

....MY FRIEND THE MANIAC....

"I must say, it seems like tempting Providence," said Redmond.

"With a thousand dollars? And most of that in non-convertible checks?" I laughed.

Redmond smiled dubiously. "It's a foolish thing to do on the face of it, Morgan."

"Nonsense. I've slept with that box under my bed for five months. You ought to know by this time that a Jamaica dandy would not dare to steal so much."

"There was no time to be lonely all day, but when I had finished dinner that evening, after once more assuring myself as to the lack of my unread novels, had subsided with my pipe into a steamer chair, the house began to seem rather desolate."

Having nothing to do I went to bed early, noting that there was a storm coming up—apparently a heavy one, from the water bank of clouds off to the east. The mosquitoes evidently missed my companions as much or more than I, for they were wailing and lamenting so loudly that my little room seemed full of them, and every now and then they would make a desperate attempt to appease their hunger on quarter rations, so that, between these assaults and suitriness, sleep came reluctantly.

Redmond's warning seemed silly, however, as I cared for money robbery so little that we never thought of closing the outside doors a night in good weather.

I had just fallen into a dozy, stupid state, after a long vigil, when I was startled by the sound of voices in front of the house. Hastily rising, I listened again, but could hear nothing. Ordinarily the occurrence would have made little impression upon me. But Redmond's uncomfortable doubts had somewhat shaken my calm sense of security after all. It could not be the servants, for they were on the other side, and all of them slept like logs, as I had often discovered when wanting some one to take care of my horse late at night.

Standing there in perplexed uncertainty, I suddenly caught my breath as a subdued shuffling noise came from the office. I stole cautiously to the shelf in the corner, picked up the six-shooter with which I had been practicing that afternoon, and felt around for the box of cartridges. It seemed strange enough to remember afterwards that I did not begin to be really alarmed until I discovered how shaky my hands were. When I had opened the door, I started back as I entered the office at the far end, since the sound had seemed to come from the corner by my door. The moon was behind the clouds, leaving the room in a dark, gloomy light. I stepped slowly along in my bare feet, fearing to run against a chair.

I had reached a point which I judged to be about the center of the room, and, having heard nothing, had almost persuaded myself that it was all fancy on my part, when there was a rattle and movement apparently ten or twelve feet ahead. I stopped short, with the hair on my head feeling alive and the rest of me feeling dead—all but my spine, up which cold chills were running in a most unnerving way, and my heart, which had begun to thump like a paving-hammer. I was horribly scared. If the thing had been visible, it would have been a comparatively simple matter to tackle it, man or beast, with a good pistol, but the impenetrable blackness and the diabolical possibilities conjured up by a vivid imagination were almost overpowering.

They were in danger of losing their separate identity, and there was a strange light in his little eyes. "Decidedly crazy," I thought to myself, for he had taken no notice whatever of me since the lamp had been lit. Presently he drew a huge red bandanna handkerchief from his pocket and began to dust the sleeve of his coat. I drew back in disgust, for the peculiar look of his hands was due to the fact of his having no thumbs, not even stumps.

He glanced up quickly at my motion. "Ah, you don't like muck? I do. It makes me think of the musk-dons at my old home—and then he couldn't bear muck."

"You are an American?" I ventured. "Yes, sir, it was my fortunate lot to be born under the shadow of the eagle's wing. I am one of that grand nation of sixty million—at least they have souls, but I haven't."

This was becoming more than interesting. "No soul, you say? That is very singular."

"Singular!" He rose from his chair in his excitement. "Singular! Well, I should think so. Why, my dear sir, there isn't a museum manager in the states who wouldn't be glad to give me a hundred dollars a day. Think of it—'The Man Without a Soul' in huge red letters on a gilt background. And what is more, sir, here is the place it was taken out of."

His voice sank to a confidential whisper and he rapidly unbuttoned his shirt. Glancing around cautiously, he held it open, and the lamp-light fell upon a ghastly, livid scar right across his breast. I was quite sure by this time that he was mad. How he had strayed to this out-of-the-way place in the mountains, fifteen miles from the nearest railway station and as far from the northern coast, was a mystery, but clearly the wise plan was to humor him.

"Pray, tell me," I said politely, "how you happened to lose it?"

His eyes sparkled. "With pleasure; but may I light a cigarette first?"

He offered me a cigar, which he accepted, and I took one myself. The storm had arrived and the rain was beginning to patter down outside. My companion resumed his seat and lit his cigar, thus again showing those thumbless hands, the sight of which made me shudder. Crossing his legs, he puffed away for a moment and began:

"I was there a week he seemed to be always busy about something. Would go off as soon as he'd finished his breakfast, and I'd never see him again till supper-time. I thought it over day after day while the lamp had been lit. It was astonishing how much thinking a man will do, sir, with the lines around his wrist and the plow running smooth—and one day I had a kind of instinct to go over to Maggie's. So I left the horses right there in the stable, and went across the fields, till I came to their garden. Then I crept in behind the rose-bushes and got close to the summer-house—and there they were, sir, he with his arm around her waist and she resting her head on his shoulder."

"But I'm engaged to my brother," I heard her say.

"That may be," says he, "but you're going to marry me," and then they both laughed.

I went back and finished my plover. Next day it was hot, awful hot. "Bill," I says to him, "let's go for a swim this morning."

"All right, old stick-in-the-mud," he cries out, in his hearty way. "I didn't know you dared stop plover for half a day, for fear you'd forget how."

"We went to the creek and swam around for an hour or so. Then he said he was going out and turned over on his back to float, shutting his eyes on account of the sun, and I swam up beside him and hit him with all my might on the temple and held him, stunned as he was, under the water till he drowned."

I had forgotten to smoke in my attention to his story. At the last words I sprang to my feet with an exclamation of horror. Then I realized that the fellow was certainly crazy, and resumed my seat, but the ghastly connectiveness of the story was so convincing that I could hardly believe it was not all true. The narrator went on with no sign that he had noticed my movements.

"I dragged the body to the bank and lay down beside it with the feet all in spirits rose. I vowed I would catch the thieves at any cost. One after another the familiar mileposts were passed at a steady trot, and at quarter to seven we swung around the sharp turn and were in the town of Bog Walk. I saw some breakfast, had my mar, but to the train, and an hour later was spinning along in the same direction."

We made the first nine miles in just an hour, which was remarkable time, considering the fearful hills. My spirits rose. I vowed I would catch the thieves at any cost. One after another the familiar mileposts were passed at a steady trot, and at quarter to seven we swung around the sharp turn and were in the town of Bog Walk. I saw some breakfast, had my mar, but to the train, and an hour later was spinning along in the same direction."

streaming in over my face. It took a few seconds to get my eyesight straightened out in my mind, but present recollection of the strange narrative I was expecting. When one has been in the bush five months, any sort of break in the monotony is welcome. Their adventures were so promising, so quite out of the ordinary. There was no noise from the next room, so I concluded that Dr. Barclay was not up yet, and I dressed quietly for fear of disturbing him. Walking out into the office, I saw to my surprise that his door was open. With a sudden suspicion I stepped inside—there were the wet clothes in a pile on the floor, but the room was empty. A glance into the opposite room showed that the only man there was gone. Swiftly I ran back to my own apartment—the tin box was not there!

I was so overcome by this discovery that I weakly sat down on the bed for an instant, but a flood of rage and indignation swept over me. I took down the hill I took to the old woods. The soft clay held the wheel marks like wax; no tracks to look inside—there were the tracks leading out and down to the main road, and then turning with a sharp curve to the right. So they were bound for Kingston, and a two-horse buggy. Back to the house I ran as fast as my legs would carry me, and, panting for breath, caught up a copy of the cleaner, "Sailing from Kingston, from Kingston for New York, the Albia, at 2 p. m., Wednesday." I looked at my watch; it was already half-past seven, and there were forty miles and a range of mountains between me and the city.

"Murphy!" I called. "Murphy!" "Yes, wukmahsa, my son, suh." "Saddle Brutus and start for Bog Walk with six quarts of corn. Lively about it now, I want you to be away from here in ten minutes."

"Yes, wukmahsa, my son, suh." "When you get there, rub him down and feed him—two quarts. I'll be along by the time he finishes and will go on with him."

"Yes, suh," and in a few minutes I saw him make his way down the steep path, but the fellow couldn't loosen some breakfast, had my mar, but to the train, and an hour later was spinning along in the same direction."

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Goodwin, coming forward. "What in the mischief does all this mean? I thought you were cleaning out makka way back there in the bush."

"So I was, but two of my countrymen cleaned me out last night. Tin box with a thousand dollars. I've chased them all the way. They're on board."

"How do you know they are?" "This staggered me for an instant. They must be—they're bound to be," I cried. "They came to Kingston, and they weren't born yesterday, I can tell you. They knew their only chance was to get off before the news arrived. Come along; we haven't much time now."

We stepped up the gang-plank and on deck. There were fifteen or twenty passengers aft, but my friends were not among them, so we started forward.

"There they are! There they are!" I whispered excitedly, as I saw leaning against the port rail two men, one very tall, the other ridiculously short. Their backs were toward us, but I knew those figures, despite the fact that they were dressed in other clothes. We stepped briskly up.

"I arrest you in the queen's name," said Goodwin, laying his hand on the tall one's shoulder. The both wheeled like a flash and I was dumfounded to see that they looked entirely different from my visitors. Both had beards, the large man's brushing his chest, and their faces were totally unlike the ones I remembered so well. My jaw dropped and I gazed from one to the other in stupid astonishment.

"What the devil does this mean?" said the little man, fiercely.

"See here, Morgan," began Goodwin in a dignified tone, observing my amazement; "you don't mean to say—"

But I had glanced at the tall man's hands. He wore gloves and the thumbs looked very stiff and woody. I grabbed the one near me—it was stunted.

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