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THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOUM

BY ST. GEORGE RATHBORNE.

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

SYNOPSIS OF THE OPENING CHAPTERS.

The story opens at Cairo, where Mr. Grimes, who passes as an American silver king; Sandy Barlow, a newspaper correspondent; Mr. Tanner, a millionaire traveller, and his daughter Molly, all meet. Mr. Grimes informs Grimes that his dahabiah on its way down the Nile picked up Mynheer Joe a messenger from Gordon. As both Grimes and Sandy know Joe they go down to the boat to find him. Joe gives them the first news of the fall of Khartoum and Gordon's death. They bring Joe up from the boat to meet Molly, Millionaire Tanner's daughter, who recognizes as a girl he once saved from drowning at Malta.

Mynheer Joe obtains presentable clothes from Mr. Grimes and has an interview with Molly, who thanks him for saving her life.

At Shepherd's hotel in Cairo, where a ball is in progress, he finds a big man and a little one quarrelling. Thinking the little one is Molly's father, he takes his part.

Having thoroughly thrashed the big man in a scientific manner, he is astounded to learn that he has knocked out Molly's father. She appears and rushes to her parent's aid.

He does nothing of the sort, however, but manfully holds his own. They pass on to the hotel without noticing him, whereupon Joe heaves a sigh of relief. Then he takes himself mentally to task. Why should he care whether this young girl detests him or not? She is nothing to him—can be nothing to him. Her coming across his path has been a mere accident—a gentle ripple on the broad sea of his plans and existence.

Then his mind goes back—he sees himself struggling in the waters of the blue Mediterranean, while the boat he's back to his arms clasping the fair young girl who clings to him so confidently. How often has this picture remained before his mind during days and nights of peril, when death howled at the walls of devoted Khartoum, and brave Gordon fought back the hordes of dervishes again and again.

It is useless for Mynheer Joe to declare that this young girl has no influence upon his life. He knows even while thus endeavoring to deceive himself that there is something back of it all—a hidden power that manipulates the wires—a fate that controls their destinies.

Accompanied by Mr. Grimes, he again reaches the piazza, and seeking a quiet retired nook, he starts to enjoy their cigars. Mynheer Joe seeks to throw this last disturbing element to one side, and being possessed of remarkable will power, he manages to do so, concentrating his mind upon other matters.

They chat about several things in general, and seem to be very comfortable. The explorer, when his cigar is half smoked, takes a glance around, and notes that they are quite alone, for the piazza at this point is deserted, the guests having wandered in the direction of the supper-room, for the hotel does nothing by halves.

It is no longer utterly dark. The remnant of a February moon has crept up over the horizon, and lends a pencil of silver to the Egyptian landscape. It is very romantic, for the moonlight gleams from many a dome-like mosque and towering minaret.

Mynheer Joe, after noting the fact that they are quite alone, turns to his companion and makes a remark that has a peculiar ring:

"This is as good a time and place for explanations, Mr. Grimes, as we can find."

The silver king looks at his companion and breathes out rings of smoke.

"Explanation? My dear fellow, to what do you refer?" he asks; but the expression on his face proclaims that he, at least, suspects.

"There is no need of concealment between us, Mr. Grimes. You may deceive these good people at the hotel, but I have heard of you, sir."

"Oh!" mutters the individual addressed.

"Yes," Mynheer Joe goes on, quickly, as though his mind is made up; "you pass as a silver king at Cairo. Across the water, Mr. Grimes, you are known as one of the shrewdest detectives in the country."

He pauses again as if to let this shot go home. Both puff away at their cigars, as though the action may clear their brains. It is the explorer who breaks the silence.

"You don't deny the soft impeachment, Mr. Grimes?" he says, with a query in his voice.

"I have no objection to you, sir, although I should not like this subject to become common property," replies the stout man, in a singularly cool tone.

"Perhaps I can even guess the object of your visit to Egypt in this year of eighty-five."

"Make a try at it now."

"You are searching for a certain individual by name, Joseph Miner."

"Bull's eye, first shot," laughs Grimes. "Come, how in the deuce did you know all this?"

"I have been looking for a visitor from across the water. Something told me I should find him in Cairo. Your especial interest in me caused me to be doubly watchful. I remember your name

through some peculiar incident that happened when last I saw New York, and as a result I unmasked the silver king."

While he thus speaks, Mynheer Joe shows no signs of uneasiness. He has not the manner of a man who has anything to fear when he finds an officer of the law following him. One who has embroiled a great sum of money might show signs of alarm, but this man evidently has no such burden upon his mind. It is with a far different object in view Mr. Grimes has sought him; that is evident. The pseudo silver king watches him from the corners of his eyes. Now that his journey to the burning land of Egypt has reached its fruition, he begins to entertain doubts as to its ultimate success. Mynheer Joe is undoubtedly a man with a determined character, not easily influenced. Can he offer any inducements whereby the traveller may change his plans and revoke a vow made in the past? Whatever secret he carries with him, Mr. Grimes hopes it may prove effective.

"There is little use, then, in my explaining why I am over here," he says, jocosely.

"The same old story—to patch up a peace between Colonel Carrington, my uncle, and myself. I understand. It means much to him that this thing is done; but, although I trust I don't harbor malice, I never want to see his face again."

"Nor will you, sir," says the other, quietly.

"Ah! Then the colonel is dead?"

"Just so. He succumbed to his enemy at last."

"Peace be to his ashes! I've no doubt he kept his word and disinherited me?" with a peculiar inflection of the voice, as though the subject naturally has some interest for him.

"Come, that's a singular answer, Mr. Grimes."

"It is on that account I am over here. Perhaps you remember Jack Austin?"

"One of my best friends in the Quaker City?"

"It was he who sent me. I have exchanged nearly four months. There remain eight more for you to show up in Philadelphia and prove your identity. That done within a year from the date of the old man's death, and you fall heir to his vast estates."

"Well, with a steady puff, 'suppose I fail to show up—what then?'"

"Why, man, there's a cool million at stake in this matter—think of it, enough to fit out expeditions to the North Pole—to the centre of the earth—money to squander in the most elaborate efforts to discover what even a Livingstone or a Doctor Kane has failed in."

How artfully Mr. Grimes puts a question to what he knows is the weak spot in the make-up of his strange companion. "Was ever such a scene as this known before, when a man pleads with a fellow human to appear and claim a fortune that awaits his coming?"

Mynheer Joe seems to be weighing the whole affair in the invisible scales of his mind. When he speaks again it is reflectively.

"Eight months, you say? When did he die?"

"On the 10th of October last."

"Eight months—let me see—from Cairo I go direct to India—it is impossible to give that journey up, for even now I may be too late to accomplish what I seek to do. Then, if all goes well there, I have made up my mind to set something of 'China in a region to penetrate, making my way through Persia and the Mediterranean. Eight months are a short time, but then if everything goes well, there is a chance that I may turn up in Philadelphia before or on next October 10th. It all depends on how fortune handles me, you know."

It would be impossible to portray the feelings that possess Mr. Grimes while he listens to these remarkable words. He has seen many types of men in his life, and looks upon the whole human race as gold worshippers, yet here is a man who seems to have an honest scorn for the dross. It is the most astonishing event Mr. Grimes has ever come across in all his life. He holds his cigar between finger and thumb and surveys Mynheer Joe with amazement.

"You are the first man I ever met in my range, sir, who would snap his fingers at a fortune which he could have by putting out his hand and grasping it," he mutters.

"Perhaps so, Mr. Grimes. I know my own mind best, and as you perhaps are a purveyor of my business, a little money goes a long way when in the bush, and I don't travel like Stanley with from one to five hundred pounds and fighting men. By the way, supposing I fail to turn up by the time specified, does the property go to charity?"

Mr. Grimes has been expecting this, and yet he twists uneasily in his chair, as though hardly willing to answer.

"No. It goes to the other side of the house."

"Ah! The Bannern?"

"A descendant of theirs, daughter of the last Miss Banner. She married and was lost sight of for a long time, but her family turned up out West somewhere."

"Do you know the name of the heiress, Mr. Grimes?"

"Well, yes, sir, I have heard it," he replies.

"Let me have it, please," remarks Mynheer Joe, taking out his note book. "A man is bound to feel some interest

in the party who will come into a million or not, according to his whim. If you have seen this party—By the way, is she a spinster or a married woman?"

"The former, by all means," with a grin that Mynheer Joe takes note of and presumes is caused by the fact that the party referred to is an antiquated old maid, with queer little curls, blue glasses and a pet cat—oh, he can see her in imagination, just as he pictured the Hon. Demosthenes Tanner—and as truly.

"I trust she'll make good use of the money if through my failure to appear it falls to her," pursues Joe, thoughtfully.

"No doubt of that, sir, no doubt of that," says the other, with something of a chuckle. "According to my idea of thinking that money is bound to go the same way whether you get it or the other."

"That's an enigma, Mr. Grimes, explain."

"Well, you see, she's uncommonly fond of travel—has been up Mount Blanc, partly scaled the Matterhorn, cruised along the whole coast of Algiers, and has many number of trips in contemplation which will consume money and add to the knowledge of geographers. Bless you, sir, she's got a medal already from the Royal Geographical Society of Great Britain in connection with certain feat—unhappy concerning some daring work she did in the Alps."

"How? A regular female discoverer? An adventurer in petticoats. I've met a number of such. They're all alike. And while admiring their grit in daring perils in unknown lands, I am free to confess, Mr. Grimes, that I've never struck with their personal charms. It is a business that only the most determined characters take to—women who partake more of the man in their nature. You've seen 'em often."

Mr. Grimes is shaking all over with emotion. He coughs, as though it is a little tobacco smoke that has gotten into his windpipe and choked him.

"Of course, my dear fellow. But you do wrong to quibble the whole class. I've always found there were exceptions to every rule."

"Come, don't think I'm throwing out innuendoes against female travellers. I've met several wonderful women who accompanied their husbands into danger and threatened death. I'm only stating a fact that all with whom I am acquainted are strong characters, with plain, resolute features. I presume the life they lead makes them look so manly."

"Yet, they, too, may have been lovely once," murmurs the pseudo king.

"The name, Mr. Grimes, the name? Perhaps I may have met the lady somewhere."

"And I am sure of it. It is now less than half an hour since you knocked her dear old governor out in one round."

Mynheer Joe drops book and pencil and springs to his feet as if made the recipient of a galvanic shock from the electric coils he is so fond of twirling about.

"Why, man, you don't mean to tell me that it is Molly Tanner?" he bursts out with, whereupon his companion begs him to remember that others are not for away, and one scene of an evening is quite enough.

By this time Mynheer Joe, the erstwhile cool messenger from Khartoum, has picked up his book and seats himself beside Mr. Grimes, upon whose arm he fastens a clutch, while with a voice full of eagerness he asks:

"Tell me the exact truth, my friend. There is no reason for concealment between us. You say Molly Tanner will come in for that million if I fail to turn up?"

"That is the whole of it, my dear Joe."

"Of course she knows the nature of the will?"

"Word for word."

"I am puzzled."

"How so?"

"She met me, heard my name, and yet did not recognize me as the party who could step between her and this fortune."

"Bah! You forget something. You assumed your uncle's name, which, it seems, for reasons best known to your self, you have thrown off again."

"True, sir."

"The document speaks of Joseph M. Carrington as the coming man. How was she to know Mynheer Joe as that party?"

"Ah! You are right, Mr. Grimes, you are right."

"This young woman, as I told you, is an enthusiast in the work of seeing unknown countries, climbing mountains that have never yet been scaled, and, in fact, accomplishing deeds that you men love so dearly."

"I remember she spoke of being fond of travel," he mutters, thoughtfully. This surprise has taken his breath away, and for the time being Mynheer Joe is not himself.

"Just at present she has an object in her travel beyond mere adventure or sight-seeing. She is searching for a man."

"Ah!"

"By name, Joseph M. Carrington?"

"On deck. What will she do when she finds this same personage?"

"Endeavor to send him home to Philadelphia in time to secure his inheritance. She believes the old man's will is unjust, and desires to set matters right. No one looks for the missing Carrington more earnestly than this girl who would profit most by his absence."

"Then Molly Tanner is one in a thousand. I knew I could not be mistaken in her face. Here is another peculiar trait that draws us together. Make up your mind, Mr. Grimes, as he tosses his cigar away and jumps to his feet. 'I go to India from here, and the chance is now one in a thousand that I turn up in Quakerdom in time to secure the condition of the will.'"

Mr. Grimes does not rise, but puffs away at his Havana, brought across the water, while the looks after Mynheer Joe's retreating form.

"Well," he says with a chuckle, "two and two make four. The magnet draws—he goes to meet her. I may be beaten in one sense, but there are more ways of accomplishing a thing: 'han enter into your philosophy, Horatio. Klame! It is indeed fate.'"



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CHAPTER VIII.

Mynheer Joe enters the nearest room and finds a few of the guests scattered about. His eye seeks one form alone—and finds it not. It is uncertain how Molly will receive him, as he cannot tell whether her father will relate the circumstances of the affair to her or not.

Conscious that a pair of eyes have fastened upon him, he looks across the room to see the small man whom Grimes designated as the wily baron, the secret emissary of the Russian government, smiling and nodding in a condescending way that is irritating, to say the least.

Just then Mynheer Joe has a peculiar sensation sweep over him; he is conscious of a deep dislike toward this man. He does not attempt to explain the feeling. Perhaps it is rivalry that brings these two together—arriving after the smiles of a beautiful girl.

Molly Tanner brushes past the baron at this moment, having been able to leave her parent, who is not badly injured in any way. The Russian puts out a hand to stay her passage, but she heads him not, advancing straight as the home fight of a bee for the spot where the explorer stands. In another moment she is at his side.

"How is your father?" he manages to ask, feeling like a hypocrite; and for the fact of his face being already tanned, the blood mounting upward would betray him.

"He feels no effect from his fall, but is full of deep anger," Molly replies.

"Against the man who struck him?"

"No, singularly enough he doesn't seem to feel that way toward the wretch. His anger is wholly directed against the man who threw the banana-skin upon the flags on which he slipped at the time he was struck."

"Oh!" says Joe, with a gurgling smile, as he grasps the defeated gladiator's arm to excuse his downfall. "Singular how accidents will happen. I've had strange things occur to me at times. But, Miss Molly, how is it with you? If your father does not bear malice toward the unlucky offender who was so rash as to measure strength with him, do you forgive him?"

"Not I—the wretch. It was my dear old governor he struck. If I had been present I'm afraid I might have done something desperate."

And her flashing eyes give Joe an idea that this is no mere idle threat on her part.

He shrugs his shoulders and continues:

"I believe it was a fair, stand-up business. But we will not discuss it further, Miss Molly."

"Pardon me, but—" she stammers.

"What can I do for you?" seeing she is about to ask some favor at which she hesitates.

"I don't know why I speak to you in this way, since I have known you for so short a time. I have numerous friends here—acquaintances, I should call them—but you saved my life, and, somehow, I feel that I can say to you what I should hesitate to speak to others."

"Yes," he utters encouragingly, feeling deeply flattered by her words, and yet conscious of an uneasy sensation, for the baron is glaring at him from across the room, and there is something baleful in that diplomat's frown.

"Will you help me?" she asks bluntly. "I promise you, to the best of my ability," he replies without a second thought.

"A thousand thanks. I knew I could depend upon you," she murmurs.

Mynheer Joe does not read the nature of the request she is about to make.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he asks. "Do not hesitate. Speak out."

"You may think me vindictive, perhaps."

"Never."

"But when I think of the dear old governor being so badly used, my blood fairly boils."

"Ah!"

"Do you think you could find the wretch who beat my governor, Mynheer Joe?"

"I am sure of it," stoutly.

"Will you do this—for me?"

"Assuredly."

"And bring him before me?"

"I will drag him there by the neck and the heels, though he has the strength of a Samson."

(To be Continued.)