

The Hollow Ruby.

By JULIAN HAWTHORNE.

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CHAPTER IV.

An hour after sunset Meryon, mounted on a thoroughbred Arab and followed by two camels bearing his luggage, passed out of the gate of the city and set his course towards the west. A good many things had happened since he saw him last.

To set out with this important detail left at loose ends. He was ill at ease and rather cross. He cared more for Ebal than for anyone in the country except Terah, and feared lest some mishap had overtaken him.

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The Boy Was Not to Be Found.

meanwhile it transpired that Hatpha had escaped; when the prince's guards went to get him, he had vanished. It was not surprising; the war scare threw everything into a hubbub. Had the American not been rendered so conspicuous by his mission, he might easily have slipped away from the prince's hands. Late in the afternoon a report that the princess's mother had been taken violently ill added to the confusion. When Meryon went to the prince for his farewell interview, he was half-minded to proclaim and put himself at the head of a revolution, deposing his highness, and assume his throne. The odds were in favor of such a move being successful. Meryon finally resolved against it, from reluctance to be left with a kingdom on his hands so far from New York, and with the home policy still so strong against annexations. He afterward was sorry he had been so fastidious.

He found the prince entirely alone—divested for the moment even of his Nubians. He produced a writing done in minute characters on very thin paper, setting forth that the bearer was the trusted friend of the under-signed, and going on to describe the situation and demand help. When Meryon had finished reading this his highness drew from the folds of his robe a small gold box richly ornamented, and handed it to him. It was a huge ruby, about two inches in length, and shaped like a much elongated egg. Meryon could not repress an exclamation of surprise; such a stone was never before seen; it could not be bought for a room full of rubies.

"The prince smiled at it between his fingers, and it came apart; it had been cut in two and hollowed out, and the parts made to screw together. The letter was now rolled up and inserted into this precious box; so there was a vast fortune and a message. His highness then handed it to Meryon. "Do you expect me to take the responsibility of lugging a bomb-shell like that about the country?" demanded the latter, recoiling.

"Do not be nervous against him who carries it," replied the other. "It is a talisman, the greatest treasure of my dynasty; till now no unbeliever has ever seen it; judge then of the confidence I repose in you! When you arrive here with the army of my great-great-grandfather, I will in return give you my other greatest treasure—my daughter, the princess Terah—to be the bride of your heart and the queen of your harem."

"This old pointer-pigeon," said Meryon to himself, "has been smart enough to see that by putting me upon him he can get the best of me. He has me on toast. I must countermand the orders for the eloquent, and play straight ball! These orientals are too much for us after all. Kismet! Hand it over, then," he added aloud, as if the precious object were a chocolate caramel.

"How will you carry it?" asked his highness. "In my waistcoat pocket, of course," replied the American, nonchalantly stuffing it into that receptacle.

"Perhaps it is as well as," said his highness, thoughtfully. "If danger threatens you can readily swallow it." He added, "Remember, Meryon Pacha, it is worth the ransom of a kingdom." "What? this thing?" exclaimed Meryon, slipping his pocket with a contemptuous smile. "Bless you, the boys where I come from use things like this for sinkers when they go fishing! Good-by!"

On returning to his apartments he sent for Ebal to tell him of his changed purposes. The boy was not to be found. The hour for starting came, and still no Ebal. After waiting till the last possible moment he was forced

to set out with this important detail left at loose ends. He was ill at ease and rather cross. He cared more for Ebal than for anyone in the country except Terah, and feared lest some mishap had overtaken him.

The party consisted of two camels with their drivers—one of whom was the guide—loaded with Meryon's luggage, and his horse, an Arab, a thoroughbred Arab. The twenty miles to the border was traversed without incident. As they crossed the line the moon rose, in its third quarter, throwing their long black shadows before them on the sandy plain. Its light also dimly revealed the apex of the head of a rock rising in the distance, and where it was still Meryon's intention to camp for the night.

Meanwhile, he anticipated being stopped by the officers of customs, for his passport, which was in readiness; he was in a hurry to get away. An hour's further travel brought them to the great rock. The picturesque of the scene pleased Meryon's artist eye.

The rock was of a roughly conical shape, about a hundred feet high. It was in its center a bare plain; but around it, in its base, lay the waters of a spring which bubbled from the ground and filled a wide stone basin, was a grove of tall palms and great hemispherical mangos. All was silent and deserted in the silent moonlight. In the base of the rock was a narrow opening leading to a small cave or cell, formerly, according to tradition, occupied by a saint and hermit of supernatural powers. Meryon looked into it, and saw a space about eight feet in diameter, hewn out of the solid rock. By hearing a few loose stones in the cave he might have supposed a dungeoned more secure than a chamber in a New York safe-deposit company's vault.

The animals were watered and fed. The camels squatted down in their usual absurd fashion with their legs tucked up in the air, and their heads parallel with the horizon. The drivers curled up beside them and promptly went to sleep. Meryon did not feel sleepy. He wandered about, and speculating over what had happened, and speculating as to might be to come.

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came up rapidly; yet, in that strange light, he distinguished him. At times he utterly vanished, like a phantom; then he reappeared, shadow-like; but each time nearer. All at once, as it were, up he rode in flesh and blood. Yes, it was Ebal.

"Well, my boy, you didn't get her?" said Meryon, stepping up. Ebal was evidently much exhausted; he reeled in the saddle, and would have tumbled off if Meryon had not caught him. "Why, you poor little kid!" muttered he, compassionately.

Then he gave a sudden start, and stared in the youth's face. Ebal's soot-black hair, his eyes and features; but this supple young body which his arms held was the body, not of a boy, but of a girl! He almost dropped her in astonishment.

"Terah! What, Terah? Well, by the great horn spoon! Why, you cunning little sweetest!" Here he kissed her. "Tuckered out, eh? I should think she might! And all alone! What became of Ebal?"

The princess was nearly at the end of her tether. Being an oriental, she did not faint; that art is little understood in the east. But she rested in her lover's arms like a little sack of soft peaches, and did not in the least resent his demonstrations of affection.

"Light of my soul," she murmured, "am I safe? Oh, I am so thirsty—and hungry! Oh, such a ride! That hard saddle—I can hardly move my legs! Are we alone? It's so strange being without a veil! These men's clothes—how I must look!"

Meryon set her down on a pile of rugs beside the spring. He got a bottle of wine and some food, and made her as comfortable as he could. "You look like an angel," he said, "though not like a male one, in spite of that rig. You're feminine, my dear, inside and out. Luckily that Arab streak in you is an ass. But what about Ebal? What's the matter that he didn't escort you?"

"The princess, whom the wine was beginning to restore, laughed faintly, as a school-boy over some bit of coyness. "We exchanged dresses and places, lord of my heart," said she. "Ah, I often wished, before I got here, that I was safe back among the soft cushions again. But now I am glad; and when I have smoked some cigarettes and had a good long sleep, I shall be all right."

"This is going to be the devil," thought Meryon, (referring to the situation.) "Here she is dressed like my footboy and acting like the princess! We ought to be off in an hour, and she's hooked herself for a nine-hours' nap. Handled getting his army over the Alps was nothing to my getting this girl over fifty miles of flat plain. I must try fixing her a bed on camel back, and letting the beast rock her to sleep. And Ebal—by the way, Terah," he said aloud, "how is it about Ebal? Do you mean he has taken your place as princess in the harem? But he'll be found out, won't he? and what'll they do with him then?"

"Where are the cigarettes?" demanded the princess. "Ebal! Oh, the devil! He'll invade him, I suppose, or perhaps, since he's so young, he will look into it, and saw a space about eight feet in diameter, hewn out of the solid rock. By hearing a few loose stones in the cave he might have supposed a dungeoned more secure than a chamber in a New York safe-deposit company's vault.

provident to inquire how much one ought to save before facing the question of what one can possibly do without. Here the people who are said to have too much for their own good have an advantage over the rest of us. The future of their children is secure. If they dread death it is not because they fear to leave their wives and children unprotected. For many of them go on saving just the same, and talk poor of a railroad lowers a dividend, or there is not a ready market for their real estate at an exalted price. Are there more irritating men or women in the world than the over-conscientious persons of large means who are perpetually harping on saving, and worrying lest they may not be able to put by for a rainy day, as they call it, 25 per cent. or the capitalist careworn by solicitude of this sort is the one fool in creation who is not entitled to some morsel of pity.

BISMARCK'S DIPLOMACY.

He Found a Way to Outwit His Austrian Opponent.

Several weeks ago, when the first rumors of the Dreyfus espionage scandal were canvassed in high political circles, writes a Paris correspondent of the Philadelphia Times, I met here Count Herbert Bismarck, who was on his way from England to Berlin, and thence to Varzin, where he found his venerable mother dying. He told me a characteristic anecdote how his father, the Iron Chancellor, used to guard against spies as a necessary evil.

"While Prussia plenipotentiary at the federal council in Frankfurt," so ran the count's story, "father became aware that his Austrian colleague was unusually well informed about his diplomatic intentions. 'He opens my dispatches and reads my telegrams,' he said to himself. 'The postoffice authorities are undoubtedly adding him in by delivering up official-looking mail to him.' Then he set to thinking. The matter," he went on, "was not to be neglected. He wrote out on ordinary letter paper, instead of regulation foolscap, then donned an old overcoat and a pair of heavy gloves and walked to the oldest and poorest quarter of the city, where he entered a little grocery store. 'Do you sell soap?' he asked the clerk.

"Certainly," was the answer. "Give me a cake of the strong smelling sort." After this father turned, as if to go, then, recollecting himself, he asked for an envelope. He took his pen and attempted to write the address, which, with the heavy gloves he wore, was, of course, impossible. He begged the clerk, or storekeeper, to help him out, dictating the address to him. The letter he placed in this pocket, next to the soap, then wandered to another part of the city and mailed it.

"With its antediluvian envelope, the comical address and the whole smelling of soap, herring, cheese and oil," said father, "neither the Frankfurt postoffice thieves nor the Austrian spy-phiduchers got at it, and my secrets thereafter."

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