The New Arabian Nights

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

From time to time he risked a momentary look in the direction which principally interested him, and once at least he felt certain that his eyes encountered those of the young girl. A shock passed over his body, and he saw all the colors of the rainbow. What would he not have given to overhear what passed between the Vandeleurs? What would he not have given for the courage to take up his opera glass and steadily inspect their attitude and expression? There, for aught he knew, his whole life was being decided, and he not able to interfere, not even able to follow the debate, but condemned to sit and suffer where he was in impotent anxiety.

At last the act came to an end. The curtain fell, and the people around him began to leave their places for the interval. It was only natural that he should follow their example, and if he did so it was not only natural, but necessary, that he should pass immediately in front of the box in question. Summoning all his courage, but keeping his eyes lowered, Francis drew near the spot. His progress was slow, for the old gentleman before him moved with incredible deliberation, wheezing as he went. What was he to do? Should he address the Vandeleurs by name as he went by? Should he take the flower from his buttonhole and throw it into the box? Should he raise his face and direct one long and affectionate look upon the lady who was either his sister or his betrothed? As he found himself thus struggling among so many alternatives he had a vision of his old equable existence in the bank and was assailed by a thought of regret for the past.

By this time he had arrived directly opposite the box, and, although he was still undetermined what to do or whether to do anything, he turned his head and lifted his eyes. No sooner had he done so than he uttered a cry of disappointment and remained rooted to the spot. The box was empty. During his slow advance Mr. Vandeleur and his daughter had quietly slipped away.

A polite person in his rear reminded him that he was stopping the path, and he moved on again with mechanical footsteps and suffered the crowd to carry him, unresisting, out of the theater. Once in the street, the pressure ceasing, he came to a halt, and the cool night air speedily restored him to the possession of his faculties. He was surprised to find that his head ached violently and that he remembered not one word of the two acts which he had witnessed. As the excitement wore away it was succeeded by an overweening appetite for sleep, and he hailed a cab and drove to his lodging in a state of extreme exhaustion and some disgust of life.

"I DO NOT KNOW WHO ARE MY FRIENDS AND ENEMIES."

Next morning he lay in wait for Miss Vandeleur on her road to market and by 8 o'clock beheld her stepping down a lane. She was simply and even poorly attired, but in the carriage of her head and body there was something flexible and noble that would have lent distinction to the meanest toilet. Even the basket, so aptly did she carry it, became her like an ornament. It seemed to Francis, as he slipped into a doorway, that the sunshine followed and the shadows fled before her as she walked, and he was conscious, for the first time, of a bird singing in a cage above the lane.

He suffered her to pass the doorway and then, coming forth once more, addressed her by name from behind.

"Miss Vandeleur," said he.

She turned and, when she saw who he was, became deadly pale.

"Pardon me," he continued. "Heaven knows I had no will to startle you, and indeed there should be nothing startling in the presence of one who wishes you so well as I do. And, believe me, I am acting rather from necessity than choice. We have many things in common, and I am sadly in the dark. There is much that I should be doing, and my hands are tied. I do not know even what to feel nor who are my friends and enemies."

She found her voice with an effort.

"I do not know who you are," she said.

"Ah, yes, Miss Vandeleur, you do," returned Francis, "better than I do myself. Indeed it is on that, above all, that I seek light. Tell me what you know," he pleaded. "Tell me who I am, who you are and how our destinies are intermixed. Give me a little help with my life, Miss Vandeleur—only a word or two to guide me, only the name of my father, if you will—and I shall be grateful and content."

"I will not attempt to deceive you," she replied. "I know who you are, but I am not at liberty to say."

"Tell me, at least, that you have forgiven my presumption, and I shall wait with all the patience I have," he said. "If I am not to know, I must do without. It is cruel, but I can bear more upon a push. Only do not add to my troubles the thought that I have made an enemy of you."

"You did only what was natural," she said, "and I have nothing to forgive you. Farewell."

"Is it to be farewell?" he asked.

"Nay, that I do not know myself," she answered. "Farewell for the present, if you like."

And with these words she was gone.

Francis returned to his lodging in a state of considerable commotion of mind. He made the most trifling progress with his Euclid for that forenoon and was more often at the window than at his improvised writing table. But beyond seeing the return of Miss Vandeleur and the meeting between her and her father, who was smoking a Trichinopoli cigar in the veranda, there was nothing notable in the neighborhood of the house with the green blinds before the time of the midday meal. The young man hastily allayed his appetite in a neighboring restaurant and returned with the speed of unallayed curiosity to the house in the Rue Lepic. A mounted servant was leading a saddle horse to and fro before the garden wall, and the porter of Francis' lodging was smoking a pipe against the doorpost, absorbed in contemplation of the livery and the steeds.

"Look!" he cried to the young man. "What fine cattle! What an elegant costume! They belong to the brother of M. de Vandeleur, who is now within upon a visit. He is a great man, a general, in your country, and you, doubtless, know him well by reputation."

"I confess," returned Francis, "that I have never heard of General Vandeleur before. We have many officers of that grade, and my pursuits have been exclusively civil."

"It is he," replied the porter, "who lost the great diamond of the Indies. Of that, at least, you must have read often in the papers."

As soon as Francis could disengage himself from the porter he ran upstairs and hurried to the window. Immediately below the clear space in the chestnut leaves the two gentlemen were seated in conversation over a cigar. The general, a red, military looking man, offered some traces of a family resemblance to his brother. He had something, although very little, of the same free and powerful carriage, but he was older, smaller and more common in air, his likeness was that of a caricature, and he seemed altogether a poor and debile being by the side of the dictator.

They spoke in tones so low, leaning over the table with every appearance of interest, that Francis could catch no more than a word or two on an occasion, for, as little as he heard, he was convinced that the conversation turned upon himself and his own career. Several times the name of Scrymgeour touched his ear, for it was easy to distinguish, and still more frequently he fancied he could distinguish the name Francis.

At length the general, as if in hot anger, broke forth into several violent exclamations.

"Francis Vandeleur!" he cried, accentuating the last word. "Francis Vandeleur, I tell you!"

The dictator made a movement of his whole body, half affirmative, half contemptuous, but his answer was inaudible to the young man.

Was he the Francis Vandeleur in question? he wondered. Were they discussing the name under which he was to be married, or was the whole affair a dream and delusion of his own conceit and self absorption?

After another interval of inaudible talk dissension seemed again to arise between the couple underneath the chestnut, and again the general raised his voice angrily so as to be audible to Francis.

"My wife!" he cried. "I have done with my wife for good. I will not hear her name. I am sick of her very name."

And he swore aloud and beat the table with his fist.

The dictator appeared by his gestures to pacify him after a paternal fashion, and a little after he conducted him to the garden gate. The pair shook hands affectionately enough, but as soon as the door had closed behind his visitor John Vandeleur fell into a fit of laughter which sounded unkindly and even devilish in the ears of Francis Scrymgeour.

So another day had passed and little more learned. But the young man remembered that the morrow was Tuesday and promised himself some curious discoveries. All might be well, or all might be ill; he was sure at least to glean some curious information and, perhaps by good luck, get at the heart of the mystery which surrounded his father and his family.

As the hour of the dinner drew near many preparations were made in the garden of the house with the green blinds. The table which was partly visible to Francis through the chestnut leaves was destined to serve as a sideboard and carried relays of plates and the materials for salad; the other, which was almost entirely concealed, had been set apart for the diners, and Francis could catch glimpses of white cloth and silver plate.

Mr. Rolles arrived, punctual to the minute. He looked like a man upon his guard and spoke low and sparingly. The dictator, on the other hand, appeared to enjoy an unusual flow of spirits. His laugh, which was youthful and pleasant to hear, sounded frequently from the garden. By the modulation and changes of his voice it was obvious that he told many droll stories and imitated the accents of a variety of different nations, and before he and the young clergyman had finished their vermuth all feeling of distrust was at an end and they were talking like a pair of school companions.

At length Miss Vandeleur made her appearance, carrying the soup tureen. Mr. Rolles ran to offer her assistance, which she laughingly refused, and there was an interchange of pleasantries among the trio which seemed to have reference to this primitive manner of waiting by one of the company.

"One is more at one's ease," Mr. Vandeleur was heard to declare.

Next moment they were all three in their places, and Francis could see as little as he could hear of what passed. But the dinner seemed to go merrily. There was a perpetual babble of voices and sound of knives and forks below the chestnut, and Francis, who had no more than a roll to gnaw, was affected with envy by the comfort and deliberation of the meal. The party lingered over one dish after another and then over a delicate dessert, with a bottle of old wine carefully uncorked by the hand of the dictator himself. As it began to grow dark a lamp was set upon the table and a couple of candles on the sideboard, for the night was perfectly pure, starry and windless. Light overflowed besides from the door and window in the veranda, so that the garden was fairly illuminated and the leaves twinkled in the darkness.

For perhaps the tenth time Miss Vandeleur entered the house, and on this occasion she returned with the coffee tray, which she placed upon the sideboard. At the same moment her father rose from his seat.

"The coffee is my province," Francis heard him say.

And the next moment he saw his supposed father standing by the sideboard in the light of the candles.

Talking over his shoulder all the while, Mr. Vandeleur poured out two cups of the brown stimulant and then, by a rapid act of prestidigitation, emptied the contents of a tiny vial into the smaller of the two. The thing was so swiftly done that even Francis, who looked straight into his face, had hardly time to perceive the movement before it was completed, and the next instant, and still laughing, Mr. Vandeleur had turned again toward the table with a cup in either hand.

"Ere we have done with this," said he, "we may expect our famous Hebrew."

It would be impossible to depict the confusion and distress of Francis Scrymgeour. He saw foul play going forward before his eyes, and he felt bound to interfere, but he knew not how. It might be a mere pleasantry, and then how should he look if he were to offer an unnecessary warning? Or, again, if it were serious, the criminal might be his own father, and then how should he not lament if he were to bring ruin on the author of his days? For the first time he became conscious of his own position as a spy. To wait inactive at such a juncture and with such a conflict of sentiments in his bosom was to suffer the most acute torture. He clung to the bars of the shutters, his heart beat fast and with irregularity, and he felt a strong sweat break forth upon his body.

Several minutes passed.

He seemed to perceive the conversation die away and grow less and less in vivacity and volume, but still no sign of any alarming or even notable event.

Suddenly the ring of a glass breaking was followed by a faint and dull sound, as of a person who should have fallen forward with his head upon the table. At the same moment a piercing scream rose from the garden.

"What have you done?" cried Miss Vandeleur. "He is dead!"

The dictator replied in a violent whisper, so strong and sibilant that every word was audible to the watcher at the window.

"Silence!" said Mr. Vandeleur. "The man is as well as I am. Take him by the heels while I carry him by the shoulders.

Francis heard Miss Vandeleur break forth into a passion of tears.

"Do you hear what I say," resumed the dictator in the same tones, "or do you wish to quarrel with me? I give you your choice, Miss Vandeleur."

There was another pause, and the dictator spoke again.

"Take that man by the heels," he said. "I must have him brought into the house. If I were a little younger, I could help myself against the world, but now that years and dangers are upon me and my hands are weakened I must turn to you for aid."

"It is a crime," replied the girl.

"I am your father," said Mr. Vandeleur.

This appeal seemed to produce its effect. A scuffling noise followed upon the gravel, a chair was overset, and then Francis saw the father and daughter stagger across the walk and disappear under the veranda, bearing the inanimate body of Mr. Rolles embraced about the knees and shoulders. The young clergyman was limp and pallid, and his head rolled upon his shoulders at every step.

Was he alive or dead? Francis, in spite of the dictator's declaration, inclined to the latter view. A great crime had been committed, a great calamity had fallen upon the inhabitants of the house with the green blinds. To his surprise, Francis found all horror for the deed swallowed up in sorrow for a girl and an old man whom he judged to be in the height of peril. A tide of generous feeling swept into his heart. He, too, would help his father against man and mankind, against fate and justice, and, casting open the shutters, he closed his eyes and threw himself with outstretched arms into the foliage of the chestnut.

Branch after branch slipped from his grasp and broke under his weight. Then he caught a stalwart bough under his armpit and hung suspended for a second, and then he let himself drop and fell heavily against the table. A cry of alarm from the house warned him that his entrance had not been effected unobserved. He recovered himself with a stagger and in three bounds crossed the intervening space and stood before the door in the veranda.

In a small apartment, carpeted with matting and surrounded by glazed cabinets full of rare and costly curios, Mr. Vandeleur was stooping over the body of Mr. Rolles. He raised himself as Francis entered, and there was an instantaneous passage of hands. It was the business of a second. As fast as the eye can wink the thing was done. The young man had not the time to be sure but it seemed to him as if the dictator had taken something from the curate's breast, looked at it for the least fraction of time as it lay in his hand and then suddenly and swiftly passed it to his daughter.

All this was over while Francis had still one foot upon the threshold and the other raised in the air. The next instant he was on his knees to Mr Vandeleur.

"Father!" he cried. "Let me, too, help you. I will do what you wish and ask no questions. I will obey you with my life. Treat me as a son, and you will find I have a son's devotion."

A deplorable explosion of oaths was the dictator's first reply.

"Son and father?" he cried. "Father and son? What dashed unnatural comedy is all this? How do you come in my garden? What do you want? And who, in God's name, are you?"

Francis, with a stunned and shamefaced aspect, got upon his feet again and stood in silence.

Then a light seemed to break upon Mr. Vandeleur and he laughed aloud.

"I see," cried he. "It is the Scrymgeour. Very well, Mr. Scrymgeour. Let me tell you in a few words how you stand. You have entered my private residence by force, or perhaps by fraud, but certainly with no encouragement from me, and you come at a moment of some annoyance, a guest having fainted at my table, to besiege me with your protestations. You are no son of mine. You are my brother's bastard by a fishwife. If you want to know. I regard you with an indifference closely bordering on aversion, and from what I now see of your conduct I judge your mind to be exactly suitable to your exterior. I recommend you these mortifying reflections for your leisure, and, in the meantime, let me beseech you to rid us of your presence. If I were not occupied," added the dictator, with a terrifying oath, "I should give you the unholiest drubbing ere you went."

Francis listened in profound humiliation. He would have fled had it been possible; but, as he had no means of leaving the residence into which he had so unfortunately penetrated, he could do no more than stand foolishly where he was.

It was Miss Vandeleur who broke the silence. "Father," she said, "you speak in anger. Mr. Scrymgeour may have been mistaken, but he meant well and kindly."

"Thank you for speaking," returned the dictator. "You remind me of some other observations which I hold it a point of honor to make to Mr. Scrymgeour. My brother," he continued, addressing the young man, "has been foolish enough to give you an allowance. He was foolish enough and presumptuous enough to propose a match between you and this young lady. You were exhibited to her two nights ago, and I rejoice to tell you that she rejected the idea with disgust. Let me add that I have considerable influence with your father, and it shall not be my fault if you are not beggared of your allowance and sent back to your scrivening ere the week be out."

The tones of the old man's voice were, if possible, more wounding than his language. Francis felt himself exposed to the most cruel, blighting and unbearable contempt. His head turned, and he covered his face with his hands, uttering at the same time a tearless sob of agony. But Miss Vandeleur once again interfered in his behalf.

"Mr. Scrymgeour," she said, speaking in clear and even tones, "you must not be concerned at my father's harsh expressions. I felt no disgust for you. On the contrary, I asked an opportunity to make your better acquaintance. As for what has passed tonight, believe me it has filled my mind with both pity and esteem."

Just then Mr. Rolles made a convulsive movement of his arm, which convinced Francis that he was only drugged and was beginning to throw off the influence of the opiate. Mr. Vandeleur stooped over him and examined his face for an instant.

"Come, come!" cried he, raising his head. "Let there be an end of this. And, since you are so pleased with his conduct, Miss Vandeleur, take a candle and show the cur out!"

The young lady hastened to obey.

"Thank you," said Francis as soon as he was alone with her in the garden. "I thank you from my soul. This has been the bitterest evening of my life, but it will have always one pleasant recollection."

"I spoke as I felt," she replied, "and in justice to you. It made my heart sorry that you should be so unkindly used."

By this time they had reached the garden gate, and Miss Vandeleur, having set the candle on the ground, was already unfastening the bolts.

"One word more," said Francis. "This is not for the last time. I shall see you again, shall I not?"

"Alas," she answered, "you have heard my father. What can I do but obey?"

"Tell me at least that it is not with your consent," returned Francis. "Tell me that you have no wish to see the last of me."

"Indeed," replied she, "I have none. You seem to me both brave and honest."

THE DICTATOR HAD TAKEN SOMETHING FROM THE CURATE'S BREAST.

"Then," said Francis, "give me a keepsake."

She paused for a moment, with her hand upon the key, for the various bars and bolts were all undone, and there was nothing left but to open the lock.

"If I agree," she said, "will you promise to do as I tell you from point to point?"

"Can you ask?" replied Francis. "I would do so willingly on your bare word."

She turned the key and threw open the door.

"Be it so," said she. "You do not know what you ask, but be it so. Whatever you hear," she continued, "whatever happens, do not return to this house. Hurry fast until you reach the lighted and populous quarters of the city. Even there be on your guard. You are in a greater danger than you fancy. Promise me you will not so much as look at my keepsake until you are in a place of safety."

"I promise," replied Francis.

She put something loosely wrapped in a handkerchief into the young man's hand, and at the same time, with more strength than he could have anticipated, she pushed him into the street.

"Now run!" she cried.

He heard the door close behind him and the noise of the bolts being replaced.

"My faith," said he, "since I have promised."

And he took to his heels down the lane that leads into the Rue Ravignan.

He was not fifty paces from the house with the green blinds when the most diabolical outcry suddenly arose out on the stillness of the night. Mechanically he stood still; another passenger followed his example. In the neighboring floors he saw people crowding to the windows. A conflagration could not have produced more disturbance in this empty quarter. And yet it seemed to be all the work of a single man, roaring between grief and rage, like a lioness robbed of her whelps, and Francis was surprised and alarmed to hear his own name shouted with English imprecations to the wind.

His first movement was to return to the house; his second, as he remembered Miss Vandeleur's advice, to continue his flight with greater expedition than before, and he was in the act of turning to put his thought in action when the dictator, bareheaded, bawling aloud, his white countenance, with his head, shot past him like a ball out of the cannon's mouth and went careering down the street.

"That was a close shave," thought Francis to himself. "What he wants with me and why he should be so disturbed I cannot think, but he is plainly not good company for the moment, and I cannot do better than follow Miss Vandeleur's advice."

So saying, he turned to retrace his steps, thinking to double and descend by the Rue Lepic itself while his pursuer should continue to follow after him on the office line of street. The plan was ill devised. As a matter of fact, he should have taken his seat in the nearest cafe and waited there until the first heat of the pursuit was over. But besides that Francis had no experience and little natural aptitude for the small war of private life. He was so unconscious of any evil on his part that he saw nothing to fear beyond a disagreeable interview, and to disagreeable interviews he felt he had already served his apprenticeship that evening; nor could he suppose that Miss Vandeleur had left anything unsaid. Indeed, the young man was sore both in body and mind—the one was all bruised, the other was full of smarting arrows, and he owned to himself that Mr. Vandeleur was master of a very deadly tongue.

The thought of his bruises reminded him that he had not only come without a hat, but that his clothes had considerably suffered in his descent through the chestnut. At the first magazine he purchased a cheap wide-awake and had the disorder of his toilet summarily repaired. The keepsake, still rolled in the handkerchief, he thrust in the meanwhile into his trousers pocket.

Not many steps beyond the shop he was conscious of a sudden shock, a hand upon his throat, an infuriated face close to his own and an open mouth howling curses in his ear. The dictator, having found no trace of his quarry, was returning by the other way. Francis was a stalwart young fellow, but he was no match for his adversary whether in strength or skill, and after a few ineffectual struggles he resigned himself entirely to his captor.

"What do you want with me?" said he.

"We will talk of that at home," returned the dictator grimly.

And he continued to march the young man up hill in the direction of the house with the green blinds.

But Francis, although he no longer struggled, was only waiting an opportunity to make a bold push for freedom. With a sudden jerk, he left the collar of his coat in the hands of Mr. Vandeleur and once more made off at his best speed in the direction of the boulevards.

The tables were now turned. If the dictator was the stronger, Francis, in the top of his youth, was the more fleet of foot, and he had soon effected his escape among the crowds. Relieved for a moment, he walked briskly until he debouched upon the Place de l'Opera, lighted up like day with electric lamps.

"This, at least," thought he, "should satisfy Miss Vandeleur."

And, turning to his right along the boulevards, he entered the Cafe Americain and ordered some beer. It was both late and early for the majority of the frequenters of the establishment. Only two or three persons, all men, were dotted here and there at separate tables in the hall, and Francis was too much occupied by his own thoughts to observe their presence.

He drew the handkerchief from his pocket. The object wrapped in it proved to be a morocco case, clasped and ornamented in gilt, which opened by means of a spring and disclosed to the horrified young man a diamond of monstrous bigness and extraordinary brilliancy. The circumstance was so inexplicable, the value of the stone was plainly so enormous, that Francis sat staring into the open casket without movement, without conscious thought, like a man stricken with idiocy.

A hand was laid upon his shoulder lightly, but firmly, and a quiet voice, which yet had in it the ring of command, uttered these words in his ear:

"Close the casket and compose your face."

Looking up, he beheld a man, still young, of an urbane and tranquil presence and dressed with rich simplicity. This personage had risen from a neighboring table and, bringing his glass with him, had taken a seat beside Francis.

"Close the casket," repeated the stranger, "and put it quietly back into your pocket, where I feel persuaded it should never have been. Try, if you please, to throw off your bewildered air and act as though I were one of your acquaintances whom you had met by chance. So! Touch glasses with me. That is better. I fear, sir, you must be an amateur."

And the stranger pronounced these last words with a smile of peculiar meaning, leaned back in his seat and enjoyed a deep inhalation of tobacco.

To be Continued,

INTERESTING FACTS

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Portland Markets.

Wheat—Walla Walla, 72c; bluestem 77c; valley, 7 ,

Flour—best grades, $3 35@3 65 per barrel; graham, $3 15@3 55.

Oats—No. 1 white, $1 17@1 20; gray $1 15 per cental.

Barley—Feed, $21 per ton; $21 brewing rolled $22 per ton.

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, hense 13½ @ 14c, roosters 10½ @ 13c; broilers @17c, fryers, 14 @ 15c, ducks 13½ @ 14c, geese 8c, turkeys, live 17c, dressed 18 @ 10c per lb.

Hogs—Gross, heavy, $6 50@7; light, $4.75 @5; dressed, 8@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, at 14½; mohair, 35 at 38c per pound.

Potatoes—50 @ $.60 per sack

Onions—4050c per cental;

The West has found in President Roosevelt a pretty good immigration bureau. It is said he never tires of telling of this country as he saw it on his recent tour and that he can always get a crowd of distinguished listeners when he begins to talk about the Pacific coast. The Eastern Press quotes him and eminent men have become so imbued with a desire to see our country that many of them are arranging trips through the Pacific empire.

The Spaulding Logging Company that has its mill at Newberg, Yamhill county has sold a big block of its stock to Portland capitalists. The new people enables the company to expand. One of the first things to do is build a new and larger mill estimated to cost $80,000. This will be installed at Newberg on the banks of the Willamette if the city will secure without cost to the Spaulding Logging Co. a side track from the S. P. Co. track to the mill site a distance of three fourths of a mile. Since it costs from $10000 to $20000 per mile to build railroads it is seen what kind of a subsidy Newberg has to raise.

Grants Pass parties writing from Newport say a large sea lion created quite a commotion at Nye Creek beach Sunday afternoon. A large number were in bathing, when the voracious looking animal suddenly appeared in their midst. The bathers at once had business on hand much to the amusement of the onlookers. The unwelcome visitor had dropped in just to see the sights, but continued his journey toward the Seal Rocks.