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An Object Lesson

(Continued from page 15)

"Oh, I object to nothing that will get to the bottom of this intolerable mystery," Marie cried. "And, of course, any friend of yours will be welcome. What time is he coming?"

Parke gave the desired information. He refused to say any more. He objected point blank to be drawn. He talked of other matters till it was time to go down to the station and meet his Australian friend. The latter turned up as arranged—a tall, muscular-looking, brown-faced man, carrying a kit-bag and a small brown paper parcel that looked not unlike a diminutive fishing-rod.

"So you've brought it with you?" Parke asked.

"Well, it isn't my own," Cheserworth explained. "I don't know what has become of mine. But I managed to procure one at a sporting outfitter's and had an hour's practice, because, you see, I was rather stiff, and I haven't touched one of those weapons for the last three years. I must congratulate you on the way you have got to the bottom of this business."

"More good luck than anything else," Parke said modestly. "If I hadn't been a sportsman I should never have tumbled to what was going on. But come along, and be introduced to Miss Conningham. She is looking forward eagerly to your visit."

IV.

Dinner was over, and Marie Conningham and her two men guests were seated in the big lounge hall talking together and awaiting the advent of Kate Fladbury, whose return was expected at any moment. The conversation had veered round to Australian matters, and Marie was not displeased to find that Cheserworth knew her relations perfectly well. He was talking of sporting matters now with a zest and interest, when the door opened, and Kate Fladbury came in. She stepped smilingly forward, but she stopped just for a moment and looked quickly at Cheserworth. Her face was slightly pale, there was a frightened look in her eyes. With a murmur of apology she turned in the direction of the stairs, but Parke managed to intercept her.

"Oh, don't run away like that," he said. "I am anxious to know how you have been getting on. Allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Frank Cheserworth. He is an old friend of Mrs. Malcolm's, whom you were with for years, so that, no doubt, you have met before."

The girl said nothing; her eyes travelled slowly round the hall as if looking for some avenue of escape. Cheserworth bowed slightly, and then turned to resume his conversation with Marie. He took from the table the brown paper parcel which he proceeded to untie, and disclosed a whip of somewhat peculiar form. The stock was not more than two feet in length, but the long, lithe, cruel-looking lash must have been at least twenty.

"And now I will show you what I mean," he said. "I daresay you will think I have been boasting. But Miss Fladbury knows better than that. Would you mind clearing a space for me? Thanks. Now, Parke, you stand at the end of the hall there, sideways, and light a cigarette. Yes, that will do. Now you will see what I am going to do. Are you ready?"

Parke nodded slightly. Cheserworth drew back his hand with a dexterous turn of the wrist, and the long tongue of the whiplash fairly whistled in the roof. Then Cheserworth jerked his arm forward like a fisherman casting a fly, which straightened out unerringly in Parke's direction, and a

moment later the tip of his cigarette was cut as clean as if it had been severed with a knife. The lighted end dropped to the floor and smouldered there.

Then Parke took his watch-chain from his pocket and hung it across his waistcoat. Once more Cheserworth's arm moved imperceptibly. The long lash flashed out once more, the chain vanished from Parke's black waistcoat and came back, as if by some weird sleight of hand and lay coiled up in Cheserworth's palm. The hall was more or less filled with flowers in pots, and as Cheserworth continued to make play with the whip, so the flowers were severed from their stems, and came back in the same startling manner to Cheserworth's left hand until he had quite a bouquet there. He turned with a bow and handed them over to Marie, who stood there dazed and fascinated.

"There," he said quietly. "You can see what it is possible to do with a stock weapon in an experienced hand. I could flick a fly off a bush at thirty feet, I could cut a pack of cards in two as if they were a pat of butter. A whip like this would cut a bullock through to the flesh. I once saw a desperado have his hand taken off on one of the farms in the West. And I am quite an amateur at the game. I don't suppose I have done a single thing that Miss Fladbury couldn't do quite as well."

Kate Fladbury dropped into a chair. Her hands were pressed together between her knees. She looked from one man to another with wide staring eyes; she touched her dry, white lips with the tip of her tongue. Parke stood by the door.

"I don't understand you," she said. "I think you do," Parke took up the story. "Mr. Cheserworth tells me that you are quite as clever with that terrible stock whip as he is. He informs me that he saw you perform in Sydney at a music-hall there. He doesn't recollect meeting you at Mrs. Malcolm's, for the simple reason that you were never there."

"This is an insult," the girl said hoarsely.

"Not at all," Parke went on. "It is extremely unpleasant, but I am bound to speak plainly. You see I have had a deal of experience with mysterious crimes in India, and that is why I am here. When Miss Conningham told me what had happened I naturally cast about to find out who the culprit was. I was told that you came from Australia from Mrs. Malcolm's, and I elicited the information that since you have been here no letter from Mrs. Malcolm had reached the bungalow. Therefore, I cabled to Mrs. Malcolm yesterday, and a reply came this morning to the effect that there must be some mistake, and that Mrs. Malcolm's Miss Fladbury, so to speak, married a squatter out there, and, therefore, on the face of it, you must be an impostor. After I had got you out of the way to-day I did not hesitate to search your bedroom, and I found there the stock whip which is lying in front of you on the table at the present moment. Then I began to see my way clear. I knew that my friend Mr. Cheserworth knew Mrs. Malcolm, I told him everything that had happened on the telephone, and, at my request, he came down here at once. Do you follow me?"

"There is some mistake," Miss Fladbury murmured. "And even this does not account for the loss—"

"Oh, I am coming to that," Parke interrupted. "Surely, you are not going to carry this matter any further; you are not going to force us to call in the police. Why, Mr. Cheserworth has just given us an object lesson of the manner in which the jewels were stolen. What looked like an inexplicable mystery is perfectly plain

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