The New Arabian Nights

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

room in silence."

Toward morning, worn out by apprehension, he fell asleep on his chair, with his head forward on the trunk. In spite of so constrained an attitude and such a grisly pillow his slumber was sound and prolonged, and he was only awakened at a late hour by a sharp tapping at the door.

He hurried to open and found the boots without.

"You are the gentleman who called yesterday at Box court?" he asked.

Silas, with a shiver, admitted that he had done so.

"Then this note is for you," added the servant, proffering a sealed envelope.

Silas tore it open and found inside the words, "Twelve o'clock."

He was punctual to the hour. The trunk was carried before him by several stout servants, and he was himself ushered into a room where a man sat warming himself before the fire, with his back toward the door. The sound of so many persons entering and leaving and the scraping of the trunk as it was deposited upon the bare boards were alike unable to attract the notice of the occupant, and Silas stood waiting in an agony of fear until he should deign to recognize his presence.

Perhaps five minutes had elapsed before the man turned leisurely about and disclosed the features of Prince Florizel of Bohemia.

"So, sir," he said, with great severity, "this is the manner in which you abuse my politeness. You join yourself to persons of condition, I perceive, for no other purpose than to escape the consequences of your crimes, and I can readily understand your embarrassment when I addressed myself to you yesterday."

"Indeed," cried Silas, "I am innocent of everything except misfortune!"

And in a hurried voice and with the greatest ingenuousness he recounted to the prince the whole history of his calamity.

"I see I have been mistaken," said his highness when he had heard him to an end. "You are no other than a victim, and, since I am not to punish, you may be sure I shall do my utmost to help. And now," he continued, "to business. Open your box at once and let me see what it contains."

Silas changed color.

"I almost fear to look upon it," he exclaimed.

"Nay," replied the prince, "have you not looked at it already? This is a form of sentimentality to be resisted. The sight of a sick man whom we can help should appeal more directly to the feelings than that of a dead man who is equally beyond help or harm, love or hatred. Nerve yourself, Mr. Scuddamore." And then, seeing that Silas still hesitated, "I do not desire to give another name to my request," he added.

The young American awoke as if out of a dream and, with a shiver of repugnance, addressed himself to loose the straps and open the lock of the Saratoga trunk. The prince stood by watching, with a composed countenance and his hands behind his back. The body was quite stiff, and it cost Silas a great effort, both moral and physical, to dislodge it from its position and discover the face.

Prince Florizel started back with an exclamation of painful surprise.

"Alas," he cried, "you little know, Mr. Scuddamore, what a cruel gift you have brought me! This is a young man of my own suit, the brother of my trusted friend, and it was upon matters of my own service that he has thus perished at the hands of violent and treacherous men. "Poor Geraldine," he went on, as if to himself, "in what words am I to tell you of your brother's fate? How can I excuse myself in your eyes or in the eyes of God for the premature death? Ah, Florizel, when will you learn the discretion that suits mortal life and be no longer dazzled with the image of power at your disposal? Power!" he cried. "Who is more powerless? I look upon this young man whom I have sacrificed, Mr. Scuddamore, and feel how small a thing it is to be a prince."

Silas was moved at the sight of his emotion. He tried to murmur some consolatory words and burst into tears. The prince, touched by his obvious intention, came up to him and took him by the hand.

"Command yourself," said he. "We have both much to learn, and we shall both be better men for today's meeting."

Silas thanked him in silence with an affectionate look.

"Write me the address of Dr. Noel on this piece of paper," continued the prince, leading him toward the table, "and let me recommend you when you are again in Paris to avoid the society of that dangerous man. He has acted in this matter on a generous inspiration; that I must believe. Had he been privy to young Geraldine's death he would never have dispatched the body to the care of the actual criminal."

"The actual criminal!" repeated Silas in astonishment.

"Even so," returned the prince. "This letter which the disposition of Almighty Providence has so strangely delivered into my hands was addressed to no less a person than the criminal himself, the infamous president of the Suicide club. Seek to pry no further in these perilous affairs, but content yourself with your own miraculous escape and leave this house at once. I have pressing affairs and must arrange at once about this poor clay, which was so lately a gallant and handsome youth."

Silas took a grateful and submissive leave of Prince Florizel, but he lingered in Box court until he saw him depart in a splendid carriage on a visit to Colonel Henderson of the police. Republican as he was, the young American took off his hat with almost a sentiment of devotion to the retreating carriage. And the same night he started by rail on his return to Paris.

Here, observes my Arabian author, is the end of "The Story of the Physician and the Saratoga Trunk." Omitting some reflections on the power of Providence, highly pertinent in the original, but little suited to our occidental taste, I shall only add that Mr. Scuddamore has already begun to mount the ladder of political fame, and by last advices was the sheriff of his native town.

"THE CABMAN HAS BEEN PAID," OBSERVED THE SERVANT.

The SUICIDE CLUB

PART III

The Adventure of the Hansom Cabs

LIEUTENANT BRACKENBURY RICH had greatly distinguished himself in one of the lesser Indian wars. He it was who took the chieftain prisoner with his own hand. His gallantry was universally applauded, and when he came home prostrated by an ugly sabre cut and a protracted jungle fever society was prepared to welcome the lieutenant as a celebrity of minor luster. But his was a character remarkable for unaffected modesty. Adventure was dear to his heart, but he cared little for adulation, and he waited at foreign watering places and in Algiers until the fame of his exploits had run through its nine days' vitality and begun to be forgotten. He arrived in London at last, in the early season, with as little observation as he could desire, and as he was an orphan and had none but distant relatives who lived in the provinces it was almost as a foreigner that he installed himself in the capital of the country for which he had shed his blood.

On the day following his arrival he dined alone at a military club. He shook hands with a few old comrades and received their warm congratulations, but as one and all had some engagement for the evening he found himself left entirely to his own resources. He was in dress, for he had entertained the notion of visiting a theater. But the great city was new to him. He had gone from a provincial school to a military college and thence direct to the eastern empire, and he promised himself a variety of delights in this world for exploration. Swinging his cane, he took his way westward. It was a mild evening, already dark, and now and then threatened rain. The succession of faces in the lamplight stirred the lieutenant's imagination, and it seemed to him as if he could walk forever in that stimulating city atmosphere and surrounded by the mystery of 4,000,000 private lives. He glanced at the houses and marveled what was passing behind those warmly lighted windows. He looked into face after face and saw them each intent upon some unknown interest, criminal or kindly.

"They talk of war," he thought, "but this is the great battlefield of mankind."

And then he began to wonder that he should walk so long in this complicated scene and not chance upon so much as the shadow of an adventure for himself.

"All in good time," he reflected. "I am still a stranger and perhaps wear a strange air. But I must be drawn into the eddy before long."

The night was already well advanced when a plump of cold rain fell suddenly out of the darkness. Brackenbury paused under some trees, and as he did so he caught sight of a hansom cabman making him a sign that he was disengaged. The circumstance fell in so happily to the occasion that he at once raised his cane in answer and had soon ensconced himself in the London gondola.

"Where to, sir?" asked the driver.

"Where you please," said Brackenbury.

And immediately, at a pace of surprising swiftness, the hansom drove off through the rain into a maze of villas. One villa was so like another, each with its front garden, and there was so little to distinguish the deserted lamplit streets and crescents through which the flying hansom took its way that Brackenbury soon lost all idea of direction. He would have been tempted to believe that the cabman was amusing himself by driving him round and round and in and out about a small quarter, but there was something businesslike in the speed which convinced him of the contrary. The man had an object in view. He was hastening toward a definite end, and Brackenbury was at once astonished at the fellow's skill in picking a way through such a labyrinth and a little concerned to imagine what was the occasion of his hurry. He had heard tales of strangers faring ill in London. Did the driver belong to some bloody and treacherous association, and was he himself being whirled to a murderous death?

The thought had scarcely presented itself when the cab swung sharply round a corner and pulled up before the garden gate of a villa in a long and wide road. The house was brilliantly lighted up. Another hansom had just driven away, and Brackenbury could see a gentleman being admitted at the front door and received by several liveried servants. He was surprised that the cabman should have stopped to immediately in front of a house where a reception was being held, but he did not doubt it was the result of accident, and sat placidly smoking where he was until he heard the trap thrown open over his head.

"Here we are, sir," said the driver.

"Here!" repeated Brackenbury, "Where?"

"You told me to take you where I pleased, sir," returned the man, with a chuckle, "and here we are."

It struck Brackenbury that the voice was wonderfully smooth and courteous for a man in so inferior a position. He remembered the speed at which he had been driven, and now it occurred to him that the hansom was more luxuriously appointed than the common run of public conveyances.

"I must ask you to explain," said he. "Do you mean to turn me out into the rain? My good man, I suspect the choice is mine."

"The choice is certainly yours," replied the driver, "but when I tell you all I believe I know how a gentleman of your figure will decide. There is a gentleman's party in this house. I do not know whether the master be a stranger to London and without acquaintances of his own or whether he is a man of odd notions. But certainly he was hired to kidnap a single gentleman in evening dress, as manly as I pleased, big military officers by preference. You have simply to go in and say that Mr. Morris invited you."

"Are you Mr. Morris?" inquired the lieutenant.

"Oh, no," replied the cabman. "Mr. Morris is the person of the house."

"It is not a common way of collecting guests," said Brackenbury, "but an eccentric man might very well indulge the whim without any intention to offend. And suppose that I refuse Mr. Morris' invitation," he went on, "what then?"

"My orders are to drive you back where I took you from," replied the man, "and set out to look for others up to midnight. Those who have no fancy for such an adventure, Mr. Morris said, were not the guests for him."

These words decided the lieutenant on the spot.

"After all," he reflected as he descended from the hansom, "I have not had long to wait for my adventure."

He had hardly found footing on the sidewalk and was still feeling in his pocket for the fare when the cab swung about and drove off by the way it came at the former breakneck velocity. Brackenbury shouted after the man, who paid no heed and continued to drive away, but the sound of his voice was overheard in the house, the door was again thrown open, emitting a flood of light upon the garden, and a servant ran down to meet him, holding an umbrella.

"The cabman has been paid," observed the servant in a very civil tone, and he proceeded to escort Brackenbury along the path and up the steps. In the hall several other attendants relieved him of his hat, cane and paletot; gave him a ticket with a number in return and politely hurried him up a stair adorned with tropical flowers to the door of an apartment on the first story. Here a grave butler inquired his name and, announcing "Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich," ushered him into the drawing room of the house.

A young man, slender and singularly handsome, came forward and greeted him with an air at once courtly and affectionate. Hundreds of candles of the finest wax lighted up a room that was perfumed, like the staircase, with a profusion of rare and beautiful flowering shrubs. A side table was loaded with tempting viands. Several servants went to and fro with fruits and goblets of champagne. The company was perhaps sixteen in number, all men, few beyond the prime of life and, with hardly an exception, of a dashing and capable exterior. They were divided into two groups, one about a roulette board and the other surrounding a table at which one of their number held a bank of baccarat.

"I see," thought Brackenbury. "I am in a private gambling saloon, and the cabman was a tout."

His eye had embraced the details, and his mind formed the conclusion while his host was still holding him by the hand, and to him his looks returned from this rapid survey. At a second view Mr. Morris surprised him still more than on the first. The easy elegance of his manners, the distinction, amiability and courage that appeared upon his features, fitted very ill with the lieutenant's preconceptions on the subject of the proprietor of a hell, and the tone of his conversation seemed to mark him out for a man of position and merit. Brackenbury found he had an instinctive liking for his entertainer, and, though he chided himself for the weakness, he was unable to resist a sort of friendly attraction for Mr. Morris' person and character.

"I have heard of you, Lieutenant Rich," said Mr. Morris, lowering his tone, "and believe me I am gratified to make your acquaintance. Your looks accord with the reputation that has preceded you from India. And if you will forget for awhile the irregularity of your presentation in my house I shall feel it not only an honor, but a genuine pleasure besides. A man who makes a mouthful of barbarian cavaliers," he added, with a laugh, "should not be appalled by a breach of etiquette, however serious."

And he led him toward the sideboard and pressed him to partake of some refreshment.

"Upon my word," the lieutenant reflected, "this is one of the pleasantest fellows, and, I do not doubt, one of the most agreeable societies in London."

He partook of some champagne, which he found excellent, and, observing that many of the company were already smoking, he lighted one of his own Manillas and strolled up to the roulette board, where he sometimes made a stake and sometimes looked smilingly on the fortune of others. It was while he was thus idling that he became aware of a sharp scrutiny to which the whole of the guests were subjected. Mr. Morris went here and there, ostensibly busied on hospitable concerns, but he had ever a shrewd glance at disposal. Not a man of the party escaped his sudden, searching looks. He took stock of the bearing of heavy losers, he valued the amount of the stakes, he paused behind couples who were deep in conversation, and, in a word, there was hardly a characteristic of any one present but he seemed to catch and make a note of it. Brackenbury began to wonder if this were indeed a gambling hell; it had so much the air of a private inquisition. He followed Mr. Morris in all his movements, and, although the man had a ready smile, he seemed to perceive, as it were under a mask, a haggard, careworn and preoccupied spirit. The fellows around him laughed and made their game, but Brackenbury had lost interest in the guests.

"This Morris," thought he, "is no idler in the room. Some deep purpose inspires him. Let it be mine to fathom it."

Now and then Mr. Morris would call one of his visitors aside, and after a brief colloquy in an anteroom he would return alone, and the visitor in question reappeared no more. After a certain number of repetitions this performance excited Brackenbury's curiosity to a high degree. He determined to be at the bottom of this minor mystery at once, and, strolling into the anteroom, found a deep window recess concealed by curtains of the fashionable green. Here he hurriedly ensconced himself, nor had he to wait long before the sound of steps and voices drew near him from the principal apartment. Peering through the division, he saw Mr. Morris escorting a fat and ruddy personage, with some what the look of a commercial traveler, whom Brackenbury had already remarked for his coarse laugh and underbred behavior at the table. The pair halted immediately before the window, so that Brackenbury lost not a word of the following discourse:

"I beg you a thousand pardons," began Mr. Morris, with the most conciliatory manner, "and if I appear rude I am sure you will readily forgive me. In a place so great as London accidents must continually happen, and the best that we can hope is to remedy them with as small delay as possible. I will not deny that I fear you have made a mistake and honored my poor house by inadvertence, for, to speak openly, I cannot at all remember your appearance. Let me put the question without unnecessary circumlocution—between gentlemen of honor a word will suffice—under whose roof do you suppose yourself to be?"

"That of Mr. Morris," replied the other, with a prodigious display of confusion, which had been visibly growing upon him throughout the last few words.

"Mr. John or Mr. James Morris?" inquired the host.

"I really cannot tell you," returned the unfortunate guest. "I am not personally acquainted with the gentleman any more than I am with yourself."

"I see," said Mr. Morris. "There is another person of the same name farther down the street, and I have no doubt the policeman will be able to supply you with his number. Believe me, I felicitate myself on the misunderstanding which has procured me the pleasure of your company for so long, and let me express a hope that we may meet again upon a more regular footing. Meantime I would not for the world detain you longer from your friends. John," he added, raising his voice, "will you see that this gentleman finds his greatcoat?"

And with the most agreeable air Mr. Morris escorted his visitor as far as the anteroom door, where he left him under conduct of the butler. As he passed the window on his return to the drawing room Brackenbury could hear him utter a profound sigh, as though his mind was loaded with a great anxiety and his nerves already fatigued with the task on which he was engaged.

For perhaps an hour the hansoms kept arriving with such frequency that Mr. Morris had to receive a new guest for every old one that he sent away, and the company preserved its number undiminished. But toward the end of that time the arrivals grew few and far between and at length ceased entirely, while the process of elimination was continued with unimpaired activity. The drawing room began to look empty, the baccarat was discontinued for lack of a banker, more than one person said good night of his own accord and was suffered to depart without expostulation, and in the meanwhile Mr. Morris redoubled in agreeable attentions to those who stayed behind. He went from group to group and from person to person with looks of the readiest sympathy and the most pertinent and pleasing talk. He was not so much like a host as like a hostess, and there was a feminine coquetry and condescension in his manner which charmed the hearts of all.

As the guests grew thinner Lieutenant Rich strolled for a moment out of the drawing room into the hall in quest of fresher air. But he had no sooner passed the threshold of the antechamber than he was brought to a dead halt by a discovery of the most surprising nature. The flowering shrubs had disappeared from the staircase. Three large furniture wagons stood before the garden gate. The servants were busy dismantling the house upon all sides, and some of them had already donned their greatcoats and were preparing to depart. It was like the end of a country ball, where everything has been supplied by contract. Brackenbury had indeed some matter for reflection. First, the guests, who were no real guests after all, had been dismissed, and now the servants, who could hardly be genuine servants, were actively dispersing.

"Was the whole establishment a sham," he asked himself, "the mushroom of a single night, which should disappear before morning?"

Watching a favorable opportunity, Brackenbury dashed upstairs to the higher regions of the house. It was as he had expected. He ran from room to room and saw not a stick of furniture nor so much as a picture on the walls. Although the house had been painted and papered, it was not only unhabited at present, but plainly had never been inhabited at all. The young officer remembered with astonishment its spacious, settled and hospitable air on his arrival. It was only at a prodigious cost that the imposture could have been carried out upon so great a scale.

Who, then, was Mr. Morris? What was his intention in thus playing the householder for a single night in the remote west of London? And why did he collect his visitors at hazard from the streets?

Brackenbury remembered that he had already delayed too long, and hastened to join the company. Many had left during his absence, and, counting the lieutenant and his host, there were not more than five persons in the drawing room, recently so thronged. Mr. Morris greeted him as he re-entered the apartment with a smile and immediately rose to his feet.

"It is now time, gentlemen," said he, "to explain my purpose in decoying you from your amusements. I trust you did not find the evening hang very dully on your hands, but my object, I will confess it, was not to entertain your leisure, but to help myself in an unfortunate necessity. You are all gentlemen. Your appearance does you that much justice, and I ask for no better security. Hence I speak it without concealment. I ask you to render me a dangerous and delicate service—dangerous because you may run the hazard of your lives, and delicate because I must ask an absolute discretion upon all that you shall see or hear. From an utter stranger the request is almost comically extravagant. I am well aware of this, and I would add at once if there be any one present who has heard enough, if there be one among the party who recoils from a dangerous confidence and a piece of quixotic devotion to he knows not whom, here is my hand ready, and I shall wish him good night and godspeed with all the sincerity in the world."

A very tall, black man, with a heavy stoop, immediately responded to this appeal.

"I commend your frankness, sir," said he, "and, for my part, I go. I make no reflections, but I cannot deny that you fill me with suspicious thoughts. I go myself, as I say, and perhaps you will think I have no right to add words to my example."

"On the contrary," replied Mr. Morris, "I am obliged to you for all you say. It would be impossible to exaggerate the gravity of my proposal."

"Well, gentlemen, what do you say?" said the tall man, addressing the others. "We have had our evening's frolic. Shall we all go homeward peaceably in a body? You will think well of my suggestion in the morning when you see the sun again in innocence and safety."

The speaker announced the last words with an intonation which added to their force, and his face wore a singular expression, full of gravity and significance. Another of the company rose hastily and, with some appearance of alarm, prepared to take his leave. There were only two who held their ground, Brackenbury and an old red nosed cavalry major. But these two preserved a nonchalant demeanor and, beyond a look of intelligence which they rapidly exchanged, appeared entirely foreign to the discussion that had just been terminated.

Mr. Morris conducted the deserters as far as the door, which he closed upon their heels. Then he turned round, disclosing a countenance of mingled relief and animation, and addressed the two officers as follows:

"I have chosen my men like Joshua in the Bible," said Mr. Morris, "and I now believe I have the pick of London. Your appearance pleased my hansom cabmen; then it delighted me. I have watched your behavior in a strange company and under the most unusual circumstances. I have studied how you played and how you bore your losses. Lastly, I have put you to the test of a staggering announcement, and you received it like an invitation to dinner. It is not for nothing," he cried, "that I have been for years the companion and the pupil of the bravest and wisest potentate in Europe."

"At the affair of Bunderchang," observed the major, "I asked for twelve volunteers, and every trooper in the ranks replied to my appeal. But a gaming party is the same thing as a regiment under fire. You may be pleased, I suppose, to have found two, and two who will not fail you at a push. As for the pair who ran away, I count them among the most pitiful hounds I ever met with. Lieutenant Rich," he added, addressing Brackenbury, "I have heard much of you of late, and I cannot doubt but you have also heard of me. I am Major O'Rooke."

And the veteran tendered his hand, which was red and tremulous, to the young lieutenant.

"Who has not?" answered Brackenbury.

"When this little matter is settled," said Mr. Morris, "you will think I have sufficiently rewarded you, for I could offer neither a more valuable service than to make him acquainted with the other."

"And now," said Major O'Rooke, "is it a duel?"

"A duel after a fashion," replied Mr. Morris, "a duel with unknown and dangerous enemies, and, as I gravely fear, a duel to the death. I must ask you," he continued, "to call me Morris no longer; call me, if you please, Hammersmith. My real name, as well as that of another person to whom I hope to present you before long, you will gratify me by not asking and not seeking to discover for yourselves. Three days ago the person of whom I speak disappeared suddenly from home, and until this morning I received no hint of his situation. You will fancy my alarm when I tell you that he is engaged upon a work of private justice. Bound by an unhappy oath, too lightly sworn, he finds it necessary without the help of law to rid the earth of an insidious and bloody villain. Already two of our friends, and one of them my own born brother, have perished in the enterprise. He himself, or I am much deceived, is taken in the same fatal toils. But at least he still lives and still hopes, as this billet sufficiently proves."

And the speaker, no other than Colonel Geraldine, proffered a letter, thus conceived:

Major Hammersmith—On Wednesday at 3 a. m. you will be admitted by the small door to the gardens of Rochester House, Regent's park, by a man who is entirely in my interest. I must request you not to fail me by a second. Pray bring my case of swords and, if you can find them, one or two gentlemen of conduct and discretion to whom my person is unknown. My name must not be used in this affair.

T. GODALL.

"From his wisdom alone, if he had no other title," pursued Colonel Geraldine when the others had each satisfied his curiosity, "my friend is a man whose directions should implicitly be followed. I need not tell you, therefore, that I have not so much as visited the neighborhood of Rochester House, and that I am still as wholly in the dark as either of yourselves as to the nature of my friend's dilemma. I betook myself as soon as I had received this order to a furnishing contractor, and in a few hours the house in which we now are had assumed its late air of festival. My scheme was at least original, and I am far from regretting an action which has procured me the services of Major O'Rooke and Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich. But the residents in the street will have a strange awakening. The house which this evening was full of lights and visitors they will find uninhabited and for sale tomorrow morning. Thus even the most serious concerns," added the colonel, "have a merry side."

"And let us add a merry ending," said Brackenbury.

The colonel consulted his watch.

"It is now hard on 2," he said. "We have an hour before us, and a swift cab is at the door. Tell me if I may count upon your help."

"During a long life," replied Major O'Rooke, "I never took back my hand from anything nor so much as hedged a bet."

Brackenbury signified his readiness in the most becoming terms, and after they had drunk a glass or two of wine the colonel gave each of them a loaded revolver, and the three mounted into the cab and drove off for the address in question.

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Millstuffs—Bran, $23; middlings, $27; shorts, $23; chop, $18

Hay—Timothy, $20@21; clover, $17

Butter—Fancy creamery, 20@22½c dairy, nominal; store, 17c @18 per pound

Eggs—fresh 16@17½c.

Cheese—Full cream twins, 16½@17½c; Young American, 17½c@18½c per pound.

Poultry—Chickens, mixed, 12 @13c per lb, hens, 13½ @ 14c, roosters 10½ @ 13c; broilers 16 @17c, fryers, 14 @ 15c, ducks, 13½ @ 14c, geese 8c, turkeys, live 17c, dressed 18 @ 19c per lb.

Hogs—Gross, heavy, $6 50@7; light, $4.75 @5; dressed, 8c@8½c per pound.

Veal—Small, 7½@8½c; large, 7@7½c per pound.

Beef—Gross top steers, $4.50@5.50;

Hops—19@20 c per pound.

Wool—Valley 15½@16c; Eastern Oregon, 8 at 14½; mohair, 35 at 38c per pound.

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