

# The Mazaroff Mystery

—By—

J. S. FLETCHER

Illustrations by IRWIN MYERS

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CHAPTER XI—Continued

—17—

"You're all right!" I said eagerly.

"Safe?"

"Safe—yes!" she answered. "All right, too. But—everything else is all wrong! Maythorne?—where is he?"

"Outside," I said. "The police, too! Two of them—Corkerdale and Manners."

"We've got to see the police at once!" interrupted Sheila. "Let them in, Mervyn. You'll hear everything that I say to them," she added, turning to Mr. Elphinstone. "There mustn't be any delay, either! Open the door!"

"I thrust back the latch and threw the door open—the three men outside came in, wondering. The two policemen, thus admitted, appeared to lose their tongues, but Maythorne, after a first keen glance at Sheila, smiled.

"I think you're none the worse for your adventures, Miss Merchison," he said. "I hope Mrs. Elphinstone is not seriously the worse, either?"

"My mother's had a sort of collapse after she came in," replied Sheila. "The doctor says she will be all right after a night's rest. Sit down, all of you, if you please—I want to talk to you," she continued, abruptly.

"You've all been wondering where my mother, and Alison Murdoch, and myself went, and where we've been since, haven't you?"

"A good deal of search has been made for you, miss," observed Corkerdale, finding his tongue. "Going on now, it is, too! What happened, if I may ask?"

Sheila looked at Maythorne and from him to me.

"Happened?" she answered. "My mother and I were kidnaped!"

Mr. Elphinstone groaned—but there was a note of triumph in his voice.

"By whom were you kidnaped, Miss Merchison?" asked Maythorne quietly.

Sheila unconsciously lowered her voice as she bent forward to answer.

"Alison Murdoch!" she replied.

"And—where is Alison Murdoch?" continued Maythorne. "But—I suppose you don't know!"

"No!" answered Sheila. "I don't know!"

Corkerdale cleared his throat—the sound suggested that he thought it was high time he came in.

"What I'd wish, Mr. Maythorne," he said—"that is, Sergeant Manners and myself—would be if the young lady would just tell us what happened after she and her mother and this woman left the hotel three nights ago. Seems to me we want a consecutive narrative, as it were. Then—"

"I'm going to tell you," interrupted Sheila. "But I shall have to begin before that. I must begin where Mr. Maythorne and Mr. Holt came to Miss Apperley's flat that evening—the evening that my mother arrived here. After you two had gone," she continued, turning to Maythorne and me, "I thought a lot—a tremendous lot—about the whole business. I was very uneasy about everything—the will—the general situation. To tell you the truth, I felt that if things were going to remain where they were I should come pertinently near to suspicion of my own mother. So—"

Mr. Elphinstone smote his knees with his open palms and groaned audibly. But Sheila gave him a glance and went on.

"So, eventually, I said to Miss Apperley that I was going to Short's, to have it out with my mother, if I could. I came here—I saw my mother in that bedroom."

"Alone?" asked Maythorne.

"Alone! We had a sort of row at first—she was naturally furious with me; first, for taking the will out of her possession; second, for running away to London with it and giving it to Mr. Holt. But in the end she calmed down, and eventually, when we had restored amicable relations between ourselves, she told me that I need not have been so hasty, for it was her full intention to send the will, either to Mr. Postlethwaite, who had prepared it, or to Mr. Crole, the very next day, with an account of how it had come into her possession."

"How had the will come into Mrs. Elphinstone's possession?" asked Maythorne.

"In this way," replied Sheila. "I told you and Mr. Holt that my mother was out late in the evening for two evenings in succession, and that on the second evening I stole downstairs on hearing her come in, and, unperceived by her, saw her examining a document which I afterward discovered to be the will. Her explanation is that on coming in that night she found one of the French windows in the library open, and on the carpet, just within, an envelope containing the will! She had just picked this up and was examining it when I saw her."

"To be sure—to be sure!" muttered Mr. Elphinstone. "Perfectly clear!—perfectly!"

"Proceed, if you please," said Maythorne, quietly.

"Well," continued Sheila. "I then began to talk to my mother about various possibilities as to how the will had come there. I pointed out that the possession of it, and her refusal to account for it and to reply to questions (all of which is due to her natural pride and obstinacy and dislike of being coerced by anyone) would

make people—like you, for instance—suspicious about her. She cared very little about it, but we began to discuss the question of the identity of the murderer. For it seemed to me that whoever had stolen the will had previously murdered its maker! And eventually, and I think, accidentally, I told her about that cairngorm brooch which you showed me the other night."

"Ah!" exclaimed Maythorne, with a sudden betrayal of his keen interest.

"You did? Good—good! And—"

"She immediately became excited. She jumped to the conclusion that you had picked it up at the scene of the murder—"

"I did!" remarked Maythorne.

"So she suspected—and said that that of course was why you were taking care of it. Then she told me that—from my description—the brooch was one of two which Mr. Elphinstone had bought, years ago, in Scotland, and given to her. She had never worn either, as they were cumbersome and heavy; she still had one, but she had given the other away, some time before."

"Aye, and to whom?" asked Maythorne, eagerly.

"To Alison Murdoch!" replied Sheila, giving us all a swift, enveloping glance. "And of course, as soon as I heard that, I saw through the whole sordid business. Alison Murdoch was the guilty person! She had murdered and robbed Mazaroff; she had dropped that brooch at Reiver's den; she had thrown the will into the library at the tower—the one fatal mistake she made for her own chances!—and . . . I told my mother my conclusions. And then I fetched Alison Murdoch in, and accused her—pointblank!"

There was a murmur that seemed to denote a mixture of interest and of admiration from the two policemen; Corkerdale, who sat twiddling his thumbs and watching Sheila intently, smiled broadly.

"You plumped her with it, miss?—straight out!" he exclaimed. "Yes—yes?"

"Straight out!—there and then," assented Sheila. "But let me tell you why—in addition to what I've already told. During the last few minutes of my talk with my mother I'd been thinking, harder and quicker than I'd ever thought in my life. Now, I remembered something about Alison Murdoch and about her family. Although my mother rarely mentioned such matters to me, I knew more about Marrasdale and my father's connection with it than she had any idea of—I had picked up a lot of knowledge and gossip from the old people round about us. And I knew that my father, Andrew Merchison, was well known in those parts before his marriage, and that his people had been folk of some consequence there. I knew, too, that Alison Murdoch's family had been there a long time, too, and that between it and my father's people there was a deadly enmity, arising out of—"

"Land!" interrupted Mr. Elphinstone. "The Merchison lot did the Murdochs out of a bit of land—some years ago. Piece of oppression and chicanery—but it was done. Unforgivable, of course—in the minds of these Border people. Feud! Land feud! Such things are remembered for ever."

"They rankle," said Sheila. "There was blood shed over it at the time—Merchison shot a Murdoch; though not fatally. All that's well known—Mr. Elphinstone knows all about it—"

"Countryside gossip to this day," agreed Mr. Elphinstone. "There are men and women there in Marrasdale who remember it—"

"Well," continued Sheila, "it struck me that Alison Murdoch, who is a silent, grim, reserved, determined woman, probably not only remembered it, but was the very sort of person, who, if she got the chance of revenge, would take it without hesitation. I figured it all out this way. Alison Murdoch, when Mazaroff, who, of course, was really Andrew Merchison, came to the Woodcock, was helping there: helping with the cooking and so on. She saw him, and recognized him. She no doubt got acquainted with his habits and knew that he strolled out on the moors, after dark. Now,

she didn't live at the Woodcock—she lives at a cottage of her own, on the way to Birnside. I came to the conclusion that having made up her mind to revenge the old feud on Andrew Merchison, she watched for her opportunity. On the night of the murder she saw him go out and take the path towards Reiver's den. She abstracted Musgrave's gun from the parlor and followed him—and shot him. And—"

"A moment!" interrupted Maythorne. He glanced at the two policemen.

"Corkerdale and Manners will understand the meaning of a question I want to put to you," he continued.

"It's this—does this woman, Alison Murdoch, at all resemble your mother, Mrs. Elphinstone?"

"Very closely!" answered Sheila.

"They're of the same height and build, anyway—very similar in figure and not at all unlike in general appearance."

"One could easily be mistaken for the other in the dark, eh?" asked Maythorne.

"I should say, very easily," asserted Sheila. "In fact, I have so mistaken them, myself."

Maythorne turned to the policemen.

"That accounts for what Eccleshaire and Parslave saw—or believed they

saw," he remarked in an undertone. "Eh?"

"Seems so—to me," answered Manners. "Yes—I should say it did."

Corkerdale, however, said nothing; he was still watching Sheila. "You were saying, miss—?" he suggested.

"Well—I was going to say that that seemed to me a good ground for suspecting her, taking other things into consideration," continued Sheila. "But I had another ground. It was well known—it had already got talked about. It was careless about displaying his wealth—I myself heard, as people do hear things in villages, that he left large sums of money and even diamonds lying about on his dining table. Now, I knew that Alison Murdoch is a covetous, avaricious, grasping woman; miserly to the last degree. If she murdered Andrew Merchison out of revenge, she was just the sort of woman to rob his dead body of everything on it out of sheer greed! She is, I say that sort—"

"A hoarder!" muttered Mr. Elphinstone. "A saver of farthings! I think you're quite right, Sheila. But murder—dear me!"

"Well, that's the conclusion I came to," said Sheila, "and these were my reasons. In the few minutes in which I thought all this out, I came to the absolute definite conclusion that Alison Murdoch had shot Andrew Merchison, had robbed him of his money, valuables, and papers, and that it was she who had thrown his will into the open window of Mr. Elphinstone's library, where my mother had picked it up. And, as I said at the beginning, as soon as I'd arrived at that conclusion, I called her into my mother's room—that room!—and accused her of the murder!"

Mr. Elphinstone treated us to one of his groans. But Corkerdale, unconsciously, edged his chair nearer to Sheila.

"Now this is where the really interesting part comes in, miss!" he

said. "You charged her! What might she reply, now?"

"She denied it, of course—indignantly," answered Sheila. "She was for flouncing out of the room, to complain to Mr. Elphinstone. Then she changed her mind, and said she'd go to her own room, pack her things, and leave the hotel. I soon settled her, though!"

"Aye!—and how, miss?" asked Corkerdale, still more interested.

"I told her that if she attempted to leave that room until I'd finished with her, I'd ring the bell, send for the police, and give her in charge!" said Sheila. "And I should have done so—nothing would have stopped me. That calmed her down—she knew me! Then I talked to her. I pieced things together finally. I told her that her cairngorm brooch had been found on the scene of the murder—"

"How did she take that?" interrupted Maythorne.

"She turned very pale," replied Sheila. "But almost instantly she retorted that my mother had an exactly similar brooch—why wasn't she suspected? I replied that my mother never wore the other brooch—evidently she, Alison, did. Then I went on to rub it into her, frightening her all I could. My mother, on her part, begged her to tell of anything she knew. Finally, on my telling her that unless I got some explanation, I should give her in charge there and then, she admitted that she knew—something!"

"Ah!" said Maythorne. "Something!"

"Something!" repeated Sheila. "And having admitted that, she made a strange offer—though I'm bound to say that it didn't seem so very strange at the time. She pointed out that she was alone there in London, that she was, in a degree, at my mercy. Then she reminded us that she had a brother here in London, a man who left Marrasdale years ago, and who had, she said, a business in the Harrow road—"

"Aye, to be sure!" muttered Corkerdale. "The Harrow road!"

"And she made us an offer," continued Sheila. "She said that if we would go with her, there and then, to her brother's house, and allow her to consult with him first, she'd tell us the absolute truth about all that she actually knew. We were fools enough to go—and we set off at once, without telling anybody. We expected, of course, to be back in a very short time."

"What happened, miss?" inquired Corkerdale.

"We left the hotel and got a taxicab round the corner of the next street," continued Sheila. "Alison Murdoch told the driver where to go. I know where the Harrow road opens in Edgware road at Paddington Green; we went a long, long way beyond that. At last we got out—"

"A minute, Miss," interrupted Manners. "When you got out, did you happen to notice if you were being followed? By another taxicab, now?"

"I did see a taxicab pull up on the other side of the street lower down," replied Sheila. "I noticed that while my mother was paying our man."

Manners sniffed, and whispered to his colleague—an audible whisper.

"That 'ud be—him!" he said. "Tracked 'em! Beg pardon, miss for interrupting you."

"We walked up the road a little way," continued Sheila. "Then we turned into a side street, and into a still smaller street that ran off that—a dark, gloomy street. Outside one of the houses, Alison Murdoch asked us to wait a few minutes while she went in. We did. She was away perhaps five minutes. Then she came out and fetched us in. It was a dark, gloomy house—as gloomy as the street outside. She took us into what seemed to be a back bedroom, on the ground floor, where there was a dim light from a gas bracket, and asked us to wait a few minutes longer. Then she went out—and that was the last we saw of her."

Corkerdale, still twiddling his thumbs, took his eyes off Sheila for the first time. He cast them up to the ceiling, and stared at whatever he saw there, thoughtfully. Manners, however, let out one word, sharply:

"Trapped!"

"Of course we were trapped," asserted Sheila. "We deserved to be!—anyhow, I did. We hadn't been in that room five minutes before we knew it. We heard the door locked from outside, and what seemed to be a bar put across it, too. I immediately flew to the window and tore the blind and the curtains away. Then I saw that there were heavy shutters across the window—on the outside—and I found the sashes of the window itself were nailed down. We were trapped indeed! Horrible!"

"What happened?" asked Maythorne, softly. "In brief."

"In brief—yes," said Sheila. "I'm not going into details of that horror for anything—now, at any rate. I beat on the door, but there was no reply—everything was quiet enough. After an hour, a panel that I'd noticed in one of the walls—the sort of thing, a hatch, you know, that communicates between a kitchen and a dining room, was suddenly slipped open, and a hand and arm thrust in a big basket and dropped it on the bed. Then the panel was banged to, again, and I heard it secured. There was food—plenty of it, and good—in the basket, and a couple of bottles of wine—good claret—and glasses and a corkscrew. So we weren't starved. But there we were, trapped!—until this evening—two nights and two days. We never saw anybody. Each evening another basket was dropped in, so suddenly that we'd no chance to seize the hand that dropped it, or to get a glimpse of the adjoining room. We never saw nor heard anything, all the time."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



"Straight Out!—There and Then," Asserted Sheila.

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**Paris May Honor Umbrella**  
Paris is discussing whether to commemorate next October, the one hundred and eightieth anniversary of the introduction of the umbrella into the western world. In October, 1750, Jonas Hanway gave the city a shock by carrying a rain protector brought from China.

**All Stocked Up**  
Author—Can I sell you a scenario? Movie Producer—G'wan, we've had a scenario for years.—Brooklyn Eagle.

## Real Long Distance Talk

Prince Parachatra, Siamese minister for trade and communications, by using the telephone on his desk in Bangkok, Siam, recently, spoke for an hour and a half with his son in Hamburg, Germany, and with friends in Berlin, a distance of 5,750 miles. The German Telefunken company has a short-wave station in Bangkok.

## Civil War Necessity

Shinplasters, or fractional currency, were issued during the Civil war because of the disappearance of coin from circulation and the shortage of small coin. The first issue of fractional money was made on August 1, 1862. The last and fifth issue was made from February 26, 1874, to February 15, 1876.

## Important European River

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### "Ornery" Long Employed to Express Contempt

"Ornery" and "onery" are corrupted forms of "ordinary." They are dialect or colloquial terms meaning insignificant, low, mean, contemptible, and they express a higher degree of contempt and disapprobation than "ordinary" does. "Ornary" as a contraction of "ordinary" was a common provincialism in England in the time of the Stuarts, although it is now nearly obsolete. We find the phrase "upon ornary time," in the Easthampton records as late as 1670. In Ireland and the United States this form persists in the still more corrupted forms or "ornery" and "onery," which were brought to the American colonies and perpetuated largely by Irish and Scotch-Irish immigrants, who settled in the South and West. This explains the fact that "ornery" and "onery" are generally regarded as southernisms or westernisms. In 1829 the New York Constellation published the following as a southern expression: "You ornery fellow! Do you pretend to call me to account for my language?"—Pathfinder Magazine.

### Hearing Insects Feed

"You wrote recently in this column," writes a correspondent to "Looker-on" in the London Daily Chronicle, "that one of your readers heard slugs eating. I have never heard them, but I have heard snails and caterpillars eat. Snails make a scratching noise. Caterpillars crunch. The caterpillars of the privet hawk moth make quite a loud noise, and I have often heard them when sitting in the garden, and they have been eating the lilac leaves." Other correspondents state that they have heard snails feeding.

### Fresh Air and Warmth

The public health service says that fresh warm air of a proper degree of moisture and free from appreciable draft is now recognized as essential to indoor workers. The old idea that a cold room necessarily contains fresh air and that comfortably warm rooms necessarily contain bad air has been discarded.

### Alaska's Coastline

Alaska has more than 26,000 miles of coast.

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