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IR TO-NIGHT
TOMORROW ALRIGHT

The Mazaroff Mystery

By J. S. FLETCHER

Illustrations by Irwin Myers

W. N. U. Service

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THE STORY

Mervyn Holt is engaged by a man calling himself Mazaroff as a traveling companion. After a short tour they put up at the Woodcock inn on Marrasdale moor. They meet, casually, Mrs. Elphinstone and Sheila Merchlison.

CHAPTER I—Continued

"Holt, liddle," he said, with a confidential nod, "you'll understand me, I'm sure—I want to have this day to myself, looking round old spots, you know, alone. And also, there's a man I want to see on a bit of business. So—you'll amuse yourself till evening, when I'll be back in good time for dinner?"

"Of course!" I agreed. "I'll be all right. Don't bother about me."

He thanked me, almost as if I had been the first person to consider. Presently, carrying a stout stick, he went out—and I noticed that just before leaving our sitting room he put on a pair of blue spectacles, with some remark about the glare of the sun. He went off in the direction of the village, and I saw no more of him until he turned up again just as dinner was ready at seven o'clock. He was very quiet and thoughtful during dinner, and it was not until he was half way through his after-dinner cigar that he suddenly motioned me to draw my chair close alongside his own.

"Holt," he said, "I've something to tell you. And, man—it's the strangest tale you ever heard in your life!" I suppose I gave him a wondering, and perhaps a half-uneasy stare, for he nodded reassuringly as he drew his chair still closer to mine.

"Nothing to be frightened about, Holt, my lad," he said. "Just a—a coil, as you might put it. But—a bad one! And, as I said just now—as strange a tale as ever you heard. Anyway, one of 'em."

"Yes!" I said. "About—yourself?" "Self and other folk," he replied, with a grim smile. "Other folk—aye, there's the devil of it! If it were only myself, now!—but there's more than one affected."

He turned to the window and for a moment or two sat staring fixedly and in silence across the moor, stretching away in the rapidly gathering twilight. Curiosity got the better of me, and I broke in on his thoughts.

"I'm all in the dark, Mr. Mazaroff," I said. "Am I to listen?" He started—then gave an emphatic nod.

"Aye!" he answered. "You're to listen, Holt, for I've nobody else to tell it to, and I'm wanting counsel on it, and you're a sensible youngster. It's just this—you saw the two ladies that passed us by yesterday afternoon when we were talking to the landlord at his garden gate?"

I nodded an affirmative. "Aye, well!" he continued. "They don't know it, and nobody knows it, only me. But it's just this, Holt, my lad—that's my wife and daughter!"

"I was smoking one of Mr. Mazaroff's prime cigars at the moment, and when he said this I started so violently that it jumped from between my teeth and fell to the floor. It seemed to me that a whole age—an eon, if you like—elapsed in the mere act of stooping and recovering it. And I wondered at the calmness and banality of my reply when I sat upright again, looking at him.

"Musgrave," I said, quite steadily. "Musgrave called the elder lady Mrs. Elphinstone, and the younger Miss Merchlison—Miss Sheila Merchlison."

"Musgrave here, Musgrave there!" he retorted. "He knows no better and no more. But I'm telling you that that's my wife, liddle, and the lassie's my daughter, and unless I see some way out of the complications there's the devil and all to pay!"

There was a pause between us then. He sat twiddling his big thumbs, and, as he had discarded the blue spectacles a slight cast in his eyes looked, somehow, sinister. I began to sense the mysterious in him, and to realize that his was, to me, an unexplored personality.

"I don't understand," I said at last. "I'm going to make you understand, Holt," he answered. "This is the way of it—you good-looking lassie's name is Merchlison, sure enough. And—Elphinstone though she may call herself, and no doubt think she's a right to call herself—so is her mother's. And—so's mine, Merchlison!"

"Not Mazaroff, then?" I exclaimed. "I've a right to that, too," he said. "Legal right—all correct and proper. It's been my legal name for many years, and it'll remain so. But I was born Merchlison—and not so far from here, too—and I was married Merchlison. And you's Mrs. Merchlison, for all she's married to Elphinstone."

"And I don't understand any more now!" said I.

"Well, Holt," he answered, "I'll make it as plain as I can, and maybe it's not such a tangle as it seems when you get hold of one end of the thread and pull steadily at it. My father and mother died when I was a mere

youngster, and after that I lived with my grandfather on his farm near Selkirk, across the border yonder. Then he died, when I was just about two-and-twenty, and he left me all he had, a tidy lot of money, and that, put to what my parents had left me, made me a pretty rich man. And I was headstrong and impetuous, and always for having my own way, and there was nobody to keep me from having it, nor from indulging myself in any whims that came into my head. And I came across a high-mettled girl that was pretty much like myself in that respect and we got wed in more than the usual haste, and began to repent as soon as we'd done it!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Man!" he answered. "We hadn't a taste in common! We'd nothing in common except obstinacy and self-will! And we found we were the worst pair to pull together that ever was harnessed. I saw in less than a year that things would never do—so I just took matters into my own hands. It wasn't the way I'd take now, with a sober mind and more knowledge of the world. But what I did was this—I went to a lawyer and pledged him to secrecy. Then I realized all that I had—a nice lot!—and divided it into two equal shares, and made one fast to her for life—she'll have had it always; never less, Holt, than fifteen hundred pounds a year of her own. And that done, and all secure for her, I just took my share and cleared out."

"So—you ran away from her?" I suggested.

"If you put it that way, I did," he assented candidly. "It was the only thing to do. There'd have been unpleasantness, otherwise. A silent and quiet departure—the only thing for it, in my judgment."

"And—the child?—the girl we saw yesterday afternoon?" I asked, after a pause. "Was she born then?"

"No!" he answered with emphasis. "She wasn't! If she had been, maybe I'd never have gone—indeed, I'm sure now I wouldn't have gone. But she was neither born, nor did I know she was likely to be born. She came eight months after I'd left."

"You heard of it, then?" I suggested.

"Never knew of it till today!" he exclaimed.

"Of course, Mrs. Elphinstone—as she's known here—believes you to be dead?" I said. "That goes without saying."

"Oh, to be sure!" he answered. "She married this Elphinstone a few years back, just before he bought this Marrasdale Tower estate. Aye, she believes me dead as Adam—and here I'm alive!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"What would you do, yourself, Holt?" he replied, anxiously. "Tell me your plain opinion, man—I'll not be offended at anything you say."

"I think I should just go away, saying nothing," said I. "After all, you left her. And—if you reveal yourself, it'll mean breaking up what's probably a satisfactory settlement. Mr. Elphinstone and she—"

"Oh, by all accounts, they suit each other as well as we suited each other!" he broke in. "Aye, this settlement's all right. But—the girl's my daughter."

"She's never known you, Mr. Mazaroff," I remarked.

His bronzed cheeks reddened at that, and he shook his head. "You're right, Holt, you're right!" he said, almost humbly. "And it's my own fault. Well—up to now, nothing's happened. Nobody knows but yourself."

"After all these years it would be something of a startling revelation," I observed. "It needs some reflection. And—" but then a new idea struck me, and I regarded him doubtfully. "I suppose, if it came to it, you'd have to prove that—"

"That Salim Mazaroff is Andrew Merchlison," he interrupted. "Oh, that can be done. There's the cast in my eye, and a birthmark on my right arm, and there's papers and people—not just at hand, to be sure, but findable—that can substantiate all that."

"How came you to take such an unusual name?" I ventured to ask him.

He laughed softly, as if the reminiscence pleased him. "I'll tell you," he answered. "When I first went off, it was to India. I knocked about there a good deal, and in the Persian gulf, and in adjacent parts. Then I went further south—to Durban and thence into the interior—the diamond districts. And in Durban I foregathered with an old man of like tastes to mine—in fact, he and I lived together and traded together. His name was Mazaroff, and he left me all his money—no little—on condition I took it. So I did—why not? At that time I'd no intention of ever coming back to England again. And now—there's the situation!"

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

"I don't know," he answered frankly. "Nothing in a hurry. And as I say, nobody knows but you and me. There's no fear of my being recognized. I've talked to a dozen people today who knew me in the old days,

and in my blue spectacles they hadn't the least idea as to who I really was."

He got up then, and went out, to stroll about the front of the inn, alone. That night he said no more on the subject of his revelations, nor did he mention the matter in the morning. We spent most of that day in motoring to some ruins twenty miles away: when we returned in the evening there was a good deal of business being done at the inn—men were returning in numbers from a fair. After dinner, Mr. Mazaroff, remarking to me that he wanted to have a good think all by himself, crossed over to the open moor and strolled away across the heather. I never saw him again—alive.

I went out myself soon afterward, and was out until past nine o'clock, when I returned to the inn. He had not come back. Nor had he come at ten—and when eleven struck from the old grandfather clock in the stone-walled hall I sought out Musgrave and his wife, seated at their supper table after the toils of an unusually busy evening.

The landlord and landlady were not inclined to any uneasiness or alarm. During our forty-eight hours' stay they had discovered that Mr. Mazaroff



"How Came You to Take Such an Unusual Name?" I ventured to Ask Him.

was, as they put it, an affable and friendly gentleman, inclined to sociability—his present opinion was that he had dropped in at one of the moorland houses, and was still there, comfortably chatting. But when twelve o'clock sounded, and he was still absent, Musgrave's face lengthened, and he began to talk about the foolishness of going out in the dusk and dark in strange places. "There's places he could fall over in the dusk, and there's others—bog-land—that he could sink into before he knew where he was, dark or light. Them that doesn't know these moors shouldn't wander about 'em, after dark."

Musgrave got lanterns for Webster, me and myself: we went out on the moor and dispersed in different directions, listening always for any cry of distress.

We were out in that way until a faint gray light began to show beyond the eastern hills: at that we went back to the inn. None of us had heard or seen anything.

Webster and I got some food and hot coffee, and went out again—he one way, I the other. Mine took me toward the dawn. And suddenly I came face to face with the girl of

whom I had been thinking for two days—Sheila.

CHAPTER II

Youth's Freemasonry

Sheila was sitting by one of the reed-fringed pools that lay amongst the heather and the moss. Unconscious of any presence save that of a solemn-eyed spaniel who sat at her side, she had drawn off her shoes and stockings and was dabbling her feet and ankles in the dark waters.

The spaniel caught sight of me and barked. His mistress looked hastily in my direction, saw me, seemed to realize that she had seen me before, and though she blushed at being caught in a somewhat mystifying situation, accepted it calmly. She gave me a friendly nod—and at the same time began to put on her footgear. I purposely remained in the rear until she jumped to her feet, faced me, and laughed, pointing to the pool.

"There's a superstition about that well," she said, without preface or hesitation. "They say that if you dip your feet in it six times, within an hour of sunrise, any time between Michaelmas and Martinmas, you'll live happy ever after. So—I was trying it."

"I hope it'll come true," I said. "As for myself, I'm not at all happy just now."

A look of concern came into her eyes.

"No?" she responded. "Why?"

"I believe you saw me, yesterday—no, the day before—near the Woodcock, with an elderly gentleman?" I said. "You went by. Well, he's missing—lost! He went out from the inn, last night, after dinner, alone, and he's never returned. You know those parts? Are there places—"

"There are many dangerous places," she interrupted hastily. "Have you searched?"

"Several of us, all night," I answered. "We've seen nothing, heard nothing of him."

"Your father?" she asked, eyeing me half sympathetically.

"No—a friend, with whom I'm traveling," I replied. "I'm awfully anxious about him. It was unusually dark last evening, and I'm afraid he's come to harm—fallen over something or into something." I then told her Mr. Mazaroff's name and my own.

"I wonder if our people—gamekeepers, you know—have heard anything? If you'd walk with me to the house—" She pointed across the moor to where the gables and chimneys of Marrasdale tower showed above the trees.

"We might hear something there," she continued. "We can go there in a few minutes."

We came before long to Marrasdale tower. In the courtyard, talking to a man in velveteens, we met Mr. Elphinstone, a tall, thin, gray-haired studious-looking man, who glanced at me wonderingly over the top of an unusually large pair of spectacles. His stepdaughter led me up to him.

"This is Mr. Holt—Mr. Mervyn Holt," she said. "He and a friend of his, Mr. Mazaroff, an elderly gentleman, have motored from London, and are staying a few days at the Woodcock. Last night Mr. Mazaroff went out alone on the moors, and he's never returned. Mr. Holt wants to find him: he's anxious."

Mr. Elphinstone, who looked to me to be one of those men who take in things very leisurely, nodded, and glanced at the man in velveteens.

"A gentleman hut on the moor, eh?" he said. "Ch! Parker—go and inquire amongst the men in the stables and in the gardens. Um! Lost all night, eh? Dear me! Er—wont you come in, Mr.—er—"

"My name is Holt, sir," I said, prompting his absent-mindedness.

"Holt, eh?" he answered, with a sudden gleam of interest. "Um! I was at Merton with a man of that name. He and I were great rowing men. He's vicar of some country parish in Buckinghamshire now, I believe—long since we foregathered."

"I think you are speaking of my father, Mr. Elphinstone," I remarked. "He was at Merton, and he's now vicar of Chellingham, near Aylesbury."

He turned and gave me his hand, shaking mine, in evident high delight. "Bless me!" he exclaimed. "Now just imagine it! This is a great pleasure. Come in—come in!—this is excellent!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Ruins of Ancient City Long Hidden in Jungle

After being hidden for centuries in a tangled-up mass of jungle, the ancient city of Gedl, has come to light only 50 miles from modern Mombasa. Professor Fleure, of the University college of Wales, who has been visiting Kenya colony with the members of the British association, believes that Gedl, known in Kenya as the "buried city," is of Persian origin and at least six hundred years old. The ruins disclose a fine Arabic writing, especially in the mosques and tombs. Professor Fleure thinks that Gedl would well repay investigations by archeological and ethnological experts. He does not believe these would be difficult in view of the profusion of

evidence provided by the ruins. The town was known to tribes on the coast for many years, but it was shunned by them because they regarded it as being haunted by the spirits of the dead, who wreak special vengeance on intruders. The lighting of a fire in the precincts of the ruins was considered particularly dangerous by the negroes, even if the fire was only a cigarette.

From Bad to Worse

A rich old Chinese mandarin had two wives. Said the first to him one day: "I wish you had not so many gray hairs. People jeer at me and call me an old man's darling." "In that case, my dear," he said, "I will pull them all out." And he did so. Shortly afterwards his second wife came to him complaining that now he had only black hairs on his head, she looked, by contrast, a horribly old woman. "Don't worry, my dear. I will pull them out," he said soothingly. But when he had pulled out all the gray and all the black hairs the mandarin was completely bald. And neither of his wives would have any more to do with him.

Authors' Creations

Book characters are our brothers, because often they are more ourselves than we can ever be. Being bone and sinew of real men, they are real men themselves and partake of the inexplicable character of that relation. In times of action, material or mental, few would want to be characters in books, but at other times few there are who would not be willing to change places.—Boston Herald.



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