The Mystery

OF THE

Mountain Pass

IN BOUR INSTALMENTS.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

My name is John Douglas. I am a plain living, plain-spoken man; and, Heaven knows, I never have, and never shall, set up to be regarded as a literateur Nevertheless, it has been suggested me that certain adventures, through which I passed five Christmases ago, and a year later, were so very startling, that I ought to cast them into the form of a narrative for other folks to read.

I believe my friends are, perhaps, right in this, and hence am beginning to set down these extraordinary adventures; but I warn my readers they must expect nothing mere than a narration of facts altogether unembellished by any graces of titerary style.

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titerary style.

It is unnecessary to detail the circumstances which led me, who am by birth a
gentleman, and who, even then, was not
without some little money of my own, to
take up my residence in a cottage, which
was little more than a but, at the foot of a
mountain in Wales.

Suffice it that 'a quarrel with a relative
made me thus seclude myself, and that,
for more than six months, I lived in that
cottage with no companion, save my dog,
ahd with no occupation beyond fishing,
shooting, and mountain climbing.

When Christmas came round, it found
me there

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I Pretty late on the Christmas Eve. I tramped into the town for my store of provisions, and tramped back again through the falling snow, with a misanthropical enjoyment of the fact that, for the first time in my life, I should eat my Christmas dinner alone.

I threw another log on the fire, made myself a glass of whiskey-toddy, and was suppling it very much at my leisure, when the furioug barking of my dog made me to furious barking?

Mhat was at least three miles from any other human habitation; it lay out of the way of all beaten tracks—so much so that for weeks together no one passed near it. Thieves were out of the question, for I had nothing to tempt cupidity.

What ever her reason for sectrecy, she was welcome to preserve it, so far as I was concerned.

In my own mind, I suspected a love-affer was welcome to preserve it, so far as I was concerned.

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But, let it be what it might, it was no chart fair—some romantic assignation, perhaps for the inite was welcome to preserve it, so far as I was concerned.

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I threw another log on the fire, made myself a glass of whiskey-toddy, and was sipping it very much at my leisure, when the turioug barking of my dog made me jump up and hurry outside, confident that something was wrong.

One was that the woman had never uttered a single cry or groan.

Even when Nero's cruel teeth had torn her flesh, she had suffered in stoical silence, contenting herself, as I had seen, with a desperate attempt to choke him off by the unsided strength of her own hands.

This in itself was marveilous, for it is second nature with a woman to cry out at such a time, especially when a cry may be trusted to bring her help.

Surely her silence must have been due to the fact that she preferred even the pain and peril of those awful tangs to the chance of being seen by any human eye.

The other thing was that when I approached close to her, and she turned and faced me, I saw she wore a black velvet mask, which covered her features sufficiently to defy recognition.

ly to defy recognition.

'Are you seriously hurt ?' I questioned, anxiously, and waiving my surprise in my tears for her safety. 'Has the brute bitten

For answer she held out her arm, bare

For answer she held out her arm, bare to above the elbow, and showed me a frightful wound.

'Good Heavens!' I exclaimed, aghast; 'you had better let me cauterize that. Not that I think the dog is mad. I believe him to be perfectly healthy. But still, it would be sater.'

Then the first the sater.

Then the woman spoke for the first time.

Her voice was rich and clear, its accents
maistakably those of a lady; it thrilled

me curiously.
'Are you alone?' she asked. 'Is there

anyone in there with you?" and she point

d to the cottage.
'I am quite alone. No one will see you

Come ?

I gave her my arm
She took it without a word, and leaned
on me heavily.

We had to pass by Nero, who had been
sitting on his haunches, still licking his
chops, and steadily regarding us.

A low and angry growl broke, as
though involuntarily, from his throat as my
companion passed near him.

though involuntarily, from his throat as my companion passed near him.

'Lie down, you bru'e!' I called o t to him, in anger; and, when he aftempted to fawn upon me; I sternly put him back.

I had never been so disgusted with him

He and hever been as a before.

We entered the cottage.
I led my companion to a seat, poured out a little brandy, and insisted on her drinking it.
I knew she would need some support in the terrible ordeal that lay before her.
She did not remove her mask, and I did not suggest that she should do so.
As a man or sense, I knew she did not wear that at midnight among the mountain snows without a purpose; and, as a man of breeding, I, of course, refrained from endeavoring to penetrate her disguise.

THESE

ATHLETES and make you feel like a

INDORSE Cricket, Base Ball Players. JOHNSONS ON BOTH ON THE ONE OF THE ONE OF THE ONE OF THE O

'You will not try to see my face?'
'You will not try to see my face?'
'On my honer I will not,' I answered, promptly. 'You may trust me.'
She was lying back in my low basketchair now, on the verge of fainting.
Her eyes were closed her lips tightly set; her face was ashen pale.
I administered a little brandy but feared it would not suffice to revive her.
Indeed it seemed to me she had already swooned quite away.
I was terribly perplexed.
Fettered as I was by my promise not to look at her face, I could not remove that hateful, tantalizing mask; and yet it seemed monstrous to stand by and make no effort to bring her back to consciousness.
To be sure, the mask did not seriously impede her breathin ', for it only reached as lar as her upper lip, and I had already noticed that her chin was beautifully moulded, and that her teeth were white as pearls, and her lips like some soft crimson flower.

But if I was forbidden to remove the

pearls, and her lips like some soft crimson flower.

But, if I was forbidden to remove the mask, the interdict went no further, I reflected, and stooping over the inanimate form, I unfastened the long dark cloak, which was buttoned closely from the throat to the feet.

A further surprise awaited me, for, instead of seeing a dress suited to the weather, I saw an evening-gown of softest, richest ivory satin, confined at the waist by a zone of pearl and silver, and cut low enough to display the milky whiteness of a throat and bosom such as, for peerless beauty, I had never seen before.

Around the firm white throat was clasped a circlet of rubies, which flashed like points of fire in the light of my reading-lamp,

famp,
Half guiltily, I refastened the disguising cloak, and contented myself with applying some strong smelling salts to her nostrils.
Happily, these quickly took effect.
I saw the eyes unclose behind the mask—beautiful lustrous eyes I was sure they were, even though I could see but little of them.

them.

She stirred, shuddered, put out ber hand as though to ward away some peril, then drow her closk more closely round

her.

I should say here, perhaps, that the clock had a hood to it, which was drawn closely round her face, but that I had caught a glimpse of her hair gleaming in the fire-light.

'I am better,' she said, still in that thrillingly rich, sweet voice, and in a tone of remarkable self-possession. 'Please let me walk to the door. All I want is air.'

'One moment!' I answered.

I had been applying ointment to her poor, wounded arm, and now I wrapped a a bandage round it.

When the content of the word, as though a treat ward it was the word of a mean.

It was a within as a sheet, I am quiet a the word, as though a treat ward it was the word of a mean.

I was nothing of my dog, though a manner of a ward through a mean of the word, as though a mean of the word was the word of a mean.

I was nothing of my dog, though a mean of the word was the word of a mean.

A stency throw from the cottage, as quiet at the back of the through and harrying toward the epsi, I was truck of the word of the

condition. A brisk rub down after exercise or severe work, then bathe with

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know who I am,' she answered. Remember, I trust you.'

'And you may trust me. But surely you are in no condition to face this night alone. Let me at least see you to some place of safety. I promise you I will not pry into your affairs. I will not seek to know so much as your name,'

'I am an unhappy woman,' she replied; 'a most unhappy woman!'

And there was a mournful cadence in her voice which haunted me for long atterwards.

"But, at least, I can believe that all men are not false," she added. "I will trust you."

I was certain, now, that I was right in

you."

I was certain, now, that I was right in
I was pecting she had come to this lonely
place in order to keep some secret assig-

nation.

Probably she had kept her part of it in vain—her lover had forsaken her; why else should she be on the mountain side alone?

Why also should she say, so mournfully, that all men were not false?

that all men were not false?

I frankly admit, it angered me to reflect that this woman, who had the form of a goddess, and whe, I did not doubt, had beanty of face to match, should have wasted the treasure of her love on one who, probably, cared not for the gift.

A moment or two she stood in silence; then she said—

"You shall go with me, if you will, as far as the corner of the road."

"The corner of the road! But, even then, the nearest house is three miles away. It is impossible that you should walk that distance through all this snow—alone!"

Christmas morning dawned bright and clear.

I had had but little sleep, for the excitement, consequent on my nocturnal adventure, had keep me awake until two or three and even then I had only fallen asleep to dream of a superlatively beautiful woman, with lustrous eyes and pale golden hair, who led me among mountain snows in wain searches after hidden treasure I could never find.

I dipped my face into a bowl of ice-cold water; then, teeling refreshed and thoroughly wide-awake, drank, a cup of cocca, and sallied out, intending to make a more substantial breakfast on my return.

The moment I opened the door, Nero—who had spent the night in an out-house—came up and fawned upon me, wagging his tail and looking wistfully into my face, as if doubtful of his welcome.

I was angry with him and yet in my heart I could not altogether blame him; for in thinking the whole case over during the night, I had come to the conclusion that the mysterious black mask had been the cause of his attack on a detenceless woman.

Doubtless in his eyes, what bit of velvet had had a suspicious and uncanny look.

I was very fond of Nero.

He was a magnificent brute, an Irish hound, faithful and affectionate; and moreover; he had on one occasion saved my life.

It was not likely I should keep my anger againgt him long—especially on Christmas

It was not likely I should keep my anger

Day, when we ought surely to show ou good will to animals as well as to men.

good will to animals as well as to men.
He was transported with delight at being taken back into favor.
'Come on, old fellow!' I called to him, as I bent my steps towards that corner of the road at which I had parted from the matterious woman.

Mysterious woman.

No snow had fallen in the night, so

No snow had fallen in the night, so that our footprints—mine and hers—were still plainly visible.

At that corner I paused, half doubting whether I should go any further.

To track those footprints would be to track the woman to her home.

Was I not in honor bound not to do this?

But, even as I paced backwards and forwards in decision, I made a startling discovery.

saw the marks of wheels, and of a horse's hoots.

Doubtless a carriage had stood near the corner awaiting my mysterious visitor last night.

The wheels had made deep indentations in the snow; the marks of the horse's hoofs were distinctly seen.

After a short struggle with what I conceive to have been a very natural curiosity, my sense of honor triumphed, and I resolutely turned my back upon those tempting tracks, and prepared to take my morning walk in quite an opposite direction.

My cottage stood, as I think I have said, at the foot of a mountain—I might almost say it was at the toot of sveral mountains, inasmuch as it was in a narrow pass encompassed by craggy heights on every side.

The pass was a lonely one.

compassed by craggy heights on every side.

The pass was a lonely one.
In the winter months, no one would enter it for day or even weeks together.

When I turned back from the corner of the road, I walked almost mechanically to the spot where I had rescued the woman from Nero's fangs last night; and, having reached it, I found, to my surprise, that the icotsteps did not end there, but that they stretched out, far as my eye could reach, right up the pass.

I walked on a few paces, and soon I made another discovery.

Two people had gone up that pass last night—a man as well as a woman.

This did not so much surprise me as the fact that the man had not come back.

The female footprints were plainly enough discernible coming down as well as going up the pass; but the man's only went one way.

The woman had come back alone.

I felt vaguely uncomfortable.

It was not that, at that moment, I actually suspected foul play; but still, I was anxious to know where the woman's companion had gone.

The other end of the pass led nowhere.

anxious to know where the woman's companion had gone.

The other end of the pass led nowhere,
or, rather, it led only to a road across the
mountain, which it would have been madness to attempt by night.

I resolved to push my discoveries a
little further, and I was confirmed in this
determination by the strange conduct of
Nero, who was running excitedly backwards, and forwards, smelling at the footprints, and every now and again emitting
an angry growl.

'There is some mystery here. I must

an angry grown.

'There is some mystery here. I must solve it, I said, and, making sure my whiskey flask was well filled, I hurried up the pass in the wake of those mysterious tentrinits.

the pass in the wake of those mysterious footprints.

I half expected to find some poor wretch dying of exhaustion among the move and more solves.

Nero went on before me, growing more and more excited every minute; and I must own, that I was beginning to share in his excitement.

Well, the footprints led us by the pass for about three quarters of a mile; then to my amazement, after mingling curiously, they disappeared altogether, close to a cevity in the mountain side.

Beyond this cavity the snow lay, all white and untrodden, without spot or stain.

stain.

An eeric feeling came over me—a feeling which was evidently scared by Nero for he was tearing about like a mad thing, seemingly wild with fear, and yet in a tury of rage as well.

I was certain he smelt blood.

The certain he melt blood.

The cavity in the rock was just big enough for a man to sit in; but, assuredly it would not have screened one from the storm last night, for the storm had apparently drifted in that direction—had drifted so steadily that it lay in a great heap, or

