

THE STORY BEGAN IN NO. 25.

THE MYSTERY —OF— A HANSOM CAB

BY FERGUS W. HUME.

CHAPTER XXVIII—Continued.

Mrs. Sampson, having at last exhausted herself, went out of the room, and croaked loudly down the stairs, leaving Brian to read his telegram. Tearing open the red marked envelope, it turned out to be from Madge, saying that they had come back to town, and asking him down to dinner that evening. Fitzgerald folded up the telegram, then rising from his seat, walked moodily up and down the room with his hands in his pockets.

"So he is there," said the young man aloud; "and I shall have to meet him and shake hands with him, knowing all the time what he is. If it were not for Madge I'd leave this cursed place at once, but after the way she stood by me in my trouble, I should be a coward if I did so."

It was as Madge had predicted—her father was unable to stay long in one place, and had come back to Melbourne a week after Brian had arrived. The pleasant party at the station was broken up, and, like the graves of a household, the guests were scattered far and wide. Paterson had left for New Zealand en route for the wonders of the Hot Lakes, and the old colonist was about to start for England in order to refresh his boyish memories. Mr. and Mrs. Rolleston had come back to Melbourne, where the wretched Felix was compelled once more to plunge into politics, and Dr. Chinston had resumed his usual routine of fees and patients.

Madge was glad to be back in Melbourne once more, as now that her health was restored she began to have a craving for the excitement of town life. It is now more than three months since the murder, and the nine days' wonder was a thing of the past. The possibility of a war with Russia was now the one absorbing topic of the hour, and the colonies were busy preparing for the attack of a possible enemy. As the Spanish kings had drawn their treasures from Mexico and Peru, so might the White Czar lay violent hands on the golden stores of Australia, but here there were no uncultured savages to face, but the sons and grandsons of men who had dimmed the glories of the Russian arms at Alma and Balaclava. So in the midst of stormy rumors of wars the tragic fate of Oliver Whyte was quite forgotten. After the trial, everyone, including the detective office, had given up the matter, and mentally regulated it to the list of undiscovered crimes. In spite of the utmost vigilance, nothing new had been discovered, and it seemed likely that the assassin of Oliver Whyte would remain a free man. There were only two people in Melbourne who still held the contrary opinion, and they were Calton and Kilsip. Both these men had sworn to discover this un-

known murderer, who struck his cowardly blow in the dark, and though there seemed no possible chance of success, yet they worked on. Kilsip suspected Roger Moreland, the boon companion of the dead man, but his suspicions were vague and uncertain, and there seemed little hope of verifying them. The barrister did not as yet suspect any particular person, though the death-bed confession of Mother Gutersnipe had thrown a new light on the subject, but he thought that when Fitzgerald told him the secret which Rosanna Moore had confided to his keeping, the real murderer would soon be discovered, or, at least, some clue would be found that would lead to his detection. So, as the matter stood at the time of Mark Frettlby's return to Melbourne, Mr. Calton was waiting for Fitzgerald's confession before making a move, while Kilsip worked stealthily in the dark, trying to get evidence against Moreland.

On receiving Madge's telegram, Brian determined to go down in the evening, but not to dinner, so he sent a reply to Madge to that effect. He did not want to meet Mark Frettlby, but did not, of course tell this to Madge, so she had her dinner by herself, as her father had gone in to his club, and the time of his return was uncertain. After dinner, she wrapped a light cloak round her, and went out on to the verandah to wait for her lover. The garden looked charming in the moonlight, with the black, dense cypress trees standing up against the sky, and the great fountain splashing cool and silvery. There was a heavily-foliaged oak just by the gate, and she strolled down the path, and stood under it in the shadow, listening to the whisper and rustle of its multitudinous leaves. It is curious that the unearthly glamour which moonlight seems to throw over everything and though Madge knew every flower, tree, and shrub in the garden, yet they all looked weird and fantastic in the cold, white light. She went up to the fountain, and seating herself on the edge, emased herself by dipping her hand into the chilly water, and letting it fall, like silver rain, back into the basin. While thus engaged, she heard the iron gate open and shut with a clash, and springing to her feet, saw a gentleman coming up the path in a light coat and soft wide-awake hat.

"Oh, it's you at last, Brian!" she cried, as she ran down the path to meet him. "Why did you not come before?"

"Not being Brian, I can't say," answered her father's voice.

Madge burst out laughing. "What an absurd mistake," she cried. "Why, I thought you were Brian."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; in that hat and coat I couldn't tell the difference in the moonlight."

"Oh," said her father, with a laugh, pushing his hat back, "moonlight is necessary to complete the spell, I suppose?"

"Of course," answered his daughter. "If there was no moonlight, alas for lovers!"

"Alas, indeed!" echoed her father. They would become as extinct as the moa; but where are your eyes, Pass, when you take an old man like me for your gay young Lockinvar?"

"Well, really, papa," answered Madge, depreciatingly, "You do look so like him in that coat and hat that I could not tell the difference till you spoke."

"Nonsense, child," said Frettlby, roughly, "you are fanciful"; and turning on his heel, he walked rapidly towards the house, leaving Madge staring after him in astonishment, as well she might, for her father had never spoken so roughly before. Wondering at the cause of his sudden anger, she stood spell-bound, until there came a step behind her, and a soft, low whistle. She turned with a scream, and saw Brian smiling at her.

"Oh, it's you," she said, with a pout, as he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

"Only me," said Brian, ungrammatically; "disappointing isn't it?"

"Oh, fearfully," answered the girl, with a gay laugh, as arm-in-arm they walked towards the house. "But do you know I made such a curious mistake just now; I thought papa was you."

"How strange," said Brian, absently, for indeed he was admiring her charming face, which looked so pure and sweet in the moonlight.

"Yes, wasn't it?" she replied. "He had on a light coat and a soft hat, just like you wear sometimes, and as you are both the same height, I took you for one another."

Brian did not answer, but there was a cold feeling at his heart as he saw a possibility of his worst suspicions being confirmed, for just at that moment there came into his mind the curious coincidence of the man who got into the hansom cab being dressed the same as he was. What if—"Nonsense," he said aloud, rousing himself out of the train of thought the resemblance had suggested.

"I'm sure it isn't," said Madge, who had been talking about something else for the last five minutes. "You are a very rude young man."

"I beg your pardon," said Brian, waking up. "You were saying—"

"That the horse is the most noble of all animals—Exactly."

"I don't understand——" began Brian, rather puzzled.

"Of course you don't," interrupted Madge, petulantly; "considering I've been wasting my eloquence on a deaf man for the last ten minutes, and very likely lame as well as deaf," and to prove the truth of the remark she ran up the path with Brian after her. He had a long chase of it, for Madge was nimble and better acquainted with the garden than he was, but at last he caught her just as she was running up the steps into the house, and then—history repeats itself.

They went into the drawing-room and found that Mr. Frettlby had gone up to his study, and did not want to be disturbed. Madge sat down to the piano, but before she struck a note, Brian took both her hands prisoners.

"Madge," he said gravely, as she turned round, "what did your father say when you made that mistake?"

"He was very angry," she answered. "Quite cross; I'm sure I don't know why."

Brian sighed as he released her hands, and about to reply when the visitors' bell sounded; they heard the servant answer it, and then some one was taken upstairs to Mr. Frettl-

by's study.

When the footman came in to the light the gas, Madge asked who it was that had come to the door.

"I don't know, Miss," he answered; "he said he wanted to see Mr. Frettlby particularly, so I took him up to the study."

"But I thought that papa said he was not to be disturbed?"

"Yes, Miss, but the gentleman had an appointment with him."

"Poor papa," sighed Madge, turning again to the piano. "He has always got such a lot to do."

Left to themselves, Madge began playing Waldteufel's last new waltz, a dreamy haunting melody, with a touch of sadness in it, and Brian, lying lazily on the sofa, listened. Then she sang a gay little French song about Love and a Butterfly, with a mocking refrain, which made Brian laugh.

"A memory of Offenbach," he said, rising and coming over to the piano. "We certainly can't touch the French in writing these airy trifles."

"They're unsatisfactory, I think," said Madge, running her fingers over the keys; "they mean nothing."

"Of course not," he replied, "but don't you remember that De Quincey says there is no moral either big or little in the Iliad, so these light chansons are something similar."

"Well, I think there's more music in Barbara Allen than all those frothy things," said Madge, with fine scorn. "Come and sing it."

"A five-act funeral, it is," groaned Brian, as he arose to obey; "let's have Garry Owen instead."

Nothing else, however, would suit the capricious young person at the piano, so Brian, who had a pleasant voice, sang the quaint old ditty of cruel Barbara Allen, who treated her dying love with such disdain.

"Sir John Graham was an ass," said Brian, when he had finished; "or, instead of dying in such a silly manner, he'd have married her right off, without asking her permission."

"I don't think she was worth marrying," replied Madge, opening a book of Mendelssohn's duets; "or she wouldn't have made such a fuss over her health not being drunk."

"Depend upon it, she was a plain woman," remarked Brian, gravely, "and was angry because she wasn't toasted among the rest of the country belles. I think the young man had a narrow escape myself—she'd always have reminded him about that unfortunate oversight."

"You seem to have analyzed her nature pretty well," said Madge a little dryly; "however, we'll leave the failings of Barbara Allen alone, and sing this."

This was Mendelssohn's duet, "would that my Love," which was a great favorite of Brian's. They were in the middle of it when Madge suddenly stopped, as she heard a loud cry, evidently proceeding from her father's study. Recollecting Dr. Chinston's warning, she ran out of the room, and upstairs, leaving Brian rather puzzled by her unceremonious departure, for though he had heard the cry, yet he did not attach much importance to it.

Madge knocked at the study door, and then she tried to open it, but it was locked.

"Who's there?" asked her father sharply, from inside.

"Only me, papa," she answered. "I thought you were—"

"No! No—I'm all right," replied her father, quickly. "Go down stairs, I'll join you shortly."

Madge went back to the drawing-room only half satisfied with the explanation. She found Brian waiting at the door, with rather an anxious face.

"What's the matter?" he asked, as she paused a moment at the foot of the stairs.

"Papa says nothing," she replied "but I am sure he must have been startled, or he would not have cried out like that."

She told him what Dr. Chinston had said about the state of her father's heart, a recital which shocked Brian greatly. They did not return to the drawing room but went out on to the verandah, where, after wrapping a cloak around Madge, Fitzgerald lit a cigarette. They sat down at the end of the verandah somewhat in the shadow, and could see the hall door wide open, and a warm flood of mellow light pouring therefrom, and beyond the cold white moonshine. After about a quarter of an hour, Madge's alarm about her father having somewhat subsided, they were chatting on indifferent subjects, when a man came out of the hall door, and paused for a moment on the steps of the verandah. He was dressed in a rather fashionable suit of clothes, but, in spite of the heat of the night, had a thick white silk scarf round his throat.

"That's rather a cool individual," said Brian, removing his cigarette from between his lips. "I wonder what—Good God!" he cried, rising to his feet as the stranger turned round to look at the house, and took off his hat for a moment—"Roger Moreland!"

The man started, and looked quickly round into the dark shadow of the verandah where they were seated, then, putting on his hat, ran quickly down the path, and they heard the gate clang after him.

Madge felt a sudden fear at the expression on Brian's face, as revealed by a ray of moonlight streaming full on it.

"Who is Roger Moreland?" she asked, touching his arm—"Ah! I remember," with sudden horror. "Oliver Whyte's friend."

"Yes," in a hoarse whisper, "and one of the witnesses at the trial."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Out of the Breastworks.

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