

THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN RAY

By William Le Queux

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

The outbreak of war sends Ronald Ewart, a young London barrister, to the Highlands to say good-bye to his fiancée, Myra McLeod. On the train he meets Hilderman, who calls himself an American and a stranger in those parts, but later Ewart finds that he has built a hut on a cliff above the falls opposite General McLeod's lodge. While fishing in the river Myra is suddenly blinded by a flash of green light. Gen. McLeod tells Ewart of a strange experience at the same place, known as Chemist's Rock. Hilderman is very curious as to the cause of Myra's blindness. The famous London oculist holds out no hope and Ewart, after taking Myra home, brings Dr. Garnesk from Glasgow. In the meantime Sholto is also blinded, then chloroformed and stolen. Garnesk asserts his belief that Hilderman knew of Sholto's affliction. The next morning the two men find footprints and keel-marks on the beach, and the name-plate from the dog's collar. Ewart telegraphs for his friend Dennis Burnham. At Chemist's Rock, Garnesk sees the green flash and Ewart is suffocated. While in the dark-room where the two young men are developing snap-shots, Myra discovers that she can see in the red light. Ewart explains the situation to Burnham at the station.

CHAPTER XII.—(Cont'd.)

"I'm very glad you had Mr. Garnesk with you," said Dennis at last, with a glance of frank admiration at the young specialist.

"Not so glad as I am," I replied fervently. "What I should have done without him heaven only knows. I can't even guess."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Garnesk, in modest protest. "I haven't been able to do anything. Our one advance was a piece of pure luck—the discovery that Miss McLeod could see by the light of a red lamp. We have decided to keep that quite to ourselves, Mr. Burnham."

"Of course," agreed Dennis, so emphatically that I laughed. "Why so decided, Dennis?" I asked, for I felt that I should like to climb to the topmost pinnacle of the highest peak in all the world and shout the good news to the four corners of the earth.

"I'm not a scientist, Ron," Dennis replied. "That may account for the heresy of my profound disbelief in science. I wouldn't cross the road to see a 'miracle.' The twentieth century is uncongenial to anything of that sort. Take it from me, old chap, there's a man at the back of this—not a nice man, I admit, but an ordinary human being to all outward appearances—and when we catch a glimpse of his outward appearances we shall know what to do."

"Yes, when we do," I sighed. "You mustn't let Ewart get depressed about things, Mr. Burnham. He, very naturally, looks at this business from a different standpoint. With him it is a tragic, mysterious horror, which threatens the well-being, if not the existence, of a life that is dearer to him than his own."

"I'll look after him," said Dennis, with a grim determination which made even Garnesk laugh.

"When you two precious people have finished nursing me," I said, "I hope you'll allow me to point out that that very reason gives me a prior claim to take any risks or run into any dangers that may crop up from now on. If there is any trouble brewing, particularly dangerous trouble, then it is my place to tackle it. I am deeply grateful to you fellows for all you have done and are doing and intend to do, but the nursing comes from the other side. I can't let you run risks in a cause which is more mine in the nature of things than yours."

"I fancy," said Dennis, "that even your eloquent speeches will have very little effect when it comes to real trouble. If danger comes it'll come suddenly, and we shall be best helping our common cause by looking after ourselves."

"Hear, hear," said Garnesk, and I could only mutter my thanks and my gratitude for the possession of two staunch friends.

"To get back to business," I said

presently, "why did you want me to bluff Hilderman like that?"

"Because," said Garnesk slowly, "I'm not sure that Hilderman is the man to take into our confidence too completely. It's not that I don't trust the man, but he looks so alert and so cute, and he has such a dreamy way of pretending he isn't listening, to you when you know jolly well that he is, that I have a feeling we ought to be careful with him."

"Very much what Dennis said about him the first time he saw him. But if you don't suspect him, and he is a very cute man, why not trust him and have the benefit of his intelligence?"

"How would you answer that question yourself, Ewart?" the specialist asked quietly.

"Oh," I laughed, "I should point out that his cuteness may be the very reason that we don't suspect him."

"Precisely," Garnesk agreed; "and that is partly my answer as well."

"And the other part?" put in Dennis quietly.

"Well, it's a difficult thing to say, and it's all conjecture. But I have a feeling that Hilderman is not what he says he is. He has a knack of doing things, a way of going about a sour discontent if his mind were not fully occupied with work which is accustomed to, and probably enjoys doing."

"Have you anything to suggest?" I asked.

"I have an idea," he replied; "but I haven't mentioned it because it doesn't satisfy me at all. I have an idea that the man is some sort of detective hard at work all the time. But I can't imagine what sort of detective would take a house up here and keep himself as busy as Hilderman appears to be over some case in the neighborhood. I can't imagine what sort of case it can be."

"What about a secret German naval base in the Hebrides?" I suggested.

"It's not by any means impossible or even unlikely that the Germans have utilized the lonely lochs and creeks to some sinister purpose. Many of the lochs are entirely hidden by surrounding mountains, which come right down to the edge of a narrow opening, and make the place almost unnoticeable unless you happen to be looking for it."

"There's something in that, certainly," Garnesk agreed; "but we must remember he's been here since May. Surely our precious Government would have managed to find what they wanted, and clear it out by this time. Then again, did they suspect the base, or did they have a general idea that war was coming so far back as May?"

"As to the war," Dennis put in, "we don't really know when the authorities had their first suspicions."

"No," said I; "but I fancy it was not a very definite suspicion until after the Archduke was assassinated. But look here, Garnesk, just let us suppose Hilderman really is a Government detective in the guise of an American visitor. Wouldn't he be just about the man we want, or do you think it would make too much stir to take him into our confidence?"

"Far too much," Garnesk replied emphatically. "It's not that he would talk; but if he has been here all this time his opponents have got wind of him long before this, and his arrival on the scene in connection with our case would give any suspicious character the tip to bolt. I should advise keeping in touch with Hilderman, learn as much as you can about him, and be ready to run to him for help if you come to the conclusion that he is the man to give it."

We sat down among the heather at the foot of the Malhair Vec road, and looked out over the harbor.

"Don't turn your heads," said Dennis quietly, "but glance down at the pier."

"Yes," said Garnesk in a moment, "he seems to be as interested in us as we are in him."

Hilderman and his friend were standing on the end of the pier watching us through their field-glasses.

CHAPTER XIII. The Red-Haired Man.

"I'll send the glasses at once," said Garnesk, as the train steamed out of the station. Dennis and I stood on the platform and watched him out of sight.

"He seems a good fellow," said Dennis.

"Splendid!" I agreed readily. "He's exceedingly clever and wide-awake, and very charming. What we should have done without him heaven only knows. I fancy his visit saved the entire household from a nervous collapse."

"We've no time for collapses, nervous or otherwise," Dennis replied. "We shall want our wits about us, and we shall need all the vitality we can muster. But at the same time I don't think there is any cause for nerves. You're not the sort of man, Ron, to let your nerves get the better of you in an emergency, especially if we can prove that our enemy is a tangible quantity, and not a conglomeration of waves and vibrations."

"Hilderman and his friend appear to be waiting for us," I interrupted.

"You may as well introduce me," said Dennis. "I'd like to meet the man. Who is his friend, do you know?"

"Haven't the remotest idea," I replied. "I have seen him once before, but that is all. I don't know who he is."

"Is he staying with Hilderman, or does he live in the neighborhood?"

"That I couldn't tell you either," I said. "I'm sure he doesn't live anywhere near Invermalloch."

As we strolled out of the station Hilderman and his companion were standing chatting by the gate which leads on to the pier. As we approached, Hilderman turned to me with a smile.

"Ah, Mr. Ewart," he exclaimed, "your friend has left you, then. I hope you won't let his inability to help Miss McLeod depress you unduly. While there's life there's hope."

"I shall not give up hope yet awhile, anyway," I answered heartily.

"May I introduce my friend Mr. Fuller to you?" he asked presently, and I found myself shaking hands with the round-faced little man, who blinked at me pleasantly through his glasses. I returned the compliment by introducing Dennis.

"On holiday, Mr. Burnham?" asked the American. Dennis was so prompt with his reply that I was convinced he had been thinking it out in the meanwhile.

"Well, I hardly know that I should call it a holiday," he replied immediately. "I have just run up to say good-bye to Ewart before offering my services to my King and country. We had intended to join up together, but he has, as you know, been detained for the time being, so I am off by myself."

"We are very old friends," I explained, "and Burnham very decently decided to come here to see me as I was unable to go south to see him."

"Never mind, Mr. Ewart," said Hilderman. "I guess you'll be able to join him very soon. I wish you luck, Mr. Burnham. I suppose it won't be long before you leave."

"He's talking of returning to-morrow," I cut in. "I wish you'd tell him it's ridiculous, Mr. Hilderman. Fancy coming all this way for twenty-four hours. He must have a look round, to say nothing of his stingsiness in depriving me of his company so soon."

"Well, I can quite understand Mr.

Burnham's anxiety to joint at the earliest possible moment," he answered. "But I've no doubt Lord Kitchener wouldn't miss him for a day. I think he might multiply his visit by two, and stop till Wednesday, at any rate. Ah, here's the Fiona!"

I looked out to the mouth of the harbor and saw the steam yacht, which was in the habit of calling at Glasbinnie, gliding past the light-house rock. I was about to make some comment on the boat when Hilderman forestalled me.

"How are you going tack?" he asked.

"In a motor-boat," I replied. "I am afraid Angus is getting weary of waiting already."

"I'm sure Mr. Fuller would be delighted to have you fellows on board. Why not let your man take Mr. Burnham's luggage to Invermalloch, and come to Glasbinnie on the Fiona? You can lunch with me, and when you tire of our company I will run you across in the Baltimore. Eh? What do you say?"

"I shall be delighted, of course," his companion broke in.

I hesitated for a moment, and glanced at Dennis. His face obviously said, "Accept," so I accepted.

"Thank you," I said; "we shall be very pleased. It will be more jolly than going back by ourselves."

"Good!" cried Hilderman, "and I can show you the view from my smoking-room. I hope it will make you green with envy."

So I gave Angus his instructions, and the four of us waited at the fish-table steps for the dinghy to come ashore from the yacht. She was not a particularly beautiful boat, but she looked comfortable and strong, and her clumsy appearance was accentuated by the fact that her funnel was aft a commodious deck dining-saloon, on the top of which was a small wheel-house. Myra had been right, as it turned out; she was a converted drifter. The two men who came in to pick us up wore the usual blue guernsey, with S. Y. Fiona worked in an arc of red wool across the chest. They were obviously good servants and useful hands, but there was none of that ridiculous imitation of naval custom and etiquette which delights the heart of the Cotton Exchange yacht owner. We boarded the Fiona with the feeling that we were going to have a pleasant and comfortable time, and not with the fear that our setting of a leather-soled shoe upon the hallowed decks was in itself an act of sacrilege.

We were no sooner aboard than Fuller set himself to play the host with a charm which was exceedingly attentive and neither fussy nor patronizing. (To be continued.)

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Woman's Interests

You Can Have Flowers Too.

For the busy woman who cannot spend as much time with flowers as she would like, but who still wants to beautify her home with summer annuals, a border bed along a fence is the most practical. A width of three feet makes a bed that is convenient to work with, and it can be any length, the longer the better. One of the prettiest borders of this kind I have ever seen was over ninety feet long, and contained about every tint of the rainbow.

The taller plants, of course, belong next the fence, making a splendid background for the shorter ones. It is best to start the seed in flats, transplanting later, thus getting the largest and best plants in the most conspicuous places. Much time can be gained in this way by avoiding all danger of frost.

One year I used cosmos for my backing with blue larkspur in front of them, and bush nasturtiums at the edge. Those nasturtiums were the large flowering Tom Thumb variety, and stood erect, each individual plant a compact bush in itself. They bloomed abundantly from late spring until frost, the different shades of yellow blending well with the blue of the larkspur. Along a back fence that same year I planted dwarf sunflowers, which furnished feed for the chickens in addition to furnishing entertainment for the entire family. We loved to watch them turn with the sun.

Another quick-grower giving splendid results is the old-fashioned zinnia. Seed houses are advertising a conical zinnia which, as the name implies, is cone-shaped, and rather blunted at the top. It grows to be about three feet tall, and comes in all shades of red, yellow, lavender, orange, and pink. A pretty combination with this is white candytuft, a low-spreading plant which, when covered with bloom, resembles a snowdrift.

A taller bed may be had by planting ten-weeks stocks, a flower something on the order of the hollyhock, using the double marigold and the Chinese woolflower to fill in.

The summer kochia, sometimes called burning bush, makes a restful pale green border. During the summer months it forms a hedge, two feet high, of the daintiest green imaginable, and does not develop any color until touched with frost, when it turns a lovely claret-red.

The portulaca goes well with this unusual green, furnishing plenty of color for the entire bed. This makes an "easy" a flower bed as the busiest woman could wish for, as the portulaca doesn't require the attention that most quick-blooming flowers do. They bloom and seed at the same time—quite different from the fragrant nasturtiums. To allow nasturtiums to seed is to shorten their life by about half.

At one time I found that I had cut out a big contract for myself when I covered a 40-foot fence with the climbers. They were beautiful, a brilliant mass of clean yellow and red blooms, hiding the fence completely and lightening up an otherwise dreary view. Sometimes I got almost a peck basket full at one picking, and I went over them at least every other day.

Perhaps the most satisfactory border is the one containing a reckless profusion of a dozen or more varieties. This can include verbenas, the broad-flowering zinnias, salvia, both red and pink, California poppies, as well as

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