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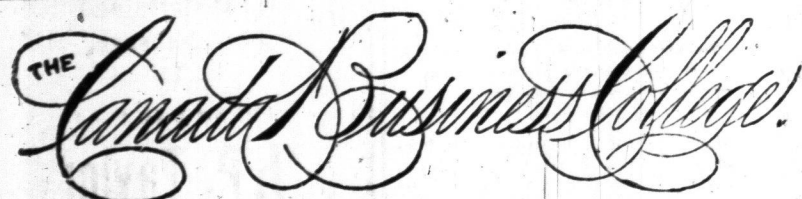
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THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOUM

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

Author of "Dr. Jack," "Dr. Jack's Wife," "Miss Caprice," Etc., Etc.

Hence, Mynheer Joe finds himself the cynosure for many eyes, and he is annoyed at the interest people seem to take in him, but that is the fate of any one whom fortune destines to move on a higher plane than his fellows, and he must get used to it.

Molly on her part, believing this attention is caused simply because the people have learned that he is the sole survivor of the massacre at Khartoum, is proud of the fact that he is her friend—pleased to think he is an American, and thinks more of him than ever.

He gives no hint of what is to come off in the morning, for it is not his way to boast, and he can keep a secret. Indeed, to see how merry he appears no one would think he has anything on his mind. Those who are in the secret are amazed, and not a few make up their minds that the whole report may be a canard, for they cannot imagine a man who expects to meet the Russian baron at sunrise could be so cool about it.

The evening passes, and finally Mynheer Joe bids the ladies good night. Mr. Grimes sees that he retires to his room to get a few hours sleep. At the proper time Grimes is up and arouses both Mynheer Joe and Sandy.

Together they quietly repair to the dining-room of the hotel. A cook has been bribed to let them have each a cup of coffee, than which no better can be had in the world than right there at Shepherd's in Cairo.

This opens their eyes and makes them feel as though they have a warmth next their heart. Outside the poor moon hangs up in the sky, but her pale light already gives way to the coming of early morning. Soon the gathering hosts of light will rush up from their stronghold below the eastern horizon, when the rout of the night king will be complete. Just about this hour, Molly Tanner, dressed in a white wrapper and with her hair showering down her back, enters her father's room by means of the connecting door.

"Who's that?" asks Tanner, sitting up right, his night-cap hanging over his ear.

"Only Molly, father," comes the reply.

"What the dickens are you wandering around for? Go back to your bed, child," he says softly, for his love toward his daughter is very great.

"It is winter morning. You can hear the birds twittering in the trees, I was awake, and, catching voices, went to the window. Below I saw three men more toward the river. I am almost positive I recognized one of their voices."

"Well," grunts the orator, getting ready to resume his nap, "what's that, Molly?"

"But it was Mynheer Joe."

"And I heard one of the others—I am sure it must have been Mr. Grimes—say: 'I will examine the swords. He shall have no advantage.'"

Tanner grunts again.

"Then the report was true."

"What report, governor?"

"Never mind, child. It doesn't concern you. Go back and get your beauty nap," he growls.

"Not until you tell me what this means. Three men leave the hotel at daybreak. They talk about swords. What is about to happen?"

"Bah! Some officers on a lark, perhaps."

"You know better, governor. You betrayed yourself when you said the report was true. What report? It concerns Mynheer Joe. I remembered now how strangely they looked at him last night."

"Confound it, child, you are a little tyrant and a bulldozed old man! Listen, then. It is reported that Mynheer Joe and the baron were to fight a duel about sunrise this morning."

Molly covers her face with her hands and utters a low cry. Then she eagerly questions Tanner and learns all that he knows, until at last he stubbornly drops back on his pillow and feigns sleep, so there is nothing for the wretched girl to do but to return to her room, and sit there, waiting the rising of the sun, with a dumb feeling of pain at her heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

When Mynheer Joe and his two friends, having secured a cup of coffee and a bite of breakfast at the hotel, pass down toward the river, the very first gleam of daylight is abroad, though as yet kept in the background by the moon, which shines on the land of the Pharaohs with a peculiarly dull radiance, unlike the flood of light poured upon the earth when the Queen of Night is at her full.

Knowing the way they experienced no trouble in reaching the point where they have been informed the two boats will be in readiness. This time there is no attempt made to rob them. Perhaps the rascally Arabs who prowled about the narrow streets during the night looking for victims have retired, like beasts of prey, to their various dens at the approach of dawn. At any rate, the three men meet with no adventure as they advance to the Nile.

"Here we are," says Sandy, when they bring up at the designated spot.

Sure enough, two boats are seen upon the water, both of a trim model. Voices can be heard, as though the sailors are on deck, and all is in readiness for casting off.

Sandy takes one look into the face of Mynheer Joe as they come upon the boats. It is enough to reassure him, for the man does not show the least

emotion. If he were made of ice Mynheer Joe could not take the situation in a cooler manner than he does. This satisfied the newspaper man that the Russian drollist is about to be on his guard. He may have had plain sailing in past affairs of the kind, but when he ran across Mynheer Joe he certainly struck a snag that now gives promise of wrecking his bark.

Mr. Grimes hails, and a voice answers—the voice of the French officer who met him as the baron's representative. They are to take the dahabeh a short way. The others have just arrived, and if all their party can be counted, there is nothing to be done but to push off and get up sail.

"Captain, one question," says Mr. Grimes.

"At your service," replies the polite Gaul, whom they can just indistinctly see standing on the roof of the second cabin in a brave attitude, such as French officers delight to assume, although those of other nations are not far behind them in this respect.

"You spoke of a doctor—the family doctor of the baron, who understands his constitution and knows how to treat him. Pardon me, but is he on board with you?"

Silence follows this cool question, as though the Frenchman has been staggered by it; then, in his courteous way, he would be polite if thrusting his sword through an enemy—the officer of the Khedive replies:

"He is with us, sir."

"Good. Then we consent to start," says Grimes, conscious that the baron's ears have caught all that has been uttered, and willing to let him know that there is no such thing as "secrecy" in their party.

No more is said, and the two Nile river boats gotten under way with the rapidity that distinguishes the peculiar mode common to this country. Mynheer Joe clasps the hand of his second and gives it a squeeze.

"This, my good friend, that dig is worth something to me, you understand," he says in his quiet but earnest way.

"Of course, sir. You know, my interests are bound up in yours. I am determined that this story shall end in the proper way, and it can hardly do that if the baron spits you on his sword like a fowl before the fire. I have confidence in you, Mynheer Joe," replied Mr. Grimes.

No more is said just now, for the boat is being gotten under way. The breeze chances to be favorable, and there is more of it than usual at this time in the morning. It comes from a quarter of the ground from northeast, and the three-cornered sails of the dahabeh are peculiarly fitted to catch a quartering current of air.

Both boats are speedily rushing through the water at a lively rate. The situation is rather romantic, with the moon nearly overhead, day beginning to break in the east, and the great sails of the river boats catching the fresh breeze that has worked in across the intervening delta of the Nile, from the Mediterranean.

Was ever a duel fought under similar circumstances as those which promise to mark this one? Probably not.

The two boats seem to be able equal in point of speed, they continue to keep the same relative distance apart. Perhaps, in a genuine race, with a wind like this, their craft could gain the advantage by "blanketing" the other and cutting off her supply of wind, but this will not pay under present conditions.

Although Joe has made the conditions of the duel, being the challenged party, he really leaves the selection of the ground to his rival, having only stipulated that it shall be among the hills that lie above Cairo.

Sandy and Mr. Grimes stand together near the bow of the little vessel, listening to the music of the water as her prow cuts through the tide of the Nile like a knife, curling the creamy surfs on either side and hurling them back in rolls.

Both of them are duly impressed with all their romantic surroundings, and the war correspondent is jotting down ideas in his mind that will be called upon to supply space in some forthcoming article. At the same time it is evident he has something worrying him.

Mr. Grimes is quick to notice such things, as he has made a business of reading faces.

"What's wrong, Sandy?" he asks, abruptly, as he removes his cigar to flip the ashes from the end with his dexterous little finger.

"Who said so? How did you know? Hang it, Mr. Grimes, you read men as I would books. You may have buried yourself out in Colorado—you took care to study human nature."

"Then you confess you are bothered, my boy?" continued the other, steadily.

"Well, yes, I've been wondering. You see, we know this baron is a sly schemer."

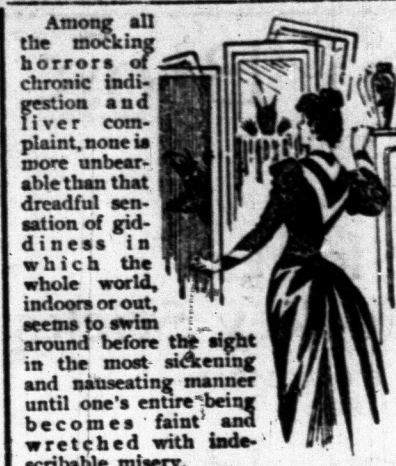
"Admitted."

"And not to be trusted out of sight."

"Ordinarily I should not dare to put my life in his charge. You're right, Sandy."

"Well, we've let him select the spot for the affair. How can we tell but what he may spring some shrewd game on us. Can you promise that yonder dahabeh has not half a dozen hired assassins on board, ready to annihilate us in case the baron feels the necessity?"

Mr. Grimes laughs, and there is a reassurance in his manner that speaks for itself.



Among all the mocking horrors of chronic indigestion and liver complaint, none is more unbearable than that dreadful sensation of giddiness in which the whole world, indoors or out, seems to swim around before the sight in the most sickening and nauseating manner until one's entire being becomes faint and wretched with indescribable misery.

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"I was all run-down and could not do any work at all without suffering from nervous attacks. I wrote to Dr. E. V. Pierce, of Buffalo, N. Y., for advice. He advised me to use Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery and 'Favorite Prescription.' I did so, and used five bottles of each, and I cannot express the benefit I have received from these medicines. I gained in health and strength. When I commenced to use the medicines I weighed only 112 pounds, now I weigh 140 pounds. I thank God and Dr. Pierce for my recovery. My husband and friends all thought I would die but to-day I am a well woman."

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"Sandy, give over worrying. I believe the strongest proof we can have that the means no treachery is his astounding confidence in himself. He has fought duels before and believes himself invincible. Hence it seems a picnic, a walk-over to him."

"Very true, very true, sir, but you must admit there is a chance that—"

"Always that, my boy, but you also forget something of interest—ourselves! What are we here for? as a member of the South asked in a republican convention? If Joe can take care of the baron, surely we will be able to look after his friends be they two in number or a dozen."

"Well spoken, Mr. Grimes. My mind is already clear on that point. I believe we will come out of this thing with flying colors. My trouble has vanished even as the smoke of this cigar fades into space."

Sandy is himself again, and that means a cheery friend, a faithful comrade, one whom Mynheer Joe could not better were he to search the globe over.

As the daylight grows stronger the moon wanes in power; it is no longer a strife between the two as to which must win, for Luna is already out of the battle.

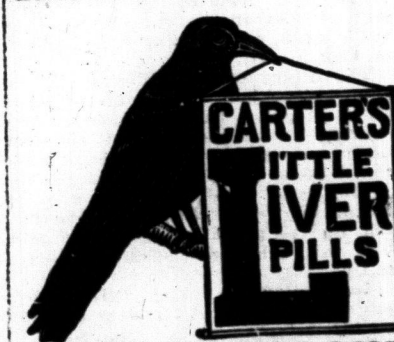
Cairo is left far behind upon the east bank, and, looking back, they can see the first shafts of sunlight glancing from her numerous domes, although the bright god of day has not yet shown his smiling face to those upon the river.

To be Continued.

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