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E. A. STRANG

A Haunted Island.

(Continued.)

I stood in the corner of the room, with my back against the wall and my hand on the cold rifle-barrel. The table covered with my books lay between me and the door, but for the first few minutes after the lights were out the darkness was so intense that nothing could be discerned at all. Then, very gradually, the outline of the room became visible, and the framework of the windows began to shape itself dimly before my eyes. After a few minutes the door, its upper half of glass, and the two windows that looked out upon the front verandah, became specially distinct; and I was glad that this was so, because if the Indians came up to the house I should be able to see their approach, and gather something of their plans. Nor was I mistaken, for there presently came to my ears the peculiar hollow sound of a canoe landing and being carefully dragged up over the rocks. The paddles I distinctly heard being placed underneath, and the silence that ensued thereupon I rightly interpreted to mean that the Indians were stealthily approaching the house.

While it would be absurd to claim that I was not alarmed—even frightened—at the gravity of the situation and its possible outcome, I speak the whole truth when I say that I was not overwhelmingly afraid for myself. I was conscious that even at this stage of the night I was passing into a psychical condition in which my sensations seemed no longer normal. Physical fear at no time entered into the nature of my feelings; and though I kept my hand upon my rifle the greater part of the night, I was all the time conscious that its assistance could be of little avail against the terrors that I had to face. More than once I seemed to feel most curiously that I was in no real sense a part of the proceedings, nor actually involved in them, but that I was playing the part of a spectator—a spector, moreover, on a psychic rather than on a material plan. Many of my sensations that night were too vague for definite description and analysis, but the main feeling that will stay with me to the end of my days is the awful horror of it all, and the miserable sensation that if the strain had lasted a little longer than was actually the case my mind must inevitably have given way.

Meanwhile I stood still in my corner, and waited patiently for what was to come. The house was as still as the grave, but the inarticulate voices of the night sang in my ears, and I seemed to hear the blood running in my veins and dancing in my pulses.

If the Indians came to the back of the house, they would find the kitchen door and window securely fastened. They could not get in there without making considerable noise, which I was bound to hear. The only means of getting in was the door that faced me, and I kept my eyes glued on that door without taking them off for the smallest fraction of a second.

My sight adapted itself every minute better to the darkness. I saw the table that nearly filled the room, and left only a narrow passage on each side. I could also make out the straight backs of the wooden chairs pressed against it, and could even distinguish my papers and inkstand lying on the white oilcloth covering. I thought of the gay faces that had gathered round that table during the summer, and I longed for the sunlight as I had never longed for it before.

Less than three feet to my left the passage-way led to the kitchen, and the stairs leading to the bedrooms above commenced in this passage-way, but almost in the sitting-room itself. Through the windows I could see the dim motionless outlines of the trees; not a leaf stirred, not a branch moved.

A few moments of this awful silence, and then I was aware of a soft tread on the boards of the verandah, so stealthy it seemed an impression directly on my brain rather than upon the nerves of hearing. Immediately afterwards a black figure darkened the glass door, and I perceived that a face was pressed against the upper panes. A shiver ran down my back, and my hair was conscious of a tendency to rise and stand at right angles to my head.

It was the figure of an Indian, broad-shouldered and immense; indeed, the largest figure of a man I have ever seen outside of a circus hall. By some power of light that seemed to generate itself in the brain, I saw the strong dark face with the acquiline nose and high cheek-bones flattened against the glass. The direction of the gaze I could not determine, but faint gleams of light as the big eyes rolled round and showed their whites, told me plainly that no corner of the room escaped their searching.

For what seemed fully fifty minutes the dark figure stood there, with the huge shoulders bent forward so as to bring the dead down to the level of the glass; while behind him, though not nearly so large, swayed to and fro like a bent tree the shadowy form of the other Indian. While I waited in an agony of suspense and agitation for their next movement, little currents of icy sensation ran up and down my spine, and my heart seemed alternately to stop beating, and then start off again with terrifying rapidity. They must have heard its thumping and the singing of the blood in my head! Moreover, I was conscious, as I felt a cold stream of perspiration trickle down my face, of a desire to scream, to shout, to bang the walls like a child, to make a noise, or do anything that would relieve the suspense and bring things to a speedy climax.

It was probably this inclination that led me to another discovery, for when I tried to bring my rifle from behind my back to raise it and have it pointed at the door ready to fire, I found that I was powerless to move. The muscles, paralysed by this strange fear, refused to obey the will. Here indeed was a terrifying complication!

* * * * *

There was a faint sound of rattling at the brass knob, and the door was pushed open a couple of inches. A pause of a few seconds, and it was pushed open still farther. Without a sound of footsteps that was appreciable to my ears, the two figures glided into the room, and the man behind gently closed the door after him.

They were alone with me between the four walls. Could they see me standing there, so still and straight in my corner? Had they, perhaps, already seen me? My blood surged and sang like the roll of drums in an orchestra; and though I did my best to suppress my breathing, it sounded like the rushing of wind through a pneumatic tube.

My suspense as to the next move was soon at an end—only, however, to give place to a new and keener alarm. The men had hitherto exchanged no words and no signs, but there were general indications of a movement across the room and whichever way they went they would have to pass the table. If they came my way they would have to pass within six inches of my person. While I was considering this very disagreeable possibility, I perceived that the smaller Indian (smaller by comparison) suddenly raised his arm and pointed to the ceiling. The big fellow raised his head and followed the direction of his companion's arm. I began to understand at last. They were going upstairs, and the room directly overhead to which they pointed had been until this night my bedroom. It was the room in which I had experienced that very morning so strange a sensation of fear, and but for which I should then have been lying asleep in the narrow bed against the window.

The Indians then began to move silently around the room; they were going upstairs, and they were coming round my side of the table. So stealthy were their movements that, but for the abnormally sensitive state of the nerves, I should never have heard them. As it was, their cat-like tread was distinctly audible. Like two monstrous black cats they came round the table toward me, and for the first time I perceived that the smaller of the two dragged something along the floor behind him. As it trailed along over the floor with a soft, sweeping sound, I somehow got the impression that it was a large dead thing with outstretched wings, or a large spreading cedar branch. Whatever it was, I was unable to see it even in outline, and I was too terrified, even had I possessed the power over my muscles to carry my neck forward in the effort to determine its nature.

Nearer and nearer they came. The leader rested a giant hand upon the table as he moved. My lips were glued together, and the air seemed to burn in my nostrils. I tried to close my eyes, so that I might not see as they passed me; but my eyelids had stiffened, and refused to obey. Would they never get by me? Sensation seemed also to have left my legs, and it was as if I were standing on mere supports of wood or stone. Worse still, I was conscious that I was losing the power of balance, the power to stand upright, or even to lean backwards against the wall. Some force was drawing me forward, and a dizzy terror seized me that I should lose my balance, and topple forward against the Indians just as they were in the act of passing me.

Even moments drawn out into hours must come to an end some time, and almost before I knew it the figures had passed me and had their feet upon the lower step of the stairs leading to the upper bedrooms. There cannot have been six inches between us, and yet I was conscious only of a current of cold air that followed them. They had not touched me, and I was convinced that they had not seen me. Even the trailing thing on the floor behind them had not touched my feet, as I had dreaded it would, and on such an occasion as this I was grateful even for the smallest mercies.

The absence of the Indians from my immediate neighborhood brought little sense of relief. I stood shivering and shuddering in my corner, and, beyond being able to breathe more freely, I felt no whit less uncomfortable. Also I was aware that a certain light, which, without apparent source or rays, had enabled me to follow their every gesture and movement, had gone out of the room with their departure. An unnatural darkness now filles the room, and pervaded every corner, so that I could barely make out the positions of the windows and the glass doors.

As I said before, my condition was evidently an abnormal one. The capacity for feeling surprise seemed, as in dreams, to be wholly absent. My senses recorded with unusual accuracy every smallest occurrence, but I was able to draw only the simplest deductions

The Indians soon reached the top of the stairs, and there they halted for a moment. I had not the faintest clue as to their next movement. They appeared to hesitate. They were listening attentively. Then I heard one of them, who, by the weight of his soft tread, must have been the giant, cross the narrow corridor and enter the room directly overhead—my own little bedroom. But for the insistence of that unaccountable dread I had experienced there in the morning, I should at that very moment have been lying in the bed with the big Indian in the room standing beside me.

For the space of a hundred seconds there was silence, such as might have existed before the birth of sound. It was followed by a long, quivering shriek of terror, which rang out into the night, and ended in a short gulp before it had run its full course. At the same time the other Indian left his place at the head of the stairs, and joined his companion in the bedroom. I heard the "thing" trailing behind him along the floor. A thud followed, as of something heavy falling, and then all became as still and silent as before.

It was at this point that the atmosphere, surcharged all day with the electricity of a fierce storm, found relief in a dancing flash of brilliant lightning simultaneously with a crash of loudest thunder. For five seconds every article in the room was visible to me with amazing distinctness, and through the windows I saw the tree trunks standing in solemn rows. The thunder pealed and echoed across the lake, and among the distant islands, and the flood-gates of heaven then opened and let out their rain in streaming torrents.

The drops fell with a swift rushing sound upon the still waters of the lake, which leaped up to meet them, and pattered with the rattle of shot on the leaves of the maples, and the roof of the cottage. A moment later, and another flash, even more brilliant and of longer duration than the first, lit up the sky from zenith to horizon, and bathed the room momentarily in dazzling whiteness. I could see the rain glistening on the leaves and branches outside. The wind rose suddenly, and in less than a minute the storm that had been gathering all day burst forth in its full fury.

Above all the noisy voices of the elements, the slightest sounds in the room overhead made themselves heard and in the few seconds of deep silence that followed the shriek of terror and pain I was aware that the movements had commenced again. The men were leaving the room and approaching the top of the stairs. A short pause, and they began to descend. Behind them, tumbling from step to step, I could hear that trailing "thing" being dragged along. It had become ponderous!

I awaited their approach with a degree of calmness, almost of apathy, which was only explicable on the ground that after a certain point Nature applies her own anaesthetic, and a merciful condition of numbness supervenes. On they came, step by step, nearer and nearer, with the shuffling sound of the burden behind growing louder as they approached.

They were already half-way down the stairs when I was galvanized afresh into a condition of terror by the consideration of a new and horrible possibiltiy. It was the reflection that if another vivid flash of lightning were to come when the shadowy procession was in the room, perhaps when it was actually passing in front of me, I should see everything in detail, and worse, be seen myself! I could only hold my breath and wait—wait while the minutes lengthened into hours, and the procession made its slow progress round the room.

The Indians had reached the foot of the staircase. The form of the huge leader loomed in the doorway of the passage, and the burden with an ominous thud had dropped from the last step to the floor. There was a moment's pause while I saw the Indian turn and stoop to assist his companion. Then the procession moved forward again, entered the room close on my left, and began to move slowly round my side of the table. The leader was already beyond me, and his companion, dragging on the floor behind him the burden, whose confused outline I could dimly make out, was exactly in front of me, when the cavalcade came to a dead halt. At the same moment, with the strange suddenness of thunderstorms, the splash of the rain ceased altogether, and the wind died away into utter silence.

For the space of five seconds my heart seemed to stop beating, and then the worst came. A double flash of lightning lit up the room and its contents with merciless vividness.

The huge Indian leader stood a few feet past me on my right. One leg was stretched forward in the act of taking a step. His immense shoulders were turned toward his companion, and in all their magnificent fierceness I saw the outline of his features. His gaze was directed upon the burden his companion was dragging along the floor; but his profile, with the big aquiline nose, high cheek-bone, straight black hair and bold chin, burnt itself in that brief instant into my brain never again to fade.

Dwarfish, compared to this gigantic figure appeared the proportions of the other Indian, who, within twelve inches of my face, was stooping over the thing he was dragging in a position that lent to his person the additional horror of deformity. And the burden, lying upon a sweeping cedar branch which he held and dragged by a long stem, was the body of a white man. The scalp had been neatly lifted, and blood lay in a broad smear upon the cheeks and forehead.

Then for the first time that night the terror that had paralysed my muscles, and my will lifted its unholy spell from my soul. With a loud cry I stretched out my arms to seize the big Indian by the throat, and, grasping only air, tumbled forward unconscious upon the ground.

I had recognised the body, and the face was my own!

It was bright daylight, when a man's voice recalled me to consciousness. I was lying where I had fallen, and the farmer was standing in the room with the loaves of bread in his hands. The horror of the night was still in my heart, and as the bluff settler helped me to my feet and picked up the rifle which had fallen with me, with many questions and expressions of condolence, I imagine my brief replies were neither self-explanatory nor even intelligible.

That day, after a thorough and fruitless search of the house, I left the island, and went over to spend my last ten days with the farmer; and when the time came for me to leave, the necessary reading had been accomplished, and my nerves had completely recovered their balance.

On the day of my departure the farmer started early in his big boat with my belongings to row to the point, twelve miles distant, where a little steamer ran twice a week for the accommodation of hunters. Late in the afternoon I went off in another direction in my canoe, wishing to see the island once again where I had been the victim of so strange an experience.

In due course I arrived there, and made a tour of the island. I also made a search of the little house, and it was not without a curious sensation in my heart that I entered the little upstairs bedroom. There seemed nothing unusual.

Just after I re-embarked, I saw a canoe gliding ahead of me around the curve of the island. A canoe was an unusual sight at this time of the year, and this one seemed to have sprung from nowhere. Altering my course a little, I watched it disappear around the next projecting point of rock. It had high curving bows, and there were two Indians in it. I lingered with some excitement (to see if it would appear again round the other side of the island; and in less than five minutes it came into view. There were less than two hundred yards between us, and the Indians, sitting on their haunches, were paddling swiftly in my direction.

I never paddled faster in my life than I did in those next few minutes. When I turned to look again, the Indians had altered their course, and were again circling the island.

The sun was sinking behind the forests on the mainland, and the crimson-coloured clouds of sunset were reflected in the waters of the lake, when I looked round for the last time, and saw the big bark canoe and its two dusky occupants still going round the island. Then the shadows deepened rapidly; the lake grew black, and the night wind blew its first breath in my face as I turned a corner, and a projecting bluff of rock hid from my view both island can canoe.—Algernon Blackwood, in Pall Mall Gazette.

The End.

A GIRL I USED TO KNOW.

I knew a girl once on a time,
Whose disposition was sublime;
Whose voice was soft and low;
Her face was always wreathed in smiles;
Her gowns were of the latest styles;
This girl I used to know.

She always was so good and kind;
To all my faults so very blind;
I loved this maiden so.
I thought it would be perfect bliss
If only one time I could kiss.
This girl I used to know.

But now this girl is sadly changed;
Her hair is always disarranged;
Her voice is not so low.
Her face, I find, is wrinkled much,
She likes to get my hand to clutch,
This girl I used to know.

My faults she does not fail to find;
To keep them always in my mind,
She's not afraid or slow.
A question always puzzles me—
I wonder can this really be
The girl I used to know.

Yes, true enough, why should I doubt
This is the girl I raved about?
The idol of my life.
The maid I dreamed was so divine;
The maid I coveted for mine,
Alas! she is my wife!

THE FLOWER GARDEN.

No garden is complete without the summer flowering bulbs; of these the dahlia leads, followed closely by the gladiolus, to which we may add the canna, tube-rose, tuberous begonia, and many others. After the first frost comes these bulbs should be carefully dried and packed in dry sand or sawdust to preserve them from next year's planting.

Let us not forget the standby of the old-time gardens—the perennials; their beauty and growth is bringing them again into general cultivation. They require little attention and respond generously to increased care and thorough cultivation. No true lover of flowers would think of a flower garden without roses, and now that the ever blooming varieties are to be obtained at a reasonable price, we can have them from June until frost. They require a larger amount of care then annuals, yet with frequent spraying with whale oil soap or kerosene emulsion they can be kept free from insects. Many varieties are hardy, and with protection will withstand the rigors of our northern winters, while many of the Hybrid varieties have to be removed to the cellar.

How the Men Propose.

No two men, so an experienced friend informs us, ever propose alike. Each and every one has a method peculiarly his own.

A man may be ever so much in doubt as to how his proposal may be received, but away down in his heart is the consciousnes that if he is reasonably dealt with she ought to say yes.

Self-esteem has been often condemned as but a negative of virtue at best, but you just mark it down that the man who has not a good share of self-esteem never amounts to much in this world. He must believe in himself before he can make anybody else believe in him.

But how do they propose?

There is the self-assured man. He goes about the business in a matter-of-fact way. It is nothing to be ashamed of. He sits up straight and addresses the object of his designs with deliberation. He has left his hat and overcoat in the hall, and has literally nothing on his hands but the proposal business. And he says:

"My dear Miss Jones, I have for some time been visiting you, and, of course, you can guess what purpose has actuated me?"

But Miss Jones blushes, and protests that "she never even dreamed of what his purpose might be. No, never!"

Then he draws a little nearer. He takes her hand. And he says:

"My dear Miss Jones, if you will only consent to become my wife, I shall esteem myself the happiest of men. Will you not consent, and make me forever your debtor?"

And it is hoped that Miss Jones decides to discount his affection and become his creditor for all time.

Then there is the widower, who has had experience with women. If a man loses one wife he generally loses another; and when he has lost two, he begins to look out for No Three. Nobody blames him for it. It shows his good taste. A man who has enjoyed the devotion of two good women has a perfect right to try for a third one. And he goes about it with a confident air born of long experience.

"Miss Jones, I have long been acquainted with you, and my second wife thought there was nobody in the world like you! I do not believe there was another woman living with whom she would have been so ready to trust her poor, little, motherless children. No indeed, I do not!" he adds emphatically, when Miss Jones offers a faint little disclaimer.

"And, my dear Miss Jones, a widower's life is so desolate, and the children so need a mother's care!" And if Miss Jones doesn't consent to marry the children, with the father thrown in, then she must have a heart harder than the traditional nether millstone.

There is the bashful man, who hardly knows what is the matter with him. He knows there is something wrong, because his appetite is fickle, and he sleeps badly, and has broken out all over in rhyme — he calls it poetry — and his heart beats too fast, and his mother insists on giving him wormwood and molasses for his digestion.

It will require weeks, perhaps months, for him to screw his courage to the sticking point, and even after he has got in the parlor at the house of his adored, with his hat and umbrella along for company and support, he has a great mind to flee from the place and never return. His heart sounds like the thump of a locomotive getting up steam, and the cold sweat stands on his manly brow. And when Susy comes in, he rises and drops his hat and picks it up, and down goes his umbrella and he picks that up and stands holding both articles — the image of despair.

And Susy, who has perhaps been there before, takes these troublesome personal belongings out into the hall, for she knows what is coming, and she also knows that when a man is proposing he needs both hands.

And he swallows a lump in his throat as big as a peck measure, and he says:

"Miss Susy, I—I—I—have come to—to—ter—to——"

"Yes?" says Susy, encouragingly.

"To—ter—tell you how I love you!" And after he has thus relieved himself the way seems easy, and he and Susy in due time will embark on the treacherous sea of matrimony.

There is the man who is curt and businesslike. "Madam," he says, "I am thinking of changing my situation. I want a wife. Will you do me the honor of becoming Mrs. Smithson?"

And there is the lover of the popular novel, who "snatches her to his throbbing breast and rains kisses upon her lips, and cries out in tragic accents, Darling, I love you! Life would be a desert without you!

There is the man who gets her mother to intercede for him, and the man who arranges matters with her father, and the man who courts half his lifetime, and never quite "gets to it," and who, after a while, sees his sweetheart spirited off by another man who did not court her more than a week.

It is little matter, so our friend says, how the men propose, so that they only do it—that is the main thing, after all."—Kate Thorn.

ARCTIC INDUSTRY.

It is the fashion of some writers to speak of the Arctic regions as a worthless quarter of the world, which has never paid for all the dangers and suffering incurred there, and yet the Danish possessions in Greenland are almost unique among colonial enterprises, having paid a profit to the general Government every year for more than a century. Practically, all the mineral cryolite used in the industries of America and Europe comes from Greenland, and, according to the estimates of Gen. Greely, the whale, seal, walrus and other products of the Arctic regions have, in a little over two centuries, contributed about $1,000,000,000 to the wealth of the world.

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