

THE MYSTERY —OF— A HANSOM CAE

BY FERGUS W. HUME.

CHAPTER XXII—Continued.

"Brian," she whispered softly, "let it be as you wish. I will never again try and learn this secret, since you do not desire it."

He arose to his feet, and caught her in his strong arms, with a glad smile.

"My dearest!" he said, kissing her passionately, and then, for a few moments neither of them spoke. "We will begin a new life," he said, at length. "We will put the sad past away from us, and only think of it as a dream."

"But the secret will still fret you," she murmured.

"It will wear away with time and with change of scene," he answered sadly.

"Change of scene?" she repeated in a startled tone. "Are you going away?"

"Yes; I have sold my station, and will leave Australia forever during the next three months."

"And where are you going?" asked the girl, rather bewildered.

"Anywhere," he said, a little bitterly. "I am going to follow the example of Cain, and be a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"Alone?"

"That is what I have come to see you about," said Brian, looking steadily at her. "I have come to ask you if you will marry me at once, and we will leave Australia together."

She hesitated.

"I know it is asking a great deal," he said, hurriedly, "to leave your friends, your position, and"—with hesitation—"father; but think of my life without you—think how lonely I shall be wandering round the world by myself; but you will not desert me now I have so much need of you—you will come with me and be my good angel in the future as you have been in the past."

She put her hand on his arm, and looking at him with her clear gray eyes, said: "Yes."

"Thank God for that," said Brian, reverently, and there was again silence.

Then they sat down and talked about their plans, and built castles in the air after the fashion of lovers.

"I wonder what papa will say," observed Madge, idly twisting her engagement ring round and round.

Brian frowned, and a dark look passed over his face.

"I suppose I must speak to him about it," he said at length, reluctantly.

"Yes, of course," she replied, lightly. "It is merely a formality; still, one that must be observed."

"And where is Mr. Frettlby?" asked Fitzgerald, rising.

"In the billiard-room," she answered, as she followed his example.

"No," she continued, as she saw her

father step on to the verandah. "Here he is."

Brian had not seen Mark Frettlby for some time, and was astonished at the change which had taken place in his appearance. Formerly, he had been as straight as an arrow, with a stern, fresh-colored face; but now he had a slight stoop, and his face looked old and withered. His thick black hair was streaked here and there with white, and the only thing unchanged about him were his eyes, which were as keen and bright as ever. Remembering how old his own face looked, and how altered Madge was, now seeing her father, he wondered if this sudden change was traceable to the same source, namely, the murder of Oliver Whyte. Mr. Frettlby's face looked sad and thoughtful as he came along; but catching sight of his daughter, a smile of affection broke over it.

"My dear Fitzgerald," he said, holding out his hand; "this is indeed a surprise! When did you come over?"

"About half an hour ago," replied Brian, reluctantly, taking the extended hand of the millionaire. "I came to see Madge, and have a talk with you."

"Ah! that's right," said the other, putting his arm round his daughter's waist. "So that's what has brought the roses to your face, young lady!" he went on, pinching her cheek playfully. "You will stay to dinner, of course, Fitzgerald?"

"Thank you, no," answered Brian, hastily, "my dress—"

"Nonsense," interrupted Frettlby, hospitably; "we are not in Melbourne, and I am sure Madge will excuse your dress. You must stay."

"Yes, do," said Madge, in a beseeching tone, touching his hand lightly. "I don't see so much of you that I can let you off with half-an-hour's conversation."

Brian seemed to be making a violent effort.

"Very well," he said, in a low voice; "I will stay."

"And now," said Frettlby, in a brisk tone, as he sat down; "the important question of dinner being settled, what is it you want to see me about? Your station?"

"No!" answered Brian, leaning against the verandah post, while Madge slipped her hand through his arm. "I have sold it."

"Sold it!" echoed Frettlby, aghast.

"What for?"

"I felt restless, and wanted a change."

"Ah! a rolling stone," said the millionaire, shaking his head, "gathers no moss, you know."

"Stones don't roll of their own accord," replied Brian, in a gloomy tone. "They are impelled by a force over which they have no control."

"Oh, indeed!" said the millionaire, in a joking tone. "And may I ask what is your propelling force?"

Brian looked at the old man's face with such a steady gaze that the latter's eyes dropped after an uneasy attempt to return it.

"Well," he said, impatiently, looking at the two tall young people standing before him. "What do you want to see me about?"

"Madge has agreed to marry me at once, and I want your consent."

"Impossible," said Frettlby, curtly.

"There is no such word as impossible," retorted Brian, coolly, think-

ing of the famous remark in Riche-lieu. "Why should you refuse? I am rich now."

"Pshaw!" said Frettlby, rising impatiently. "It's not money I'm thinking about—I've got enough for both of you; but I cannot live without Madge."

"Then come with us!" said his daughter, kissing him.

Her lover, however, did not second the invitation, but stood moodily twisting his tawny mustache, and staring out into the garden in an absent sort of manner.

"What do you say, Fitzgerald?" said Frettlby, who was eyeing him keenly.

"Oh, delighted, of course," answered Brian, confusedly.

"In that case," returned the other, coolly, "I will tell you what we will do. I have bought a steam yacht, and she will be ready for sea about the end of January. You will marry my daughter at once, and go round New Zealand for your honeymoon. When you return if I feel inclined, and you two turtle-doves don't object, I will join you, and we will make a tour of the world."

"Oh, how delightful," cried Madge clapping her hands. "I am so fond of the ocean—with a companion, of course," she added, with a saucy glance at her lover.

Brian's face had brightened considerably, for he was a born sailor, and a pleasing yachting voyage in the blue waters of the Pacific, with Madge as his companion, was, to his mind, as near Paradise as any mortal could get.

"And what is the name of the yacht?" he asked, with deep interest.

"Her name," repeated Mr. Frettlby, hastily. "Oh, a very ugly name, and which I intend to change. At present she is called the 'Rosanna.'"

"Rosanna?"

Brian and his betrothed both started at this, and the former stared curiously at the old man, wondering at the coincidence between the name of the yacht and that of the woman who died in the Melbourne slum.

Mr. Frettlby flushed a little when he saw Brian's eye fixed on him with such an inquiring gaze, and arose with an embarrassed laugh.

"You are a pair of moon-struck lovers," he said, gaily, taking an arm of each, and leading them into the house; "but you forget dinner will soon be ready."

CHAPTER XXIII.

Moore, sweetest of birds, sings—

"Oh, there's nothing half so sweet in life

As love's young dream."

But he evidently made this assertion in his callow days, and before he had learned the value of a good digestion. To a young and fervid youth, love's young dream is, no doubt, very charming, lovers, as a rule, having a small appetite, but to a man who has seen the world, and drunk deeply of the wine of life, there is nothing half so sweet in the whole of his existence as a good dinner. "A hard heart and a good digestion will make any man happy."

This remark was made by Talleyrand, a cynic if you like, but a man who knew the temper of his day and generation. Ovid wrote about the art of love—Brillat-Savarin, of the art of dinner; yet, ten to one, the gastronomical treatise of the brill-

iant Frenchman is more widely read than the passionate songs of the Roman poet. Who does not value that hour as the sweetest in the whole

twenty-four when, seated at an artistically laid table, with delicately cooked viands, good wines, and pleasant company, all the cares and worries of the day give place to a delightful sense of absolute enjoyment? Dinner with the English people is generally a very dreary affair, and there is a heaviness about the whole thing which communicates itself to the guests, who eat and drink with a solemn persistence, as though they were occupied in fulfilling some sacred rite. But there are men—alas! few and far between—who possess the rare art of giving good dinners—good in the sense of sociality as well as of cookery. Mark Frettlby was one of these rare individuals—he had an innate genius for getting pleasant people together, who, so to speak, dovetailed into one another. He had an excellent cook, and his wines were ir- reproachable, so that Brian, in spite of his worries, was glad that he had accepted the invitation. The bright gleam of the silver, the glitter of glass, and the perfume of flowers, all collected under the subdued crimson glow of a pink-globed lamp, which hung from the ceiling, could not but give him a pleasurable sensation.

On one side of the dining-room there were French windows opening on to the verandah, and beyond appeared the vivid green of the trees, and the dazzling colors of the flowers, somewhat tempered by the soft hazy glow of the twilight. Brian had made himself as respectable as possible, under the odd circumstances of dining in his riding-dress, and sat next to Madge, contentedly sipping his wine, and listening to the pleasant chatter which was going on around him. Felix Rolleston was in great spirits, the more so as Mrs. Rolleston was at the further end of the table, hidden from his view by an epervre, of fruit and flowers. Julia Featherweight sat near Mr. Frettlby, and chatted to him so persistently, that he wished she would become possessed of a dumb devil.

Dr. Chinston and Paterson were seated on the other side of the table and the old colonist, whose name was Valpy, had the post of honor on Mr. Frettlby's right hand. The conversation had turned on to the subject over green and fascinating of politics, and Mr. Rolleston thought it a good opportunity to air his views as to the government of the colony, and to show his wife that he really meant to obey her wish, and become a power in the political world.

"By Jove, you know," he said, with a wave of his hand, as though he were addressing the House; "the country is going to the dogs, and all that sort of thing. What we want is a man like Beaconsfield."

"Ah! but you can't pick up a man like that every day," said Frettlby, who was listening with an amused smile to Rolleston's disquisitions.

"Rather a good thing too," observed Dr. Chinston, dryly. "Genius would become too common."

"Well, when I am elected," said Felix, who had his own views, which modestly forbade him to publish, on the subject of the coming colonial Disraeli. "I will probably form a party."

"To advocate what?" ask Paterson, curiously.

"Oh, well, you see," hesitated Felix. "I haven't drawn up a programme yet, so can't say at present."

"Yes, you can hardly give a performance without a programme," said the doctor, taking a sip of wine, and then everybody laughed.

"And on what are your political opinions founded?" asked Mr. Frettlby, absently without looking at Felix.

"Oh, you see, I've read the parliamentary report; and constitutional history, and—Vivian Grey," said Felix, who began to feel himself at sea.

"The last of which is what the author called it, *lusus natura*," observed Chinston. "Don't erect your political schemes on such humble foundations as there are in that novel, for you won't find a Marquis Carabas out here."

"Unfortunately, no," observed Felix, mournfully; "but we may find a Vivian Grey."

Every one smothered a smile, the allusion was so patent.

"Well, he didn't succeed in the end," cried Paterson.

"Of course he didn't," retorted Felix, disdainfully; "he made an enemy of the woman, and a man who is such a fool as to do that deserves to fall."

"You have an excellent opinion of our sex, Mr. Rolleston," said Madge, with a wicked glance at the wife of that gentleman, who was listening complacently to her husband's aimless chatter.

"No better than they deserve," replied Rolleston, gallantly.

"But you have never gone in for politics, Mr. Frettlby."

"Who?—I—no," said the host, rousing himself out of the brown study into which he had fallen. "I'm afraid I'm not sufficiently patriotic, and my business did not permit me."

"And now?"

"Now," echoed Mr. Frettlby, glancing at his daughter, "I am going to travel."

"The jolliest thing out," said Paterson, eagerly. "One never gets tired of seeing the queer things there are in the world."

"I've seen queer enough things in Melbourne in the early days," said the old colonist, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh!" cried Julia, putting her hand up to her ears, "don't tell me them, for I'm sure they're naughty."

"We weren't saints then," said old Valpy, with a senile chuckle.

"Ah, then, we haven't changed much in that respect," retorted Frettlby, dryly.

"You talk of your theatres now," went on Valpy, with guarrulousness of old age; "why, you haven't got a danger like Rosanna."

Brian started on hearing this name again, and he felt Madge's cold hand touch his.

"And who was Rosanna?" asked Felix, curiously, looking up.

"A dancer and burlesque actress," replied Valpy, vivaciously nodding his old head. "Such a beauty; we were all mad about her—such hair and eyes. You remember her, Frettlby?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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