

A GOLDEN DREAM.

By G. Manville Fenn,

Author of "A Mint of Money," "Black Blood," "The Master of the Ceremonies," &c.

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CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

"A duel—that's what it will be. They fight duels out here and go in for assassinations and pleasant pastimes of that kind. Oh, they're a cheerful lot. I don't wonder that most of them are black. Place seems to be in half mourning for the souls they have sent to the other land. Depend upon it, if it does come to a challenge, that sinister-looking sneak will take some mean, dirty advantage, for he is just one of those contemptible cowards who would not want to be killed decently. Well, I give him fair warning that if he does hurt Paul I'll poison him as sure as he's alive. Humph! that is if I have a chance."

"Oh dear! it's precious hot. Be hotter if I go back without Paul. Lucie will never forgive me, and all the time he is trying to get himself put out of the way. Nice position for a respectable young medical practitioner. I've a good mind to inoculate myself for the fever and lie up, so as to have a good excuse for my inaction when I meet Lucie again."

"Hell be here, I suppose, directly, and then it will be the regular thing hanging about that old verandah with the blacks watching me, and then ordering drink that I don't want, and smoking till I feel saturated with nicotine. Well, there's one comfort, I can find plenty of nigger cisterns for the liquor I don't consume. Poor old Paul, he will not take No for an answer. Mother and daughter both look upon him as an intruder, but he will not give up. Well, I wouldn't."

"Suppose now," he said, after re-lighting his cigar and loosening his necktie, "suppose now it was my case, and I wanted to get Lucie out of the convent? Well, I must confess that I should do as Paul does: hang about, hoping against hope. By George! he is fond of her, and the more time passes and he is kept back the worse he grows."

"Ready, Bart?"

"The young doctor sprang to his feet with a start."

"Here, I say; what are you doing," he cried, "coming behind a fellow like that? Playing the spy, that's what it is. Did you hear what I was saying?"

"I did not hear you speak," said Paul, who looked haggard and strange. "Growing nervous?"

"Of course, I am. Who would not in a place like this? It's a paradise, I know; but we can't go a hundred yards without seeming to see the what's his name peeping out at us among the trees, with his black face and grinning teeth."

"Come along," said Paul drearily. "Not going up there again, are you?" Paul looked at him fiercely.

"What is the good of your talking to me like this? Go back home if you like, but for heaven's sake leave me in peace."

"How am I to go back home without you? Now, my dear old fellow, be reasonable. What is the use of your persevering?"

"Paul gave him a sad, despairing look."

"She is still free, Bart, and in her heart I believe she loves me, so I still hope."

"But you will get into some terrible quarrel with this Saintone. Recollect that we are in a land where human life is of no value."

"I know. If I do get into a quarrel with him, and we meet—well, I shall either be without a rival or out of my misery."

"Paul, old chap?"

"There, hold your tongue, man. It's heart disease and you can't cure that. Come away, I feel as if there is going to be a change in the state of affairs this morning, and that the difficulty is going to be solved. Madame Dulau was more gone and kind with me last night. I think she likes me, Bart."

"As they came in sight of the now familiar verandah, Paul uttered an ejaculation. "There's something wrong, Bart," he said. "Look!"

"Well?" cried Paul, eagerly.

"Very little to tell you," said Bart. "I had to drag what I know out of him. It seems that she was sailing yesterday and the day before. Last night her condition alarmed her mother, and the doctor was sent for. She is asleep now, and must not be disturbed. I can tell you nothing without seeing her."

A wild and piercing scream reached them at that moment, echoed by Cherubine, who raised her head and let it fall heavily again, striking the table before her as if her brow were of wood.

Paul staggered as the wail rose again from outside, recovered himself and followed Bart who had dashed through the door, and following his footsteps he staggered into the white draped room which Nousie had prepared with such loving care for the advent of her child.

Paul clutched at the door as he grasped the scene in the shaded room. Nousie on her knees frantically clasping the white form of her child extended on the bed, her face buried in her white bosom, while all around over pillow and coverlet the poor girl's long black hair lay tossed. She had evidently been seized by some terribly agonizing pain in whose clutches she had writhed and tossed, for her bared arms were apart, and her head and shoulders were half over the side of the bed, where Nousie knelt. Bart was on the other side rapidly making his examination, at the end of which he went round and whispered to the stricken mother, who rose obediently, and like one in a dream helped him to compose the cramped and distorted limbs, before with a despairing gesture, he signed to Paul to approach.

Paul recoiled like a drunken man, and stared wildly at his friend, then at the beautiful face upon the pillow, from which the distortion of pain had passed, leaving it already calm and peaceful as if she slept.

"Bart—no, no, not that—not that?" whispered Paul at last, hoarsely.

"God help you, old fellow!" whispered Bart with a deprecating gesture. "I can do nothing. It is too late."

"What?" cried Paul fiercely. "And is this your boasted knowledge. Helpless miserable pretender! Aube, Aube, my darling!—gone—gone. God help me, what shall I do?"

He flung himself on his knees by the bedside, and passionately kissed the soft curls again and again, heedless of everything, as by all the terms of endearment he could command, he called upon her to come back to him, for he could not live alone, till his passionately uttered words grew faint and husky.

Just at sundown, amidst wailing and tears, Aube's flower-covered bier was borne by half a dozen of the neighboring blacks, the white, statuesque figure, with its marble face open to the waning sunshine, to the burying ground, where a shallow grave was waiting, a priest standing close by.

Paul followed, hand in hand with Nousie, and as they reached the grave he raised his eyes, which looked to his friend as if they blazed, for they had suddenly encountered those of Saintone, standing there with his mother.

But Paul's anger died out directly, for he could see the man's face working with the hysterical passion of his southern nature, and as he stepped forward to take a last farewell of her who lay there he uttered a broken cry, and Paul gave a sigh of relief as Saintone was led away.

"It was not he," thought Paul. "He loved her, too. It was not he."

Then, as if in a dream, he listened to the priest, and stood there, stunned, till the last sad rites were at an end, and it seemed to him as he saw the earth cover her from sight that his own life was at an end as well.

The wails of the blacks rang in his ears, and he sank, the darkness was coming on fast as Bart whispered to him, "Come."

In a dreamy way still, as if he would awake from it all soon, he was about to follow, but a cold hand touched his, and a piteous voice said to him in almost a whisper—

"Don't leave me yet, dear. I am so lonely now."

Bart drew back and gave up his idea of taking Paul back to their place as he saw him gravely head over Nousie. Draw her arm through his, and followed by a group of weeping people, led her to her home, the young doctor coming almost last.

Nousie started from her chair again, stood listening intently, and then ran to the open door and listened, and as fresh voices were heard as of people passing, she hurried back with her face wild as if from some fresh horror, and stood with her hands clasped to her forehead. Then dropping on her knees she caught Cherubine's arm and shook her.

The woman's eyes unclosed, and she appeared to be awakened from a deep sleep. "Do you hear me?" said Nousie, sharply. "I cannot think; the trouble has dazed me. The meeting—it was tomorrow night?"

Cherubine closed her eyes as if sinking into her deep sleep again, but her lips moved, and she said in a faint whisper: "No—tonight—great meeting—the goat without horns—tonight."

footsteps till they died away. Then she turned back into the room with her breath coming and going with a hoarse sound.

"She is asleep," said Bart as he approached her. "Tell me what, all this means?"

"Wait, wait, she replied, as she pressed her hands to her head again, and then hurried to a cupboard, whose door she threw open.

"But where have you sent my friend?" "Wait till he returns. I cannot speak to you now. Yes," she said, "I must think of something else or I shall go mad. Tell me—will she live?"

"I hope so. I cannot say. But tell me this—it was an error then? She would not purposely have given poison to your child?"

"No," said Bart bluntly, "I don't think I am."

"Nousie groaned."

"Nousie would fight—for him—your friend—no, no, wait," said Bart grimly.

"And you have pistols?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how long he is!" cried Nousie, running to the door again. "I am not sure," she cried piteously, "or I should go along with you."

"Look here," said Bart, sharply. "We are your friends, Madame Dulau, and for that poor girl's sake we will try to serve you in this new trouble if you will only tell me what it means; but it is all a riddle to me. Come, tell me where have you sent Paul?"

She held up her hands to him.

"Hush, listen," she cried, and she ran again to the door, but came back wringing her hands. "No, no, wait," she said.

"When he comes. It can't be so. I am mad and wild, and think such horrors. Ah! at last!"

For there were rapid steps in the road, and before she could reach the door Paul rushed in, gasping and wild, the sweat standing in great drops upon his face, his hair clinging to his temples and foam upon his lips.

"Paul, man!" cried Bart, running to him and drawing a pistol. "Are you being hunted down?"

"Speak! My child?" cried Nousie, who was clinging to Paul as he fought for his breath, which came and went with a rattling sound.

"The grave!" he gasped at last; and his voice was like that of one in mortal agony. "rifled—my darling—she is not there."

Nousie uttered a low strange moaning sound as she caught the two young men each by the wrist, and the woman's manner and voice seemed changed as she dragged the two into the inner part of the room, close by where Cherubine lay now in a trance like that of death.

"Do as I tell you," she said in a quick, strong voice, "we may be in time."

Group after group had come through the doorway, a fierce-looking black, one of whose faces, for the greater part black, but dotted here and there by those of the mulatto and nearly white, turned from one to the other, each scanning his or her neighbor with an eager, earnest gaze.

The next minute, in the midst of the painful hush which had fallen upon the place, his whole manner changed, and he stood gasping—mentally stunned, for that which followed was beyond his wildest dreams.

Paul made no reply, for Nousie was holding his arm last and trembling violently. He bent towards her.

"You give it up?" he whispered. "Shall we go?"

"No," she said, in a voice he could hardly hear in the awful din around, "it is very near the time now. Are you ready?"

"If you are right," he replied, after a glance round to see that the people were too much intent upon the choral dance to heed them—a portion of the spectators, or resting performers of the rites.

"I am right," she said slowly. "I know these people and what they do. It may mean all our deaths, but you will be brave and try."

"Have no fear."

"Look!" whispered Nousie. "There, on the other side."

"Well, I see two blacks," said Paul. "You mean those leaving the place?"

"Saintone—Deffrad's friend. They will help us. Ah! be ready! They will risk it now."

"Ask what?" said Bart, angrily pressing towards them. "Madame Dulau, this is too much. We have come at your wish to this diabolical orgie. What can it do to us that we want to discover?"

Nousie's eyes looked wildly in his, and she held up her hand, as if she would say, "Don't destroy my hope of saving her," she whispered, piteously. "Can you not trust me a little while?"

All at once Nousie drew her breath with a spasmodic catch, and thrust her hand into her breast.

For the savage din ceased, and moved by one impulse the people pressed up toward the platform, stopped half-way, as if checked by some invisible barrier, and one only approached deprecatingly and with outstretched hands, preferring some petition.

Jacaine's teeth were bared, and he turned and approached Genie, whispered to her, and she slowly went through a kind of pantomime, as if resuming consciousness. She gazed wildly round, pressed her hands to her temples, and taking Jacaine's hand, stepped slowly down, and stood with her back to the people, her hands upon the serpent's cage and her head bent down, in adoring supplication, while a low exclamation of surprise escaped from the crowd, who were waiting for their request to be granted.

The silence and heat were awful, and darkness was beginning to add to the horrors of the scene, for two of the lamps hung downward with the rest of the crowd, were waiting for their request to be granted.

Suddenly Genie rose erect, her eyes glittering as she turned upon the crowd and drew herself up, her lips apart and her teeth showing in a fierce manner. She made a sign with both hands, as if she were scattering the serpent's gifts to them.

Then a wild excited shout rose from the people, followed by a dead silence, as the woman turned slowly to the back of the platform and disappeared, while, as if to excite the hideous passions of his followers, Jacaine stood watching them, and slowly drew a glittering knife from the blue scarf which girded his waist.

Nousie glanced quickly at her two companions, and saw that they were well forward, watching eagerly for the next stage in the proceedings. Paul being now almost spellbound, and the doubts which had troubled him before, giving place to a strange expectancy that he could not have analysed had he tried.

The next minute, in the midst of the painful hush which had fallen upon the place, his whole manner changed, and he stood gasping—mentally stunned, for that which followed was beyond his wildest dreams.

"Aube!" ejaculated Paul in a hoarse whisper, as Bart stood beside him with his jaw dropped, and the sweat standing in great drops upon his forehead.

"What is it for—what does it mean?" Paul asked himself, as he stood there staring wildly, and he saw the gleam of the knife in the huge black's hand, and noted that his thick lips were apart displaying his white teeth in an ugly grin.

Then still dimly and dreamily he recalled how he had heard that in these savage rites there was at times a human sacrifice to the serpent god, and he shuddered again, as his eyes wandered over the white figure with its pale set face and fixed and staring eyes. The sacrifice was dragged in the lurid glow of the dancing red.

The gathering yelled with excitement, clutching each other and leaping up, the smoky lamps swayed, and a fit of delirium seemed to be seizing upon all there.

wrought crowd of worshippers surged forward in a wave. There was no shrinking now, for they were fighting in the serpent's cause, and in the fierce struggle which followed, men swayed here and there, the platform cracked, the altar, with its serpent ark was overturned, and a lamp fell from its hold, and crashed on the floor, making the interior still more dim.

The encounter was fierce but short. The great black recoiled, and a dozen hands were there to help him; double that number were trying to clutch the interrupters of the rites, and in a very few minutes Paul and Bart were prisoners, roughly bound, and thrown upon the floor, while Nousie was torn away shrieking from her insensible child.

But her cries were drowned in the raging murmur of the excited crowd, which clamored loudly now for the conclusion of the rite, and the mutterings rose into a roar of passionate exultation, for, forgetting their prisoners where they had been cast down, all present watched Genie as with instinctive haste, she caught Aube's wrist, and made a sign to the black. He, too, once more caught the soft white arm, drawing back his knife, and then lurched forward and fell heavily, as the sharp report of a revolver rang out; another and another, and two fresh comers fought their way to the platform.

For, sickened by the heat, disgusted by the proceedings, Saintone and Deffrad, in total ignorance of what was to follow, had left the scene a few minutes before, and were sauntering slowly back to the tower when they were arrested by the outcry, and reached the doorway in time to recognise the victim Genie's diabolical ingenuity had prepared.

Saintone stood for a moment paralysed, and then with a quick order to his friend, snatched out his revolver, rested the barrel against the doorpost, and fired.

The encounter that followed bade fair to be a repetition of that which had gone before, the negroes setting up a fierce howl of rage and rushing forward once more as the newcomers reached the platform; but Deffrad's pistol flashed twice in defence of his friend, and at each shot a man fell.

Meanwhile Saintone, who had sprung up, seized Aube and dragged her from Genie, sending the priestess staggering with a blow from his pistol, and he was making his way down, burdened with his load, when Genie snatched a knife from her waist and sprang at him, but only to fall face downward with a bullet from his revolver through her brain.

There was a pause.

Another furious howl arose as the people recovered from their astonishment. The shots had dazed them for the moment, and they had shrunk from the deadly weapons, but as they saw their two leaders fall, and the victim again about to be snatched from their hands, about a score rushed forward.

Shot followed shot rapidly, and others fell, but there were 50 men and raging furies ready to take their places; and as Aube fell back upon the platform the last chambers of the revolvers were emptied, and Saintone and Deffrad were surrounded by a howling throng, who fought and struck at them, striving to drag them down in spite of their brave resistance.

Another minute and they would have been torn to pieces where they fought for dear life, but a shriek of horror arose, and the whole mob, as it moved by one impulse, rushed for the door, bearing their misdeeds and panting victims in their midst.

It was none too soon, for the temple of their obscure rites was doomed.

The thrown down lamp had remained unnoticed, and the smoke had veiled what had been taking place, till as it with a bound, a great pillar of flame had shot up one side of the brushwood walls, and leaped along the rafters and the dry leafy thatch, which roared and crackled as it burst into flame, casting down a lurid glare through the smoke upon where Aube lay, white and still, apparently doomed to die a purer death than that designed—a burnt sacrifice in the serpent's name.

But a bright keen knife was at work behind the great red curtain on one side, and the fire there was at times a miracle to the wretched crew.

"Draw your revolver, man," whispered Bart. "I had forgotten mine and used my fists," as Paul now stepped forward, raised the deeply-dugged victim and bore her behind the screen at the back. Nousie guiding him to where a narrow entrance helped the priest in his mystic jugglery before his miserable disciples.

It was none too soon, for as Bart came last and passed through, a portion of the burning roof fell, and the sides of the building tottered in the furious blaze.

Favored by the darkness they traversed the forest path, and guided by Nousie reached the port by a deserted way just as the sun rose above the glowing sea.

Fortune favored them, inasmuch as a large French steamer had come into harbor only two days before, and they were willingly received on board; while a few hours after Bart was able to announce that the effects of the potent narcotic, under whose influence Aube had been kept, were gradually dying away.

In the course of the day news reached the vessel that there had been some kind of rising among the negroes at one of their festivals, a hut had been fired, several burned to death, and a well-known gentleman and his friend nearly killed.

It was long after midnight, and just as he was growing terribly anxious that Nousie came on board, walking very slowly, and as if completely wearied out.

"Ah," she sighed, as she took Paul's arm, and leaned upon it heavily. "My darling?"

"Sleeping calmly."

"Take me to her," said Nousie softly, and Paul led her toward the cabin.

"Asleep," she said gently, and, with a strange pathos in her voice, "They had been and stabbed her to the heart."

"What?"

"And the house was burning as I came away."

"Thank heaven we are out of that dreadful place," thought Paul, as he stopped by Aube's cabin for Nousie to enter, but she held his right arm tightly.

"Come too," she said; and he walked with her into the cabin, where she whispered a few words to the lady watching and then went to the cot and kissed her sleeping child.

"I cannot bear it. I am very weak. It might hurt her."

He led her back on deck, and she sank into one of the cane reclining chairs with a heavy sigh.

"You are completely overcome," said Paul, tenderly. "Let me get you some wine?"

"No; don't leave me, dear," she said. "It is getting so dark. Tell me once more that you love me, Aube."

"Love her?" cried Paul.

"Ah yes, you do love her, and will be kind to her. It is better so. Kiss dear Lucie when you get home, and tell her always to be a sister to my child."

"Madame Dulau," cried Paul in alarm, "you are ill. Let me fetch Durham?"

"No, no," she sighed, "don't leave me. They struck me twice. It is too late. It is better so. Come closer. Kiss me, dear. Ah," she sighed, as he bent down, passed his arm about her, and pressed his lips to hers, while she feebly clasped his neck, "my darling's husband. Good-bye, dear Paul. I shall not disgrace you now—good."

She did not finish the sentence, for her head sank down on Paul Lowther's breast. The last victim of the Vaudoux was dead, with two deadly wounds above the heart.

CHAPTER XXI.—IN ENGLAND.

Aube Dulau had been back in the calm seclusion of the pension trying to forget her griefs in the companionship of Lucie, some six months before a fresh sorrow came to her in the parting, for with her brother's full consent, Lucie left France for the country town where Doctor Durham had taken his new degree and the practice that was to be his.

The wedding was quiet and there was no honeymoon, for the doctor was too busy making friends with his new patients. But it was none the less a happy match, and the wedding trip money came in very useful in other ways.

Nearly a year more had passed before, during a visit to her friend, Aube could be brought to say the words for which Paul Lowther prayed. He had long enough before given into her charge the packet confided to him by Nousie, the contents being the warrants for a large sum invested in England and France.

It was one evening that Paul at last dragged forth the reluctant word, "I was her wish," he had whispered to her again. "Almost her last words, Aube,—"My darling's husband," and she kissed me, dearest, as her son."

Aube shrank from him for the moment, then yielded herself to his embrace.

"My husband," she said softly, and no other word was uttered then, for Paul Lowther's lips sealed that which had been said.

"I am very glad, my dear. It is quite right," wrote back the old superior, when Aube sent her the reason why she would not return. "Tell Mr. Lowther we all thank him for the picture, so like the dear child we loved. God bless you both!"

[THE END.]



The first correct answers to the history questions No. 15 were received from "Persephone," city. Among the very large number of competitors, only seven had all the questions answered correctly, but all, with but very few exceptions, made their only mistake in the answer to the second question, in which many thought that Winchester was then the chief city. The successful ones were: "Persephone," city; Jessie Lawson, Duke street, West End; Jessie W. Johnston, Elliott row; Maggie J. Macdonald, 8 Factory street; Miss Pauline Estey, 198 St. James street; Bessie Estabrooks, North End, and "Loche," city. Competitors should remember that letters for city delivery should be prepaid with a two-cent stamp, and from outside places by a three-cent stamp, otherwise they will be sent to the dead letter office.

- Answers to History Questions, No. 15. 1. Where and when was Shakespeare born? Ans. At Stratford-on-Avon in the year 1564. 2. At the time of the Norman conquest what was the chief city in England? Ans. London was the chief city in England at the time of the Norman conquest. 3. When was the Eddystone lighthouse swept away? Ans. In the reign of George III., 1703. 4. In whose reign and in what year did the union of England and Scotland take place? Ans. In 1707; Anne's reign.

HISTORY QUESTION COMPETITION No. 17. 1. Sketch the character of Champlain? 2. In what year was Montreal founded? 3. Explain what is meant by the Stamp Act? and in what year was it passed? 4. Name the dates of the first and second treaties of Paris?

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