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THE MESSENGER FROM KHARTOOM

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.

Sandy has ceased making his biographies upon the pages of his note book. His face beams with enthusiasm at the thought of being first with this authentic account of Gordon's death. At the same time, out of respect for the feelings of Mynheer Joe, he endeavors to subdue this mark of journalistic pride and appear sober, but it is really beyond him.

As for Mr. Grimes, he has observed the narrator with deep interest all the while he tells of the strange things which happened to him. Whatever is passing in the mind of the silver king, he does not allow it to be shown upon his face, which is as expressionless as that of the Sphinx.

The messenger from Khartoum sits there for a brief interval, with that look of sadness on his face, as though the thoughts surging through his mind have been too much for him.

"Come, rouse yourself, my boy! You are among friends at last, thank Heaven, and will be the lion of Cairo when it is publicly known that you were with gallant Gordon when he fell," says Sandy, but the other holds up his hands, and says quietly:

"That is a distinction I do not crave. Somehow I feel guilty in not leaving my body beside Gordon. At best, I see nothing to boast of in having escaped his fate."

"The brave are ever modest," says Sandy. "At least, you will make a report to the proper officials to-morrow and verify my dispatches?"

"Yes, a very brief one. That is only just. I would, for certain reasons of my own which you cannot understand, keep it as quiet as possible."

"Just as you like," remarks the silver king, in such a peculiar way that Mynheer Joe glances at him, and then finds his attention caught by a photograph on the wall, which he sees for the first time.

"That face again! Whose picture have we here?" he demands, with an alarming interest.

CHAPTER IV.

Sandy turns his head and sees what has attracted the explorer's attention. He smiles, too, for the words of Mynheer Joe would indicate that this is not the first time his eyes have rested on the picture or its original.

"That is the daughter of the gentleman who hires the dahabiah upon which we are just now," returns the war correspondent.

"Name?" asks Joe.

"Demosthenes Tanner."

"Can it be possible?"

"That is her father, of course. The girl—"

"Stupid! It was her name I asked for."

"Ah, I see. She is called Molly," replies Sandy, with a wink in the direction of Mr. Grimes, who is, however, too deeply interested in watching Mynheer Joe's face to notice anything else. He seems to be not a little fascinated by something in connection with the other.

"Molly? A pretty name. Somehow it just seems to fit those features. Molly Tanner is it? Good! I will remember. What a strange freak of fate that I should be picked up by her father's boat, of all on the river?"

Mynheer Joe is muttering to himself, as though indulging in some reminiscence of the past; a slight smile has appeared upon his rather worn and haggard though always striking face. Evidently the thoughts that slip into his mind are pleasant ones.

It is not in the nature of Sandy Barlow to let a comrade enjoy a secret alone. Not that he has any desire to be meddlesome, but he wishes to share the joys as well as the sorrows of those in whose company he travels life's highway. Hence he nods his wise little head sagely, and, cocking it on one side in a manner peculiar to himself, remarks:

"I say, Joe, this isn't the first time that face has flashed before your enchanted vision? Own up, now, like a man. We're all in love with the divine Molly; every single man in Cairo at this hour yearns for her smiles, and you'll be only one of scores. Speak up, man: Where did you ever meet her? I've never heard her mention your name, to my knowledge, and, I love, she thought we were a Dutchman, when she sent me down here! Leave it to Grimes if it ain't so."

Mynheer Joe smiles.

"For once, friend Sandy, you have hit the bull's-eye. I have met this lady before."

"And still she does not recognize your name—that by which the whole world of scientific geographers has learned to call you? When she spoke of Mynheer Joe, she showed an emotion; and, as I said before, told us to do all for the poor unfortunate German we could. She even wanted to come herself to hear of Gordon. He's her hero, you know, as he is of many thousands. Yes, and we had

even to promise to bring you back with us. So, what do you say to that?"

"I suppose I shall have to go. A woman's will is law, generally, especially one whose face is as charming as that photo betrays."

"But, your former meeting?" hammers the man of pencil and note book, who does not deviate from a course he may have marked out, and as a consequence, generally gets there with both feet.

"Ah, you will have it, Sandy," laughs the other.

"Why not? There is something eccentric about it, I'll be bound. You didn't meet Molly in the ordinary orthodox way, or you'd know her name, while she could never forget yours."

"Well, you see, it's a poor place to ask for a name when salt water is running into mouth and eyes," returns Mynheer Joe.

The correspondent appears to have received a tremendous shock, for suddenly springing to his feet he clutches the explorer by the arm to whirl him around so that he may look in his face.

"Confusion! Were you the hero of that little episode at Malta a year ago?"

"I don't know about being a hero, but I did have the extreme pleasure of jumping from my sail boat and saving, from a watery grave, a young girl who had fallen overboard from a boat that nearly upset in a squall," returns the man from Khartoum, modestly.

Mr. Grimes puckers up his lips as if to whistle, and his whole manner says: "So, that's the way the wind blows, is it—in truth, coming events cast a shadow before."

As for Sandy he shrugs his shoulders and pretends to look dreadfully disappointed, though there is a twinkle in his eye that tells of a sly humor. You cannot always take Sandy as he appears. He has often turned out to be a sly rogue.

"And then you sailed away without even leaving your name, nor has the young lady ever been able to learn who it was so gallantly jumped overboard after her. One thing is settled—you've got a clear road there, Joe. Not another man will have a chance when once Molly recognizes you as her preserver."

Instead of looking flattered the party addressed has something of bored appearance. A man who has devoted his life to science and exploration has no business to fall in love. His heart is supposed to be wrapped up in his work.

"Don't mention it, Sandy, I beg. I was bound upon a very curious errand at the time and didn't mean to be rude, but time was money. I could spend five minutes saving a girl's life, but deliver me from an hour of thanks from her relatives. When I got back to Malta they had gone."

"But will you come with us now—that is, if you feel able?" asks Sandy, who, having nobly given up all his chances of winning the prize—they were about equal to one grain of sand in comparison with the sea shore—desires to bring the conquering hero to his fate.

"I feel like a new man. That was the first decent one I've enjoyed for months. While the men lived on coarse food, Gordon would not allow the officers to feast. One thing, however, may prevent me from going with you."

"What's that?"

"My clothes are in a dilapidated condition. See, here a vagabond cut a piece out entirely; it would have taken my leg, also, if better aimed. Then there are other slits and jagged openings. I don't remember where they came from, so I must have received them during the engagement. A few trifling wounds under them have healed up, and I am feeling very well, thank you. In day time, I can draw money from the bank in Cairo and buy what I need. Meantime, you will have to excuse me to the young lady."

"Hang me if I will! We'll find some other means of reaching the same result," cries Sandy, who is a great hand for surmounting obstacles.

Mr. Grimes here puts in his oar in the quiet way he has. Stepping up, he places himself alongside the intrepid explorer.

"Just about one size, I believe," he remarks.

"Yes, it is so," says Sandy, with a chuckle, for he has always had the reputation of being able to see through a grindstone with a hole in the centre.

"Then, consider the matter settled. The gentleman will accompany us to Shepherd's; he will go with me to my room and select from several travelling suits I keep on hand."

"But this is too much—"

"I never accept a refusal, Mynheer Joe; so look upon it as arranged," with a wave of the hand that a prince might envy.

The explorer looks at him curiously for a few seconds, and then gives in.

"I thank you, sir. I will accept the loan until morning comes and the bazaar is open."

"Good," ejaculated the newspaper man. "And now let's be tramping back to the hotel. Left the beggar with the light on deck. Hope he hasn't been tossed into the Nile. Glad to see you meet Molly. Hanged if I wouldn't! Then I've got an hour's work making up and sending my dispatch. I fancy one man in Cairo will want to cut his throat in the morning. 'Tisn't often the Herald gets left."

He is all excitement, and there is no need of further delay. Mynheer Joe turns to the rear.

"Ben Hassan Effendi, I shall remember your kindness always," he says, taking the brown hand of the old captain.

Blood

If the blood in sufficient quantity leaves the body because of a wound or hemorrhage of the lungs the result is death.

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"I am already repaid. I hate El Mahdi. You were his enemy. It pleases me to help one who did him injury. Kiss me! It is fate," says the Arab.

"On the morrow, if by chance you see my faithful Kasse come floating down the river on a raft, send him to Shepherd's Hotel. You will know him from his voice. It is like the whistle of a locomotive."

"But you said he was drowned?" cries Sandy. "I have it down so in black and white."

"I trust you may have to alter it, for somehow I can't force myself to believe him as one dead. Now I am ready, gentlemen."

They pass out of the cabin and reach the deck of the dahabiah, where the link boy is found in conversation with the crew, the members of which are naturally curious to discover all they can about the stranger they picked up in the river, who cried out that he was from Khartoum before Ben Hassan could rescue him. They might as well question one of Cairo's four hundred mosques as this boy, who can and does tell them about the brilliant fight made by the two Franks when assailed by the mob of beggars in the street, but knows nothing of their relations to the guest of the reis.

The flambeau-bearer goes ahead, and one by one, the others walk the narrow plank that stretches from the roof of the cabin to the bank. When all are safely landed, they strike off through the same street where their previous engagement took place. Evidently these men are not made of material to shrink from any hidden danger. If the rascals who lay in wait for them before choose to try conclusions a second time, doubtless they will find means to accommodate them.

They are not molested while en route. Once or twice they see shadowy figures glide from dark arches about and vanish in the gloom, who, in all probability, belong to the same gang with which they had their former adventure; but the fellows have received too severe a lesson to think of enduring such rough handling a second time.

(To be Continued.)

There is nothing good in a man but his young feelings and his old thoughts.

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