered the detective, impatiently: "I'll pay you well."

The cabman's spirits were raised by this, and by dint of coaxing and a liberal use of the silk, he managed to get his jaded horse up to a pretty good pace. They were in Fitzroy by this time, and then both cabs turned out of Gertrude street into Nicholson street, thence passed on to Evelyn street and along Spring street, until Brian's cab stopped at the corner of Collins street, and Gorby saw him alight and dismiss his cabman. He then walked down the street and disappeared into the Treasury gardens.

"Confound it," said the detective, as he got out and paid his fare, which was not by any means a light one, but over which he had no time to argue. "We've come in a circle, and I do believe he lives in Powlett street after all."

He went into the gardens, and saw Brian some distance ahead of him walking rapidly. It was bright moonlight, and he could easily distinguish Fitzgerald by his light coat. He left the gardens by the end gate

Then he went along the Wellington parade, and turned up Powlett street, where he stopped at a house near Cairn's Memorial church, much to Mr. Gorby's relief, who, being like Hamlet, "fat and scant of breath," found himself rather exhausted. He kept well in the shadow, however, and saw Fitzgerald give one final look around before he disappeared into the house then Mr. Gorby, like the Robber Captain in "Ali Baba," took careful stock of the house, and fixed its locality and appearance well in his mind, as he intended to call at it on the morrow.

"What I'm going to do," he said, as he walked slowly back to Melbourne, "is to see his landlady when he's out, and find out what time he came in on the night of the murder. If it fits into the time he got out of Rankin's cab, I'll get out a warrant, and arrest him straight off."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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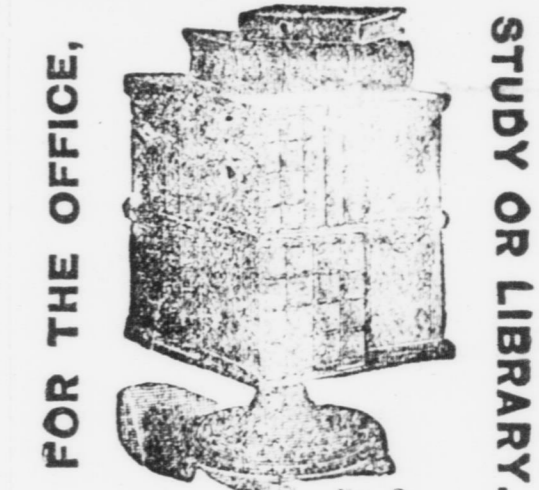
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