

# The Yellow Man..

## A STORY OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE MAN WITH THE STRANGE EYES.

Being more or less of a dutiful son it is with no little compunction that I begin this narrative, for it nearly concerns my father, and I fear he will come none too well out of the ordeal. Yet what I have to relate is so remarkable that for its singularity alone I may hope to be pardoned any lack of filial piety. And perhaps, when all is said and done, my father, though he may not cut an irreproachable figure, may appear not quite a contemptible one. It must not be forgotten that I only knew the wreck of him; the stout ship that had battled with so many tempests in so many seas was to me practically unknown. Yet, from what I have since heard, there was a time when the name of Captain Bob Kingston was respected in very strange company—when his mere entrance into a public place caused men to nod and each other and whisper low, when from Hakodade down to the Torres Strait his name was common property. But that was long ago, long before the Terror had seized him.

My personal knowledge of him up to my seventeenth year was extremely slight, for, with rare intervals, he spent the whole of that period at sea. Sometimes he was away for two or three years together, and once he staid abroad for five years at a stretch. To me his absence meant little or nothing. Had it not been for my mother's talk of him I should have forgotten his very existence. To my imagination he seemed almost a myth, a sort of Flying Dutchman, who was forever battling with stormy seas. But to her, of course, he was still the man to whom she had pledged her troth, and often had I caught her poring over her album, in which were at least a dozen portraits of him. And though at first I did not know that her hazy closing of the book meant I have still a vivid recollection of her great, sad eyes as she turned them up to me—eyes full of a painful, inquiring pathos. Sometimes I thought the scrutiny satisfied her, at others she turned away with a sigh which I failed to read. Perhaps in those days I did not try very hard—for what his a boy to do with the inner thoughts of women—but it all comes back now, and I read the meaning of those looks as I would a written page.

But, boy as I was, I soon knew that his long absences preyed upon her mind. Never once did I hear her murmur a word against him, and whenever she spoke of him it was always with a glowing satisfaction, just as one sees a face light up at the resurrection of a pleasant memory. But it was a faroff memory and one charged with ineffable sadness.

It was mainly through my Uncle Jim, my mother's brother, that I first learned to suspect my father of not being the best of husbands. But when I broached the subject to her she declared quite angrily that it would become Uncle Jim better if he were to find his own business. And yet this I know he continued to believe was his business, for he loved his sister very dearly, and so time he might be near her he had lately taken a cottage on the Maidenhead road, a little the other side of Slough.

We lived between Slough and Windsor, a bit back from the road that branches off to Datchet. Here father had brought my mother shortly after their marriage, and there I was born. There I lived during the whole of my young life, and it was there my father spent the few weeks he could spare from the sea. I have but slight recollection of him at that time, for on the occasion of his last visit to us I was only 8 years old. I know he brought some queer lace and silks and me some queer eastern toys—dolls from Japan, idols and the like from Burma and Siam and a wonderful kale from China which was the envy and admiration of every boy in the neighborhood. Then I thought my mother's face changed, and she looked young and pretty again. Not that she could ever have been anything but pretty with her wonderful brown eyes, her masses of black hair and her soft, sweet face, but I suppose the joyous happiness heightened the effect of the mere physical beauty.

Then came the parting, and for days before a melancholy fell upon the house, while for days after she would move about like one in a dream. At first the letters came with commendable regularity, and with a glad face she used to read extracts to me. Now he was in Japan, now in Java and now at Thursday Island. It seems he had a boat of his own and used to trade between the China seas and the northern coasts of Australia. That he was a shrewd business man as well as a capable sailor I had no doubt, for though we did not live in luxury, we had never a monetary trouble. No, it was not the want of money that gradually paled my mother's cheek and gave her that wistful, far-off look; it was not for money that she watched the postman come down the road week in and week out.

As the years slipped on the letters came at rarer intervals. Once we did not hear from him for ten months, and then it was only a short note to say that he had just returned from a long voyage in the Pacific and that he was about to undertake a mission in the interior of China. We were not to expect to hear from him for a long time, and sure enough he kept us waiting for 18 months. Then came a letter inclosing a draft for a very large sum of money and an intimation that we were to expect him in the shortly. But

his next communication, received some months later, informed us that he had changed his mind and that he was about to set out on a voyage to Fiji. Then at varied intervals came short notes from the most unexpected places. He seemed to have become a man with no fixed trading route, but bobbed about hither and thither, a victim to a most fantastical caprice. Uncle Jim growled. He saw the gray sorrow saddening his sister's face.

And so the long months ran into years—long months for her who watched, but for me months of youth and health and general contentment. I went to a capital school, at which it was rumored that I succeeded famously with my studies, but I regret to say that I grew so accustomed to the sad faced woman who watched the postman go by morning and evening that I failed to notice those signs which an older eye would surely have observed. Moreover, pale or not, she was just the sweetest, dearest woman in the world.

About this time we saw a lot of my Uncle Jim, and I think I lavished on him all that love which should have been given to my father. He was my mother's only brother and in his soft, kind way was as like her as it was possible for a man to be like a woman. He had reached the age of 40 and was still a bachelor, a love trouble in early life having caused him to eschew the sex. Mother told me all about it one day, and, loving her brother as she did, you may be sure she did not spare the girl who had trifled with his affections. It was the old, old story. The girl threw him over and married a brewer. Jim hated her ever after and tried hard to persuade himself that he loathed the sex.

I never exactly knew what he was beyond the fact that, like many thousands of his countrymen, he was "in the city." I rather imagine he had something to do with promoting companies, he used to talk so much about directors, prospectuses and that sort of thing, and I have seen him laugh heartily as he read out the names on the front page of a prospectus and grin comically at the gullibility of the public. All the same, I am inclined to think that he had done his share of the gulling and that the smart dogcart he drove and the hunter he rode had come out of the capacious pocket of the public. Be this as it may, he had been

wise in his time and retired before Nemesis overtook him. He used proudly to proclaim that he had hidden adieu to all worry and strife and that the future opened before him a lone smiling vista in which there was no shadow of a cloud. He foresaw nothing but a peaceful, uneventful life. He thanked heaven that he had no wife to worry him, no selfish children to darken his few remaining years. That is what the professed cynic used to say, what he hoped for, no doubt, but what he was not fated to enjoy. Sundry incidents were about to happen which would knock all the smiling self complacency out of Mr. James Davie and plunge him into a very sea of trouble.

For fully seven years I had not seen my father in the flesh, and I was now a big boy of 15, somewhat tall for my age, but giving promise of doing well in the future. And it was in this year that my troubles began, and I remember now, as distinctly as though it had only happened yesterday, that first meeting with the yellow man.

I was home for the holidays at the time and was doing a little work in our front garden when I heard the click. Looking up, I saw a man slowly push it open, carefully close it and then, with a very deferential air, advance toward me. As he raised his hat to speak I noticed that he had coal black hair, that his skin was very dark and foreign looking and that he had strange, dark eyes.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "does Captain Kingston live here?"

Though the English was remarkably pure, there was just a suspicion of foreign intonation in his voice.

"Yes," said I.

"And is the captain at home?"

"No, sir; he is in China."

The strange eyes peered up from under the strange lids, lids of which the skin seemed to be drawn up in the mere physical beauty.

Then came the parting, and for days before a melancholy fell upon the house, while for days after she would move about like one in a dream. At first the letters came with commendable regularity, and with a glad face she used to read extracts to me. Now he was in Japan, now in Java and now at Thursday Island. It seems he had a boat of his own and used to trade between the China seas and the northern coasts of Australia. That he was a shrewd business man as well as a capable sailor I had no doubt, for though we did not live in luxury, we had never a monetary trouble. No, it was not the want of money that gradually paled my mother's cheek and gave her that wistful, far-off look; it was not for money that she watched the postman come down the road week in and week out.

which I could not quarrel. After all, the man would naturally be a little disappointed. It is poor fun to travel a good 20 miles to see a man and then not find him at home. And yet where could he have seen my father and how did he know he was coming home?

The man, looking at me very hard, said, "Pardon me, but are you Captain Kingston's son?"

"Yes, sir."

"His only son?"

"His only child."

"You are not much like your father."

"You know him well then?"

"Very intimately. Indeed, we were great friends in Australia."

"But you are not an Australian?"

"I knew well he was not, but his nationality vexed me, and I hoped that he might vouchsafe the information."

"No, but I sometimes have business there."

He regarded me intently, measuring me from head to foot, his strange eyes seeming to take in every particular of my face and dress. And this he did without speaking, a proceeding with which I was not at all pleased, which, moreover, was beginning to render me extremely uncomfortable.

"I am sorry my father is not here," I said, "but if you will leave your name I will tell my mother to mention you the next time she writes."

"You have no idea when your father will return?"

"None," I said shortly, a little annoyed at the way he ignored the suggestion that he should tell me his name.

"Ah, that's a pity! Perhaps you mother knows?"

"Is she in?"

"I think so."

In fact, I knew so, but the man's questioning was not at all to my liking, and I felt suspicious. I hardly knew why. But he seemed to ignore my restraint and with a calm survey of the garden and the house remarked that we had a very pretty place, and he wondered why Captain Kingston preferred to roam so much abroad.

That, I was nearly saying, was my father's business, but at that moment my mother appeared at the door and called to me.

"At once advanced toward her, the stranger following."

"This gentleman has just called to see father," I explained, pointing to the stranger, who raised his hat and bowed very low.

My mother honored him with an uncommonly sharp scrutiny, and then I thought her lips tightened and she drew a shade paler.

"I am sorry to say Captain Kingston is still abroad," she answered, and her voice was cold and distant and startlingly unlike her usual tone.

"I regret it exceedingly," said the man. "I expected to find him here."

She did not answer, but stared at him in a way which I failed utterly to comprehend. So I chipped in with:

"This gentleman met father in Australia."

"Australia!" she echoed, her eyes growing wider.

"I may have been mistaken, but I thought the echo was more like a gasp."

"Yes," she said, a curiously familiar smile playing round the corners of his mouth. "We were good friends out there. He gave me his address when he knew I was coming to England. I quite understood from what he said that he would have arrived by this."

He spoke easily and with the same meaning smile, but his strange eyes played all over my mother, and I saw how deeply they affected her.

"I am sorry," she said hastily, giving me the impression of a woman exceedingly embarrassed, and backing toward the door at the same time. "Who shall I say called?"

"Oh, it is immaterial," he replied. "I am sure to meet him when he returns."

With that he raised his hat once more, bowed very politely in a distinctly foreign fashion and sauntered down the pathway.

My mother and I immediately entered the house and shut the door. That done, she sprang through the hall into the dining room and across to the window. I at her heels. The stranger had just shut the gate and was taking a survey of the house. Seeing us, he raised his hat once more, smiled and then disappeared down the road.

CHAPTER II.

THE SIGN OF THE HIDDEN MEANING.

For a full five minutes after the man had disappeared she stood stock still against the window peering intently through the curtain. Then she threw herself back into the nearest armchair, with a sigh, and as I looked at her I saw that she was very pale and evidently greatly agitated.

"Why, you are going to faint," I said. "What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing, nothing," she gasped. "Then, 'Dave, Dave, has he gone?'"

"Of course," I answered, "long ago. Why?"

But she seemed plunged in thought and did not answer. Presently she looked up at me and said, "Did I betray myself?"

I had to admit that she had acted in a way that was strange to her. It was the first time I had ever seen any one come to our door who had been treated with such scant courtesy. Usually the most hospitable of women, she seemed suddenly to have lost that polite consideration for others which I had always associated with her. And the more surprising was it in this instance, as the man came as a friend of her husband. Upon my mentioning this she suddenly burst out with: "But he is no friend, Dave. Be sure of that."

Surprised, I questioned her, and after some hesitation she drew a letter from her breast and favored me with a curious, confiding look.

"This letter I received from your father this morning," she said. "Read it and tell me what you think of it. You are big enough now to understand."

Her looks and her manner of speaking impressed me so strangely that it was with a feeling of trepidation I began a perusal of the letter. It bore

neither address nor date, but the stamp on the envelope showed it had been posted in Ballarat. What he, a sailor man, was doing at that inland town of Australia he did not explain. And, truth to tell, so strange a man was he that a letter from him dated from the north pole or the mountains of the moon would have astonished us but little.

After expressing regret at his unavoidable absence and telling in no uncertain language the intense longing he had to behold his wife and child once more, he became mystic, vague and hinted at certain misfortunes which dogged the steps of the most deserving, from which I gathered he and fate were not on the best of terms. Then from vague generalities he descended to particulars and informed us that he had quarreled with some former friends who had become his bitterest enemies and who had sworn to be revenged on him. He did not fear them himself, but he begged my mother to treat with suspicion any one who said he came from him. After warning her in words which I but vaguely understood he concluded: "Guard yourself well until I come. It will not be long now, as I have finished my last voyage. Be careful whom you entertain, with whom you travel. Suspect your own shadow."

This was sufficiently vague to be alarming. As I handed the letter back to her I saw more clearly the fear in her face, but the questioning look she gave me remained unanswered. What could I say; what advice could a boy of 15 give? To be sure it was plain enough that my father had made enemies, but I had no doubt whatever that he was capable of taking care of himself. How his quarrel could personally affect me or my mother I was at a loss to comprehend. Therefore I returned her inquiring look with one equally uncomprehending.

"Perhaps you can understand now why the sudden appearance of this stranger upset me. What if he is your father's enemy, what if he is seeking to do him an injury? Heaven knows," she continued, "what it all means, but your father would not write in this strain unless the matter was one of the utmost importance."

And yet I cannot say that I was unduly impressed, for a few ideas began to buzz confusedly in my brain, and I tried to grasp them and set them in proper order. With this end in view I took up my hat and went out, hoping that I might have another glimpse of the man. My mother made me promise that I would not go off the road, a promise to which I laughingly assented, but I followed the road right into Slough and round to the railway station, yet never saw a sign of the man with the strange eyes.

If I were to say that my father's warning made me very frightened I fear I should hardly be confining myself to the truth. I think my mother's serious face caused me the greater alarm. Once away from it the warning did not seem fraught with much significance, or, if it were, I could not grasp it. Uncle Jim would probably be over that afternoon. We should hear

of a man just verging on to 40, a well set up, powerful creature, with a good natured face, rather inclined to ruddiness. He was a man who seemed to enjoy every hour of his life; and I don't believe I ever saw him when his blue eyes had not a merry twinkle in them. Therefore the serious look with which he now greeted me was just a little disconcerting. My mother's troubled face also added a chilliness to the reception.

"Well, Dave, lad," said he, "what is all this that has been troubling your mother?"

"Told him all I knew, repeating word for word that which had passed between me and the stranger."

"I have heard as much," said he, "which I had finished. And upon my word I can't see any cause for this uneasiness. Your mother has got a fright, my boy, and nothing I can say will convince her of her folly."

"You may call it folly if you like," she replied, "and I wish I could think so, but I feel sure my husband would not have written in this strain without good cause."

Jim shook his head. Out of respect for her feelings he did not say what was on the tip of his tongue. He had not his sister's admiration for my father.

"A man who can leave his wife and child for seven years is capable of writing anything," he growled.

"Ah, but you don't understand," she replied. "You don't know the dangers and vicissitudes of a seafaring life. If he has not come, you may be sure it was for very good reasons."

"Humph!" granted Jim, but perhaps even he doubted her all the better for her sanity. No doubt it was foolish, but it is that foolishness which endears women to us. I thought she looked her best and her prettiest just then, and if Jim hadn't been there to poke fun at me I would have given her a good kiss.

"Still," said he as he slowly began to fill his pipe, "I consider vague, terrifying scrawls no excuse for such an absence, and if I were you I should try to think that they were written after I mean under—much mental depression, the result of a systematic squaring of the elbow."

She shook her head.

"I believe it to be nothing of the kind. Do you imagine that the coming of this stranger right on the top of Bob's letter was all a matter of chance? No; he knew my husband was leaving Australia, and he meant to see him. For what reason? Ah, let me know that and I shall know everything. But, tell me, does it not strike you as being very curious that I should receive Bob's letter on the very day that the stranger arrives here?"

"Well, no. The man could easily have come in the same ship as the letter. Probably he was to meet Bob in London and, disappointed in not finding him there, came on here."

"But don't you see if Bob came in the ship with that letter he would not be here yet (unless he came overland from Bristol) for another eight or nine days. I do not hesitate to say that the last thing he would think of would be to come overland, but those who do not know him so well might reasonably suspect otherwise."

"Well," said Jim, his blue eyes looking more puzzled than ever.

"Well," said my mother slowly and very impressively, I thought, "what I make out of it is this: That man did not come by the ship which brought the letter from Australia; otherwise he would have known that Bob was not here. But he believed him to be on the ship and, speculating on the chances of his coming overland, gave him time to get home."

"But why should he believe that Bob was on the ship and of what importance was it whether he was or not?"

"Now you get beyond me," she said, "but I believe, why I cannot tell you, that that man knew my husband was coming by a certain ship, that my husband knew of this and for some reason of his own changed his mind."

"Dear child," said my uncle, "you weave quite a pretty romance. That little head of yours is full of surprises. I know a mystery is dear to a woman, almost as dear as a bit of scandal, but don't build too much on it or you will be disappointed. The man had probably done his business with Captain Bob out in Australia. It might have been a serious mining speculation—Ballarat, you know, is a great mining center. If such is the case, what more natural than that the man, hearing Bob was coming by a certain ship, should be anxious to see him?"

"Why did he refuse to leave his name?"

"As he said, it was probably immaterial. I've often enough said the same thing. Trust me, your husband will soon turn up with a glowing prospectus in his pocket describing a marvelous property which is within easy reach of Ballarat. I know those prospectuses. I've drawn up a few of them myself, in which I have described with wonderful fidelity a reef or a region I have never seen. Believe me, your husband will presently blossom into director, possibly the chairman—if they can't buy a lord—of the Great Ballarat Gold Mining Company, of which your mysterious foreign gentleman with the strange eyes will most likely be the vendor."

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The Fall from Grace.

I sat beside her yesterday, and though I did not know her, Emotion thrilled me in a way I could not help but show her. Though she was fair—aye, passing fair, and all the while world eyes her, yet I felt I longed to meet her. When I sat down beside her,

For you must know we met by chance upon the streets crossing. Her too flew up—romance! My arms were wildly tossing, way she should choose to meet like that. Well, I'm not one to chide her, I only know that down she sat, and I sat down beside her!

was attracted by something on one of the posts.

what he had to say. Jim was a man of nerve and practical common sense and as such always knocked the bottom out of my silly, sentimental fancies.

As I returned along the road I saw his well known trap standing before our gate, the big bay stamping impatiently and tossing the flies from his ears. High up on the driver's cushion sat Saunders, the boy, a diminutive rascal with a wizen face. He greeted me with a formal salute and an extensive grin and information that the gun'nor was at the house. Then, after asking him sundry questions concerning his rat, his dogs and the chase generally, I turned to open the gate, when I was attracted by something which I saw on one of the posts.

At first I thought that the villageurchins had, in accordance with their usual custom, been endeavoring to deface our paint and mentally expressing the pious wish that I had only caught them at the game I stepped up closer to inspect their handiwork. The gate and the posts were grained so as to represent a light oak, and as the work had only been completed some three months previously I was exceedingly proud of its smart appearance. To my surprise, however, I found that the destroyers had confined themselves to one particular design. This was an elliptical or egg shaped ring drawn with a red pencil. The design was very accurate, the steadiness of the lines proclaiming the adeptness of the artist. In fact, there could be no doubt, a little filling in would have made the drawing perfect.

Afraid to attempt a cleansing of the post for fear of making a smudge, I turned toward the house, meaning later on to obliterate the mark with a wet cloth; but as I entered the hall I heard the voice of my Uncle Jim in the adjacent sitting room, and I forthwith forgot all about the sign.

at the time of which I write my un-

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