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THE KESTREL HOUSE MYSTERY

By T. C. H. JACOBS

SYNOPSIS

Henry Holt and his ward, Muriel Mainwaring, are staying at a Dartmouth Farm. Holt has a friend at Kestrel House, Muriel's uncle, who has a nephew, and Holt is anxious that Muriel marry this nephew, Hayden Mercer. Percival Pycroft comes to the farm where Holt is living; he takes a walk on the moor and is mysteriously assaulted. Later he finds Muriel and Hayden Mercer in an altercation and intervenes. Several persons have mysteriously disappeared, and Chief Inspector Barnard is investigating. Pycroft's chauffeur and valet, Flack, comes down from London and Pycroft tells him he is going to turn a locket which he found on the moor and which evidently belonged to Mona Page, one of the missing persons, over to Barnard.

CHAPTER VII.—(Cont'd.)

A hundred yards higher up, the trees thinned considerably, and a portion of the house became visible. Presently Pycroft and Flack reached the edge of the plantation and halted in the shadows to survey the scene. A ragged lawn fringed the front of the house, a large, stud-looking structure, built in the local granite, but with a neglected, depressing appearance, enhanced by the heavy, dark curtains which covered the lower windows. The massive oak door was closed, and a long strand of ivy hung down from the porch, almost reaching to the steps.

Flack was on the point of expressing his opinion that the place was deserted, when a light shone out from the room on the ground floor facing them.

"So queer, my dear Flack," responded Pycroft, "that I feel a most powerful urge to inspect the room. But how, mad, how, that's the rub. As you so aptly put it, there ain't much to get us here, but once in, would we stop below?"

"Sure, gov'nor, why not? We ain't met a door wot's beat us yet."

Pycroft smiled. He shared with the other a pride in that compact little bag of tools, but it wasn't of locks or bolts that he was thinking. Presently he voiced some of his thoughts.

"It's that damned car that's troubling me. There ought to be a garage here, and there is not. What is more, there is not a single trace of wheel-marks anywhere."

Flack looked surprised, but he made no comment. He failed to understand the significance or the connection with the matter in hand.

Pycroft turned on his heel, and commenced to walk slowly through the plantation towards the river. Every few yards he knelt down and placed his ear to the ground. Understanding began to dawn in Flack's mind. He followed after him, listening too.

"Get the idea?" asked Pycroft in a whisper.

"Sure, gov'nor, it's hollow under here, there's a back entrance into them cellars."

"Good lad. It remains now but to find it."

Five minutes later they reached the edge of the plantation, climbed the wall and found themselves on the bank of a deep gorge through which the river swirled in an angry torrent a hundred feet or more below. So narrow was it that the top of the span was less than eight feet. In the same time in the dim ages the river must have been of considerable volume, for the walls of the ravine overhung to form a lofty arch. Pycroft, lying flat, peered into the dark shadows, but though the roar of the water filled his ears he could not see it. From his pocket he took a powerful electric torch; carefully directing its beam into the gorge he swept the walls. Immediately he perceived a large aperture, gaping black and grim about midway up the steep ascent. A murmur of satisfaction escaped him, it was just what he had hoped for but scarcely dared to expect.

CHAPTER VIII.

Flack on his hands and knees beside him had seen it also.

"Struth!" he shuddered, crawling back into a position less precarious.

"Wot a damned hole!"

Pycroft pocketed his torch and joined him under the wall.

"Think you can clear that ditch?" he asked.

"Wot, jump across there, d'mean, gov'nor?"

"Yes, it looks worse than it really is, Flack. Measure the distance with his eye, poised himself and a moment later had dropped lightly on the opposite bank.

"It ain't any too firm over here," he called across in a stage whisper.

"There's some loose stuff along the edge you gotta look out for."

"All right, I'm coming," returned Pycroft, and leaped.

He landed heavily and immediately felt the ground giving beneath him. Flack grabbed his coat collar and hauled him to safety as a large stone crashed into the gorge carrying an avalanche of smaller stones and earth with it. Dismal echoes came up from the abyssal chasms.

"Lor, gov'nor, you was nearly gone," breathed Flack, wiping his brow with an extremely soiled handkerchief.

Pycroft flicked the dirt from his clothes and smiled:

"Thanks to you, old scout, I'm still alive, so let's get on with the good work. We've got to find the way down to that tunnel and it must be easy because the car is parked somewhere in the entrance."

"Wot's the big idea in keeping a car such a ruddy secret?" asked Flack.

"People must see the thing about sometimes."

"Very true," agreed Pycroft.

"Constable Ford has probably seen it a number of times. The idea, as I understand it, is to conceal the identity of the owners."

"Some of the gang up at the house being known in the village and some ain't, eh, gov'nor? The ones wot ain't known do the body snatching and if the car by a bit of bad luck is recognized, well then, there's no connection with the house, nobody up there owning a car or ever had one on the premises, as can easily be proved."

"That's about the size of it, something of the sort, anyway."

"But wot's the body snatching for, gov'nor? If it was all women it would be pretty easy to get, but they got a fancy for men as well."

Pycroft shrugged his shoulders:

"At the moment I haven't the remotest notion," he said, "it's up to us to find out, and the quickest way

to do it is to take a stab at finding the secret entrance."

Flack nodded. Past experience had taught him that the gov'nor had a very good reason for everything he did, and he had joined forces with him. But the other was still as big a puzzle to him as ever; he could not understand his game, though he followed blindly where his master led and asked no questions. He knew he was no ordinary crook and suspected that he was a master-mind for the most part playing a lone hand. That he reaped a rich harvest was clear from the standard of living and the generous treatment of those who served him. Flack knew that he was in his confidence to a limited extent only, but the knowledge possessed in him to ill-feeling, indeed, he would have been surprised had it been otherwise.

He thoroughly approved of the lone hand and owed his liberty at the present moment to the fact that he had never taken another into his confidence. And the gov'nor had no use for women, that was another point on which Flack was in the most hearty agreement. Women in the crook game meant ruin, he knew, he'd been very nearly bitten himself, and had no intention of repeating the experience.

Pycroft's voice broke in upon his thoughts.

"We'll walk down towards the bridge; the area is restricted, and it ought not to take us long."

In which he proved to be correct, for some ten minutes later they descended into the bed of a gully and discovered wheel-marks in a patch of marshy ground. As they progressed the gully narrowed, the rugged walls towering above them grim and menacing. By the light of the torch they examined the ground, but no further tracks were visible until rounding a bend they found themselves at a dead end.

Flack glanced around in the dark and shivered. Drawing close to Pycroft, he whispered:

"Nix doing here, gov'nor, it's a blooming cul-de-sac."

Pycroft shook his head:

"There's an entrance here, some where, even, but it's too dark to see it. So there is nothing else to be done but to explore the whole base of the cliff. I vote that we try the far end first, that's the most likely place."

It was Flack who ultimately found it cunningly concealed beneath thick strands of creeper which hung in profusion down the cliff face.

"Here y'are, gov'nor," he whispered, "wot's this?"

Pycroft directed his light upon the spot where the other was holding back a great bunch of creeper, and saw a portion of a wooden door painted to resemble the grey rock on either side of it.

"How the devil did you spot that?" he exclaimed.

Flack grinned:

"Bit of luck it was," he confessed.

"I tripped over this here vine stuff and found m'hand resting on wood."

"By gee!" murmured Pycroft admiringly, "they've concealed that jolly well. It would take mighty keen eyes to see it in daylight, practically impossible in the dark, I should think. It's locked of course?"

"Aye, it's locked, but I'll have it open in a twink with the twirlers." (To be continued.)

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Modern Language Still In Stone Age

Has Not Advanced In Line With Other Human Progress

All human beings still talk like savages. Every modern language is little more than a tool for cavemen; as though modern surgeons still operated with stone knives or modern carpenters sanded boards with fish bones or modern farmers cultivated their fields by digging them up with sharp sticks.

So protested Sir Richard Paget, life-long, British student of the nature and sounds of speech, in a recent address in London. It is generally admitted, Sir Richard recalled, that a large part of the human antagonisms which lead to wars and similar difficulties are due to differences of language, so that separate groups of people do not fully understand each other. A similar condition exists, the lecturer suggested, even among people who speak the same language. Words are complicated mouth, tongue and throat gestures, most of which were chosen by our savage ancestors thousands of years ago. These savages had but few ideas and simple ones. Languages, while probably good enough for their cavemen inventors, have been outgrown by civilization. A single word may stand for half a dozen separate ideas, even in a single language. Mankind has perfected the art of mathematics and dozens of other arts which assist the progress of science or the exact formulation of ideas in special fields like science and engineering. No similar effort has been spent on speech. Instead men have been content to get along with the words and speech forms of savages. Future progress of civilization will be delayed or perhaps prevented, Sir Richard believes, unless the problem of communicating ideas by language is studied scientifically and systematically, to find out exactly how thoughts may be expressed most clearly.

Buffalo in Canada

The herd of about 1,000 wood buffalo or bison still roaming south of Great Slave Lake is the last wild herd of the continent. Wood Buffalo Park (10,500 square miles), the largest National Park in Canada, with the Salt River therein, is reserved for their use. The Government herd of plains buffalo in the park at Wainwright, Alberta, is kept at 5,000, and is a source of robes, horns and meat.

There is no preservative and anti-septic, nothing that keeps one's heart young like sympathy, like giving one's self, with enthusiasm to some worthy thing or cause.—John Burroughs.

The ADVENTURES of CAPTAIN JIMMY and his Dog SCOTTIE



What came before: After many adventures flying over the war zone in China, Captain Jimmy and Scottie get lost in the dark and land in enemy territory. A freight train leaves supplies at a siding and they are cautiously approaching, when interrupted.

Quietly we approached the freight train. The food and gasoline which we needed so badly would soon be ours. Then, right out of the ground leaped a dark form. A heavy blow landed on my head, and I knew no more.

Gradually I became conscious. Jolt—jolt—jolt! I tried to put my hands to my head but they were securely bound. Someone had tied me on the back of a burro, and just ahead the Colonel and Fu Hsu were securely bound on two more. Numberless other donkeys loaded with bundles and boxes moved in single file along a narrow rocky path, and leading each, strode a wicked looking ruffian, armed to the teeth. Chinese bandits had captured us.

Jolt—jolt—jolt! Through the hills we went, while a great blazing sun scorched us with stifling heat. The bandits had plenty of water, but for us, never a drop. Between drinks they would grin at us, and pat their stomachs, seeming to enjoy our misery. Of Scottie I knew nothing, and became very anxious as to his fate.

Everything must end sometime. Toward nightfall we came in sight of a rift in the mountains, where the sheer cliffs rose for hundreds of feet into the air. Here, indeed, was an ideal spot for a bandit camp. A few men could hold the defile against an army. Below stretched a beautiful valley, green and fresh as a mountain paradise.

The burros, scenting the sweet grass, rushed down toward the bandit camp in a regular stampede. As we approached, a miserable looking mob of men, women and children, swarmed out of the tents.

They were a hard-bitten crowd, every one of them. They feered at

us, and the children pelted us with soft mud. But finally my turn came. Suddenly I dug my toes into the dirt and charged the mob. He bowled several over, and in a moment the camp was in an uproar. One fat fellow stood in my way, but that donkey just butted him in the belt, and he landed headplunk on the side of a tent. After that we galloped off into the night before anyone could saddle a horse.

Up the valley, I found a cliff with sharp edged rocks. Working close to it, I began to rub the ropes which bound my wrists, on the rough surface. Then lights began to twinkle here and there in the valley, as the bandits set out to hunt for me with torches. Five minutes, ten, fifteen, I rubbed those tough ropes, while the lights came nearer, then, just as I had given up hope—they snapped and I was free!

My arms were so numb that I was almost as helpless as a baby. Up and down the valley bobbed the torches—and each torch was carried by a man-hunter. I edged close into the cliff, while the feeling gradually came back into my hands.

Fortunately for me, no one came near my hiding place. Whenever a bandit's torch went out, he would make a dash for camp, so as not to be left alone in the darkness. Probably he was afraid of a dragon jumping on his back, and flying away with him to its den. Anyhow, the torches went out one by one, and the search ended for the time. So on the camp quieted down. Sentries paced to and fro, but as the night wore on, even these huddled close to the dying camp fires, and dozed in the light of the moon.

Just the ideal time for a raid! No one would expect a prisoner to suddenly attack a camp full of armed men. Cautionously I set out toward the tents.

(To be continued.)

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advantage over ironing the curtains or having them hung full is so great that it is impossible to realize the effect until one has tried this method.

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WARNER'S SAFE KIDNEY & LIVER REMEDY

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France Makes Smokers' Needs

Wooden pipes are a French specialty; the wood of the Jura Department and the briar roots from Algeria and Corsica possessing the necessary quality or not being readily combustible, according to the Index to French Production. The two principal centres for the manufacture of wooden pipes are St. Claude and Beaume les Dames, and the industry is also important at Bussang in the Vosges. Clay pipes are also made in France. Most luxurious pipes are made of meerschaum and amber, as are cigar and cigarette holders. Lighters are made of gold, silver, shell and enamelled and nicked metals.

The use of loud-speakers and gramophones is forbidden in Brussels after eleven o'clock at night.

More automobiles from the United States entered Canada last year, via Windsor, Ontario, than at any other point. The total for 1930 was 1,430, 554, of which 1,224,248 entered for a period up to 24 hours; 206,194 for periods up to 60 days; and 112 for periods up to six months.