

The Yellow Man..

A STORY OF LOVE AND ADVENTURE.

(Continued from last week.)

My mother immediately recognized that it was no use arguing with him when he affected that mood, and, dear fellow as he was, she always avoided the city in talking to him, for once set going on that topic he was a difficult man to stop. So she went out to see about some tea, and while she was away he informed me that there was a local Christy minstrel show in Maidenhead, that night, for which he had two tickets, and that he had driven round to see if I would care to go. Of course I meant staying the night at his house, but he would drive me over after breakfast the next morning. Boy like, I jumped at the offer, though I did not fail to notice that my mother gave her consent with just a little reluctance—a reluctance which I know my uncle failed to perceive. Indeed, it was no unusual thing for me to spend days together with him when I was home for my holidays, and I am sure the thought that she might not want me to go never for a moment occurred to him.

I fancied that she held me longer in her arms than usual when the time came to say good-by. Her eyes, too, wore a sad, wistful look as they met mine, and I think now, as I picture that scene afresh, that the strange light which I noticed in them must have been caused by unshed tears. And though I knew no cause for tears I recollect well that she touched some point of tenderness within me and that I kissed her again and again, and that even when half way down the little path, moved by some unaccountable impulse, I turned suddenly round, rushed back to her and threw my arms about her neck.

"Come on, you baby," cried Uncle Jim, who stood smiling by the open gate, but as I passed him he laid his arms affectionately on my shoulder, and I saw a great gladness in his eyes. He loved his sister no less than I, and that formed a sweet bond of sympathy between the three.

Then I sprang into the cart, and Uncle Jim came tumbling after me. Saunders, the aforementioned rickshawed old man of 14, let go the horse's head, and away we went. My mother, standing in the porch, a pretty, pathetic figure in a white gown, waved us a last farewell.

CHAPTER III.

I SEE THE SIGN AGAIN. That evening was made memorable for two things—one that happened at Maidenhead, and one that happened elsewhere. But how could one foresee? How sad it is that God, who sends us the warning, has not endowed us with intelligence enough to understand it. Much could not be expected from a boy of 15, though even he might have seen something had he taken the trouble to look. But in no way was I the superior of other boys. Power was not given me to peer behind the curtain of the future.

That night passed very pleasantly. We drove into Maidenhead, as arranged, had dinner there and afterward visited the entertainment, over which, I remember, I roared with laughter. I would give something to be able to laugh now over such imbecilities, but I think all the laughter died in me that night. Just as some men dissipate wildly before they blow their brains out or crack jokes in the face of death, so drew I the longest, loudest and last note of laughter out of me on that occasion—that is, laughter free of thought, of intellectual restraint. Sometimes I would like to laugh, but remembering I stop as one who has no right to be merry. The boue clapping Christy is to me a sight as sad as death itself; the jar and jingle of the tambourine set every nerve in me shuddering.

The drive back after the performance was delightful, albeit that the night was very dark. But it was a clear, good road, our horse was a sure footed beast, and Uncle Jim, who was an excellent whip, knew every inch of the way. So we dashed along in fine style, the great lamps projecting their glare into the gloom beyond. My uncle had lit his pipe, and being, like myself, in excellent spirits he chanted matches of the comic songs we had but lately heard. And yet over there through the darkness, where we could not see, what was happening? Oh heavens!

text, the swish of her skirts, as she came along the passage, but an awful stillness pervaded the whole house, a stillness which fell like a chill upon me.

Leaving the door, I went first to the dining room window, then to that of the drawing room, but they were both securely fastened. I rapped on each of them in turn, and still no answer came to relieve the sickening anxiety which had now taken possession of me.

"Can't you make them hear?" shouted my uncle, who, sitting high up in his dogcart, easily overlooked the gate and commanded a view of the pathway.

"Then go round to the back and see if you can find the girl. I suppose your mother has gone to do her marketing."

Ours was a square, two storied building standing in its own grounds. Before it was a pretty little patch of flower garden which gave on to the roadway; behind was our kitchen garden, inclosed by a low brick wall. Beyond that again were fields and in the distance the roofs and chimneys of a few scattered houses. I hurried round to the back by the side path and searched the garden in vain for the sight of a fluttering petticoat. I passed by Janet's room (Janet was the servant, who had been with us for the past



"Speak, lad! What has happened?" the blind down. I tapped loudly on the glass and then passed on to the back door. Trying the handle, I failed to open it. I knocked; no answer. I knocked loudly; I beat the panels with my open hands; I even used the toe of my boot. But there came no patter of feet, no unbending of locks. The echo sounded drearily for a moment and then all was still.

And now the fear which had already seized me paralyzed for a moment or two both limbs and intellect, and a horror of which I could not grasp the meaning turned me cold to the finger tips. I seemed intuitively to guess that I was face to face with some dire calamity, and yet I could form no conception of what it really was. I only know that my inner eye gazed upon an inner chaos, and that the sight was so appalling that it froze every drop of blood in my veins. My uncle's voice calling awoke me from the stupor, and like one in a dream I moved to complete the circuit of the house. But as I passed the scullery window I noticed that it was not locked, though it had been fastened tightly. The catch, pressed against the pane, was plainly visible above the sash. I leaned against the sill and raised the window, and in a voice which startled even myself, it was so full of fear, I cried out: "Mother, mother! Janet, Janet!" But never a sound came back. Then a dreadful shuddering seized me, and I felt the nerves tingle right up my back to my brain. Had I seen a ghost on a dark night I could not have been smitten with a greater dread.

Reeling back I made my way round to the front of the house and tried to cry out to my uncle, but my tongue clung to the roof of my mouth. I felt as though I should never speak again. "Good heavens, Davie," he cried, seeing my white face, "what is the matter with you?" and almost before I knew what had happened he had sprung from the cart, opened the gate and was holding my face up to his.

"Speak, lad!" he continued excitedly, his face full of anxiety. "What has happened? What have you seen?" "Nothing," I said. "But they do not answer—and the scullery window is open."

Realizing at once the importance of this apparently trivial statement, he dashed round to the back of the house, I at his heels. He knocked as I did, but with a like result. He shouted through the open window, but only the echo of his voice came back, and this smote upon his heart and lined with anxiety his face.

"Davie," he said, "I fear something has happened. Don't blub," as I clutched him by the arm and turned a terrified face up to his. "It may be nothing much. We shall see. Are you afraid to go in through that window and open the back door for me?" I was, but I had some pride, so I gasped out, "No."

"Good lad," he patted me encouragingly on the back. "Come here and I will help you. There's nothing to be afraid of," he added consolingly. "Your mother and the girl have evidently gone out together. We will get in and wait until they return. Now, then, one, two and up."

The window was some five feet from the ground, but with his aid I quickly scrambled across the sill and peered

into the room, measured by what I saw, which was the scullery in its usual state of perfect tidiness. I got through the window with little difficulty and let myself down upon the table which stood beneath. Then, with nothing more than a hurried glance about me, I dashed through the kitchen, out into the passage and opened the back door. My Uncle Jim immediately entered.

For a moment he seemed to hesitate, looking about him for some sign or token. Then he went along the passage to the front of the house calling loudly, but receiving no reply sprang to the stairs and without a word mounted to my mother's room. Arriving there, he stopped for a moment or two and contemplated the closed door; then he knocked gently thereon. No reply coming he knocked louder, louder, and then he turned the handle.

Peeping behind him, I saw that the room was still shrouded in gloom, the blinds being closely drawn. He called her by name, but his voice sounded hollow and ghostly as it circled round and round the oppressive chamber. No sound came from the bed, no movement. He turned and drew up the blind and let a flood of light into the dark room, and as it lit up the bed I saw it fall upon a tress of my mother's hair, which drooped back over the pillow. She was lying there enveloped in the counterpane, her form clearly outlined beneath the clothes; but she was so still, so dreadfully still.

Uttering an involuntary cry I sprang across to her, and before my uncle could prevent it I had snatched the covering from her head. A ghastly white face met me, two vague, distorted eyes stared up at mine—eyes in which glared too plainly the hideous placidity of death.

"She is dead," I wailed, "she is dead," and, unable to look death in the face, I fell upon my knees by the bed and buried my face in my hands.

Presently my uncle touched me on the shoulder. As I looked up at him with blurred eyes it seemed to me that his erstwhile jovial face was ghastly with pain or rage.

"Do you know what has happened?" he said, his voice cold and cutting as death itself. And not waiting for an answer he at once replied to his own query. "Your mother has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" I gasped. "Yes, murdered!" he repeated. "Look! Don't be afraid, she cannot hurt you, look—and remember."

He drew me close to the head of the bed, and once more I gazed upon the deathly pale face, the distorted eyes which, seen through a mist of tears, were awful in the extreme. As I stared down at the pale face I could not quite realize that this was death or what death really was, but a vague sickening sense of loss numbed all my energies and filled the world with a vague desolation. It was the first time I had gazed upon death, and I tried to learn its meaning. She was there, my mother, the sweet soul I had known so long, had loved so dearly. Save for that unworldly pallor, those fixed eyes, there was no difference in her. Yet she knew me not; she would know me no more. I might weep, I might pray, but she would heed me not. And though in life I was her all in all I had passed from her, as it were; I was that of which she knew not. This was death.

"See," said my uncle, whose voice was low and charged with deep emotion, "she has been strangled!" And he pulled back the nightdress from her white throat, and I saw that it was encircled with a hideous purple band. The murderers had done their work deftly.

By this time my eyes had cleared of the mist, and I had courage really to look my mother in the face. Across her forehead a great lock of loose hair had fallen, and as with loving fingers my uncle pressed it back he gave a sudden start as though he had been stung.

"Heavens!" he cried. "They were not satisfied to kill. They have mutilated her as well."

I pressed forward and saw distinctly a brown circle on her forehead, a reddish brown circle which looked as though it had been burned by some acid. I looked again, and the circle formed itself into an ellipse or oval. I started. What did this remind me of? I had seen something like this before, but where?

Reverently my uncle covered up the poor white face, drew the blinds and led me from the room.

"Poor Davie, poor lad," he said very tenderly, "we have been hit very hard. Why was she not spared to us? Whom could she have wronged? She who never uttered a harsh word or turned a deaf ear to a tale of sorrow. Heavens, but it's hard!" and as he spoke I felt his hand suddenly tighten on my arm, and I knew that there was a sudden madness in his heart.



"We must do for the police," he said. "As we cannot afford to go to the front gate I suddenly cried out, 'I have it,' and before my uncle knew what I was doing I had slipped from him and was dashing down the pathway."

"What?" he cried. "The sign! The sign!"

In a moment I was through the gate and closely scrutinizing the post, but the sign of the egg had been obliterated. I looked closer: I examined both posts, but not a trace of it could I find. And my brain, overworked, doubted its own knowledge. I stood vacantly staring up at the unspooled posts. Had I really seen the sign?

"The sign," repeated my uncle as he came up. "What do you mean by that?"

Then I told him what I had seen upon the post, and his face grew very serious. It was evident that he did not believe me the victim of an hallucination.

"This is terrible work, Davie," he said. "Heaven knows what the end of it will be."

Then we discovered that the horse and trap had disappeared. It will be remembered that my uncle had jumped out quickly and come to me, forgetting even to take the precaution of locking the wheel. As a consequence the horse had wandered off.

It had been his intention to send me off to the police station while he kept watch over the house, but now both of us had to set out in different ways. Luckily, however, at the first bend of the road he called to me, and on returning to his side I beheld the horse and trap in charge of a local policeman coming up the road.

"I see him grazing by the wayside," explained the official, "and I at once says to myself, ah, I know that 'ere trap. 'It belongs to Mr. James Davie, 'who lives on the other side of the Maidenhead road, and I thinks to myself—"

But my uncle cut him short. For Baddeley was known as the most loquacious peeler in the district. On an ordinary occasion the gag would have been the price of a pint of beer; now it was the word "murder." Baddeley turned very white. My uncle led him into the house and showed him what had taken place, but he merely rolled his eyes in horror, and crying out, "Don't touch nothing!" he hurried from the room, saying he would go and find the inspector.

My uncle led me into the sitting room. Placing his hand tenderly upon my shoulder, he said, "Davie, we two are all that's left. But I loved her dearly, and she was an angel to you. She must know how you feel. Here let us promise to be good friends always."

Well, what could I say? I flung myself in his arms and gave way to a passionate outburst of tears.

CHAPTER IV. THE KILLING OF THE HORSES. Many theories were set afloat concerning this dreadful crime, and the

would he not have said who they were and to what extent their hatred was likely to carry them? As for the story of the gatepost and the sign—well, I was only a boy, and it is so easy for a boy to imagine things. The mere fact of the disappearance of the sign showed how little my evidence was to be trusted.

I now went to live with my uncle, and many and many a time we discussed the pros and cons of the case, trying to build up some satisfactory clew to work upon. But we always came back to our original starting place, the man with the strange eyes.

"I believe," said my uncle, "if we could only lay our hands on him we should soon solve the mystery. Your father has led a strange life, Davie, and I should not be surprised to hear that he had mixed himself up with the secret societies of the far east. That man with the strange eyes, whose nationality neither you nor your poor mother could guess, must have been either a Jap, or a Chinese, and from what I have read of those easterns and their societies I know them to be cruel and callous to a degree. Therefore, my lad, we must be very careful, for if it is as I believe we have a terrible enemy to grapple with."

And so for weeks at a time he never let me out of his sight. I slept in a room next to his in the partition of which he had had a door constructed. He saw himself to the locking of the house, going the rounds every night after dark with a revolver in his hand. I know he inwardly prayed for a meeting with the man with the strange eyes, but that gentleman never put in an appearance. And yet, though he said nothing, I knew that he also feared the coming, and with that end in view he took me out in the fields every day and gave me pistol practice until I became quite an adept. He was a capital shot himself, and he taught me to use the rifle as well as the gun. "It may be useful one day," he used to say, and I knew what was passing in his mind.

And so in this way the next six months passed, and the winter had come, with its short days and its long, cold nights. By this time the "great Windsor mystery," as it had been called, had become a thing of the past, and my youth enabled me to regard it with equanimity. No further word had come from my father. Had he been living in any civilized city or town he could hardly have failed to read of his wife's murder. But nothing came from him, and sometimes we suspected that the same power that had struck down my mother had wrought its vengeance on him. Be that as it may, he was to all intents and purposes dead. My uncle now regarded me as his child, and had been my father I could not have loved him more.

The grief through which he had lately passed had steeled him considerably. The face was still kind, though robbed of much of its ruddiness, but the reckless, devil may care expression had entirely vanished. The man had responsibilities now—he had never known them before, and he scarcely took the pains to hide the fact. Then he had long fits of mental abstraction which he shook off with a great effort. We rode and drove incessantly, and I noticed that he always peered into the eyes of every stranger we passed. Sometimes he took me to town for a week, and together we hunted all the most popular resorts of the metropolis. We tramped the great thoroughfares from the Marble arch to the bank, from St. Paul's to Hyde Park corner. And all for what? He never said. But I knew it was for the man with the strange eyes. Time after time he used to say to me, "Davie, are you quite sure you would know him again?" And then I would go through a minute description of the man as he appeared to me in the garden that day, and so often had I repeated the story that he knew it as well as I, and if I omitted any particular he would say, "You forget to mention the black tie with the white spots," or "His boots were rather square at the toes."

But nothing ever came of our wanderings, though we had many false alarms, for in London, where one sees so many different faces, it would have been strange had we not encountered a few disappointments. Men of foreign appearance in particular we marked as our quarry, especially those who have the brand of the east or the far east. But though at the sight of a man I have sometimes felt my heart leap to my throat, a closer inspection dissipated the hope, or, rather, I should say the fear, for there was more of fear than of hope in it.

And so the time flew on, and a bitter cold January was drawing to a close. A good six months had already passed, and in that time the world forgets much. I know that I had reached that state in which I no longer experienced any difficulty in lulling my fears, and I could sleep without dreaming of trying to escape from a man with strange eyes who pursued me with a gleaming knife and who was ever on the point of stabbing me just as I woke. I think my uncle also was beginning to rest, though rest he would not while his sister's murderer was at large. But he was just a little more contented, less given to gloomy fits of abstraction, when something happened that set us all in a whirl again.

I thought one night, waking suddenly, that some one was trying to force the window of my room, but after lying for many minutes listening intently I came to the conclusion that it was nothing but my fancy. So, secure in the possession of a well barred window, I soon fell asleep again. But when I awoke in the morning I still retained a recollection of my fright and, rapidly dressing, went out to investigate that side of the house, but though I subjected it to a pretty close scrutiny I saw nothing that led me to suspect the presence of an enemy.

However, on skirting the back of the building I passed close to the stable, upon the door of which I saw something that made me start. A step or two closer assured me that I had not been mistaken. There, distinctly visible, was the fatal egg shaped sign.

(Continued on page 10.)

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