

FOUND WANTING

The Story of a Man who was White and a Woman who was Yellow.

By BARRY SHEIL



OUTSIDE the door of his bark built humpy in the Wirraboo Gully—which is eight miles from the township of Benskin, New South Wales sat a solitary man. He had filled his billy-can and hung it over the fire, and now sat reading, for the twentieth time, a much creased copy of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which he had brought over from Benskin two days before.

The particular column down which his eyes travelled he knew by heart almost, but he read it once more while he waited for the billy-can to boil. And yet it was only a glowing account of the prospects of the then newly discovered goldfields on the South African Rand.

He stroked his ragged, coal-black beard while he read, and his black eyes gathered an expression of intense determination.

"I'll go," he said aloud. "I guess I'm about sick of this. Breaking clay with nuggets in is no harder than turning sleepers out of ironwood, anyway. And yet"—he paused, and looked across to where the Wirraboo hills lay swathed in a lovely blue mist—there's room to breathe here!"

The billy-can boiled over, and the hiss of the water in the fire roused him.

"Hang it! I'll go—I can come back," he said again, as he went into the humpy to fetch his tea cannister.

The full April moon had risen hours, and the purple and silver of the coming dawn were lighting up the sky beyond the tall, gaunt gum trees, when the man who lived in the stringy bark hut on Wirraboo Gully turned into his bunk. He had read the *Herald* account of the Rand gold discoveries over and over again since his billy-can had boiled over, while the brief Australian twilight was giving place to the lovely southern night. He had read it until it seemed that chopping sleepers out of the tough, splintery ironwood for little above a living wage was an almost criminal waste of time.

"I'll go," he said once more, as he drew the mosquito net over his head and composed himself for sleep. "I can come back—if I get sick of it."

The faint echo of a dingo howling far away on the Wirraboo hills came floating dismally through the late summer night as the bushman spoke, and the next moment the weird laughter of the jackass in the blue gum trees rang out in mocking reply to the howling dingo—or perhaps it was to the dweller in the gully below who had spoken of returning.

Late on the following afternoon the man who lived at Wirraboo Gully stepped off the verandah of the hotel in Benskin, and swung himself up to the box seat of the coach.

"Coming back ever?" inquired the hotel keeper from the doorway.

"Belike," was the laconic reply, as the speaker jammed some more tobacco into his pipe, "if I get sick of it."

"A rum cuss," remarked a swagsman who was standing with the other loungers outside the hotel.

"Yes," said the hotelkeeper caustically, "measured by some, Jack Rampling is a rum cuss. But he's lived on the Wirraboo Gully close on seven years, and he's a 'white man' all through."

"Yes, Rampling is a 'white man,'" assented the man who kept Benskin's only store. "If he ain't, I'm jiggered if I ever saw one! My shout, is it? What's yours?"

The company adjourned to the bar of the hotel for drinks, while the coach rambled off down the hot road in a cloud of dust.

Four years had gone by, and it was late in the London season. There was a big crowd at Mrs. Ord-Remington's ball.

"Who is that lanky chap with the brigand's moustache and bronze face—over there, talking to that girl with red-gold hair and dressed in peacock blue?" asked a man who was leaning up against a wall and watching the crowd. His companion turned to him in surprise.

"What! You don't know? Of course, I forgot

that you have been potting hillmen on the North-West frontier for the last three years. That is Rampling, the South African gold king and diamond emperor, and all that. Fellow who's spent some years picking up nuggets as big as bricks, and Koh-i-noors in South Africa, now has come to England to find somebody to wear the diamonds and dissipate the gold."

"He won't find that difficult," returned the man who had been potting hillmen on the North-west frontier. There was a touch of bitterness in his tone. He was a younger son, with little beyond his pay and the Victoria Cross.

The other man laughed quietly.

"He doesn't. The girl with the red-gold hair has been hunting him down like a sleuth hound for the last three months and more. If she doesn't get him, she'll deserve to, that's all."

Nobody would have recognized in the John Rampling who was standing beside Lady Sybil Carstairs, daughter of Lord Westover, the bushman whom they called Rampling in New South Wales, and who used to live on the Wirraboo Gully. The ragged black beard was gone; and a year in England, besides three on the Rand in South Africa, had changed him wonderfully. There was a certain air of distinction about him, and his slow manner of speech gave him time to think while he spoke—which was a useful thing for the man who used to break out sleepers in New South Wales.

That "something" within which had caused him to read and re-read the *Herald* column about the Rand gold discoveries, acting in a different way, had brought him over to England intent on marrying a title. During the past few months his admiration for Lady Sybil had grown beyond all ordinary bounds. She was not of his world, but he felt that she would adorn the stately mansion he was even now negotiating for in Piccadilly, bringing an air of culture and fine ladyhood with her. Moreover, apart from the million and a half with which he was credited, he was very sure she liked him for himself. This was as well, because Lady Sybil would have no fortune, her father being one of the poorest of the Irish peers.

Not that there was any reason why she should not. Were merit an inducer of love, he had obtained from her an ample sufficiency. At Wirraboo they had called him a "white man." On the Rand they said he had grit as well as luck. In Throgmorton street they said he was "straight." And they all meant the same thing. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why he was received in society circles which most people would have regarded as being fairly exclusive.

The Blue Hungarians broke into the symphony of one of Waldteufel's dreamiest waltzes.

"I am a clumsy dancer," said Rampling to Lady Sybil. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have put my name on your programme. Shall we sit it out?"

The beauty with the red-gold hair assented graciously, and they drifted into the conservatory, where the air was cooler and the lights were soft and dim, and where the murky London moonlight seemed pure and white as it crept through the panes and fell in faint silvery blotches on the marble floor.

Lady Sybil was one of those women—not too numerous—who can face a mirror always with complacency, and not infrequently with a genuine thrill of self-admiration. Past her twenty-seventh year, with nine seasons of overcrowded ball rooms stretching back in the dim distance, she still had a wonderful complexion. She was fair, but rich as a Giorgione; her hair was innocent of dye, and very plentiful; her figure really beautiful—brave in its bold contours, yet delicate.

Rampling's eyes rested upon her with intense satisfaction as she sat there—using her fan with an easy grace that betokened the utmost serenity of mind. At last he spoke.

"I don't dance, and I seldom talk," he said at last. "I dare say you wonder why I am boring you."

"Are you boring me?" she asked, gazing up at him with that faint, elusive half-smile that was the one thing about her that puzzled him.

"I think so," he said simply.

He watched her fan as it rose and fell in a graceful curve.

"It is past midnight, and it is the morning of your birthday. I wanted to be the first to congratulate you," he said as he brought out a morocco case. He touched a spring, the lid flew up and disclosed a butterfly set with magnificent brilliants. Even in that dim light it blazed and scintillated like living fire. "May I add this to my congratulations?" he finished.

The fan closed with a faint snap.

"You may," she said after a momentary pause, yet still with that baffling smile. "You are too good!"

There was a look of triumph on the face of the man from Wirraboo when he entered the ballroom again with Lady Sybil on his arm. The diamond butterfly was sparkling in her red-gold hair!

John Rampling was waiting for his fiancée in the library of the house Lord Westover rented in Villiers street. Their engagement was now two months old, and the preparations for the wedding were well forward. The man from Wirraboo had become even more taciturn than ever, and the part he played in society was that of looker-on. And in regard to his future wife he saw rather more than pleased him!

Presently there was a frou-frou of silk, and Lady Sybil swept into the room—a vision of radiant beauty. As she gave him her hand she became aware that he was looking down at her with a stern expression in his deep black eyes.

"Is it Mrs. Ord-Remington's tonight?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"I suppose young Mostyn will be there?"

"It is quite possible. Why?"

"He generally does turn up where you are," said Rampling, knitting his black brows. "And it isn't his fault that he doesn't monopolise you altogether. I have noticed it myself, and last night I overheard some men talking about you in the club. I am sorry to be obliged to mention it."

She flushed a little, but returned his gaze steadily.

"You are quite at liberty to mention it," she said. "Well?"

"May I trust you to pull him up a bit?"

For an instant a flash of mutiny gleamed from Lady Sybil's violet eyes, but died down as quickly as it came.

"There may be some justice in what you ask," she said, "though I think you are a little unreasonable. There is more freedom in society nowadays than there was in our grandparents' time. However, I will try to manage so that you have no further cause for complaint."

"Thank you," he said gravely.

He opened the door for her as he spoke, and she passed out, smiling subtly, though he did not see, as if she held a secret in her heart.

It was an evening two weeks later. A sudden storm had blown up from the south-west, and a drizzle of snowy rain was making the streets wet and miserable. Lady Sybil Carstairs, hurrying along at some little distance from her home, was just debating whether or not she should call a cab, when suddenly her left foot slid out from beneath her, and she would have fallen heavily had not a manly arm clasped her in the nick of time. She looked up—to encounter the dark, handsome face of Reginald Mostyn.

"That was a lucky thing!" he said as he reluctantly released her arm. "It would have been nasty had you fallen on those stones."

"Yes, indeed," she answered faintly. "Thank you. I—"

"You are not well!" he said quickly. "May I get you a cab?"

"If you would be so kind."

As it happened, however, there were none in the immediate vicinity, so they walked on a few paces, side by side.

"I suppose," he said in deeply solicitous tones, "this trouble—the shock, I mean—has been too much for you?"

"Trouble? Shock?" she repeated. "I don't understand you."

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