The Ring of the Maharajah

To One Man It Seemed to Cause Many Deaths.

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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"Yes," said Bentley, puffing at his cigar and looking thoughtfully at a white line that marked the bronze of his finger, "that is where I used to wear the ring of the maharajah of—no matter what."

"And thereby hangs a tale, as I can guess," returned Laidlaw, with a laugh. "Out with it, man!"

"The maharajah was a friend of mine. I hunted tigers with him, and once I saved his life from the beast whose skin is under our feet." The three men looked down at the splendid tiger skin at their feet, at the tawney beauty of the silken hair and then at the cruel head with its snarling lips and deadly fangs.

"I saved his life, and he was very grateful to me for it. He gave me rich presents, and then one day in spite of my protests he insisted upon my accepting the ring. It is a wide band of gold with a carved amethyst sunk deep in the setting. 'Sahib Bentley,' said the maharajah, 'this will bring good fortune, the blessing of heaven and protection from your enemies. Come tomorrow and I will tell you the story of the ring and how you may use it to advantage.'" Bentley paused and looked gravely into the fire.

"And the next day," prompted Laidlaw, "you went and"—

"The next day I went to the palace and found that the maharajah had died suddenly in the night."

"And so you never knew the history of the ring?" remarked Eastman.

"Not until it made new history after it came into my possession. At first I did not wear it through some dislike for barbarous jewelry, and then one day after I had been thinking of the old maharajah and deciding what a white old heathen he had been I slipped it on my finger, and so I grew into the habit of wearing it.

"One night I was dining with a lot of fellows at the Calcutta club when suddenly one of them, a little Englishman by name of Ellsworth, caught my hand and examined the ring thoughtfully. I was explaining the matter of the ring to him when, with a startled cry, he fell over on the floor.

"He was dead when we picked him up," he said presently. "Heart disease, the doctors said."

"And what was your opinion?"

"I had none. To me it was merely a coincidence that he should have expired while examining my ring. I never connected the ring with the case in any way. A year afterward while I was sitting in the veranda of my bungalow a servant announced that a lady wished to see me. She was admitted to the veranda, and I found her to be the wife of an English army officer whom I knew merely by reputation. He was a hard case, and rumor had it that he was disgraced and papers from the home office were en route to Calcutta regarding his suspension.

"Mrs. Fits-Norton was a very beautiful woman, quiet and refined, but her face expressed the greatest distress. She apologized for intruding upon me and then asked abruptly if I possessed the ring of the maharajah. I told her that I did and that I had it on. She asked to examine it closely, and I drew it off and handed it to her. With a little cry she pressed it to her lips and"— Bentley stopped short and stared defiantly at his companions.

"And what happened?" they asked in unison.

"Why, she sank to the floor unconscious and died that night," said Bentley, passing his hand wearily across his brow.

"The devil!" uttered Laidlaw, looking pityingly at his friend.

"Poisoned," muttered Eastman, leaning forward in his chair, with brooding eyes fixed on the fire.

"Oh, it was examined for poison, and none was found," said Bentley. "It made matters very unpleasant for me, but the fact that it was given to me by the maharajah was generally known, and so it was forgotten after awhile."

"And did you continue to wear it?"

"Yes. After it was examined and found harmless I did wear it for a year or two until"— He paused again in a manner that had been peculiarly exasperating to his hearers.

"Until when?" exclaimed Laidlaw impatiently.

"Until the great tragedy," returned Bentley. He was looking very white and worn now, and the two men noticed for the first time the gauntness of his face and the dark hollows under his eyes. "I was engaged to marry Miss Vivian, a beautiful young English girl, the daughter of the officer in command of the Calcutta barracks. I wished to bestow a ring upon her, and she would have no other than this one. I told her the curse that seemed to be upon it, but she would not listen; she insisted. I gave her the ring, and she died in my arms!" He bent his head upon his breast and stared vacantly at the dancing flames on the hearth.

"Show us the ring, old chap," said Eastman earnestly, ignoring Laidlaw's indignant glance. "Perhaps we can help you."

"No one can help me now," returned Bentley listlessly as he arose and went to a small cabinet in the wall. From it he returned with a small ebony box, which he gave to Eastman. Then he resumed himself and watched his companions earnestly as they opened the box and rather gingerly removed the maharajah's ring from its white velvet bed.

It was as Bentley had described it, a broad band of pure gold, and sunk deep in the shank was an exquisite amethyst of rich purple tints. The face was exquisitely carved, showing a pagoda in relief. It was harmless looking, but very beautiful.

"May I have it for a day or two, Bentley?" asked Eastman after awhile.

"Certainly. Keep it as long as you like, but remember that it will bring you nothing but evil and evil in its most bitter form. You have a wife and child, and you should not risk disaster."

"I will take my chances," returned Eastman, with a confident smile. "I believe I know how to handle it, old man."

"Remember I warned you, Eastman and Laidlaw is witness to my warning," said Bentley, raising a haggard face toward them.

"That's all right, Bentley. And now my advice is to go to bed and get a good night's rest. You are all tired out with your long journey and with the recital of your painful narrative. I believe I can help you and I will."

They shook hands cordially with their host, but it was not until they had emerged upon the street that Laidlaw spoke.

"That was rather rough of you, Eastman," he said indignantly. "After he told you the story of the girl you should have let the matter drop. He's all broken up over the matter."

"Wouldn't you help him if you could?" asked Eastman quietly.

"Of course I would, but he can't be helped. He's either the victim of a series of remarkable coincidences or else the ring is a poisoned one."

"You are wrong in both instances, Laidlaw. I have a theory which I will work out, and then I will call upon you to congratulate me." The scientist spoke with an air of confidence that impressed his companion.

"I hope you will, Eastman," cried Laidlaw earnestly, "but you can't bring back the dead, you know, and that's what the matter with Bentley."

"Wait and see," was the reply as Eastman turned in at his gate. When he reached his laboratory in the top of the house he flung his coat and hat upon a chair and drew the ebony box from his pocket. Then with a powerful glass he examined the maharajah's ring with frowning brow that denoted the intentness of his interest.

With a long drawn sigh he carefully replaced the ring in the ebony box; then he sat down and wrote several letters, which he was careful to post that night in spite of the lateness of the hour.

Several months passed, during which no mention was made of the amethyst ring. Bentley lounged about his rooms, moody and abstracted, while Laidlaw dropped in now and then for a few brief words of cheer as he made his busy rounds. Eastman came, too, and had long, quiet talks with Bentley, during which he strove to learn more of the life which Bentley had spent in India, but he never mentioned the maharajah's ring.

Then one day several months after the evening of Bentley's return from India the three men gathered at Eastman's suggestion in the former's study. Eastman in his corner by the fire, Laidlaw stretched in a steamer chair and Bentley lounging in a great leathern chair with his feet on the skin of the tiger that had threatened the life of the maharajah. They talked upon indifferent subjects for awhile, and then Eastman said carelessly:

"By the way, Bentley, I have discovered the mystery of the ring."

"What!" Bentley sprang to his feet and then passed a hand absently across his brow. "You have discovered the mystery of the—ring?" he stammered.

"Certainly," replied Eastman cheerfully. "You remember the day you saved the life of the maharajah?"

"Surely."

"It was a hot day," said Eastman quietly.

"So it was. Confound it all, but I can't remember much about that day except that they told me I saved the maharajah's life. I was glad of that," said Bentley simply.

"Can you bear a shock, old man?" asked Eastman kindly.

"What is it? Yes, I can bear anything."

"You are mistaken about the deadly character of the ring, Bentley." He spread three letters written on thin foreign paper on his knee and went on: "The old maharajah of no matter what writes me he is enjoying excellent health; Mrs. Fits-Norton, the wife of the scoundrelly army man, is a cheerful widow; young Ellsworth is as husky and alive as he ever was, and the only man who toppled over at the Calcutta club that night was yourself, for it was the evening of the day of the tiger hunt, and you had suffered a sunstroke on that day, and you have forgotten and imagined things ever since. You are all right now."

A look of intense relief spread over Bentley's face, his eyes brightened, and he looked from Laidlaw's bewildered countenance to Eastman's face of quiet strength. "Thank God," he said. Then, with boyish eagerness, he cried, "And Muriel—Muriel Vivian—my love—what of her?"

"Why," laughed Eastman, with sympathetic moisture in his eyes, "Miss Vivian and her father are registered at the St. Alexis, I believe, and"—

But Bentley had seized his hat and disappeared.

A Psychological Wonder

Or Was It a Matter of Contagious Disease?

By GEORGE L. BYINGTON

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I arrived at N late at night on a visit to my uncle and on arising the next morning, as was natural, went to the window to have a look at my surroundings. There was a hill not far distant, on the top of which was a house built in the form of a hexagon. There were other things to see, but somehow the hexagonal house drew my attention from all of them. It stood out alone. I saw no one moving in or about it, but in some of the windows there were evidences that it was inhabited.

The first thing I said to my uncle at breakfast was, "Who lives in the hexagonal house on the hill?"

"What made you ask that?" said my uncle.

"I don't know," I replied.

"There's just one thing I wish to warn you about while you are here. Let that house alone."

After breakfast I walked up to the hexagonal house and rang the bell.

"I have to stay in town for a few days," I said to the man who opened the door, "and am looking for a place to sleep nights."

It took me an hour and cost half a dozen lies to induce him to rent me a room for just one night. He said no one lived in the house except himself and wife in the rear basement as caretakers. That evening at dinner I told my uncle that it was too lonely for me, and I intended to take the night train for home. Instead of going to the station, I went to the hexagonal house, was admitted and shown to my room, the second story front, east.

"You won't feel creepy sleeping all alone up here, will you?" asked the caretaker before withdrawing.

"No. Why do you ask that? Anything peculiar about the room?"

"Oh, no; nothing especial. Least-ways—"

"Well?"

"I'll tell you in the morning." And he went down the stairs, his footsteps echoing loudly through the house.

I had been slumbering for perhaps an hour when I awoke with a start. For a moment I could not locate myself. Then I remembered I was Napoleon the Great. I was at St. Helena. I was lying in my bedroom in the house at Longwood. I was very uncomfortable. I was ill. My stomach was on fire. Ah, I remembered! I had been ill for some time, and that infernal English doctor was poisoning me.

All these points came to me in quick succession. Why did I get myself into this trap? Why did I surrender to perfidious Albion? I should have known that they would risk no second escape, as from Elba. Ah, if I had had at Waterloo my old guard that I had at Jena, Wagram, Austerlitz! But they had starved or frozen in Russia. I opposed Wellington with troops officered by men they did not trust, and the officers no longer had faith in me. My star had set. Besides, I was ill. This infernal trouble or something like it was on me then.

Why am I left alone by my attendants? Where is my valet? Where is Montholon, Las Casas? Where are they all? I would call the doctor to relieve me of this infernal pain if I did not know he would give me more of his poison. I wish I had now some real poison that would let me out of this—the bag I gave Constant to keep for me, fresh as when I first received it from the chemist. I found it on that dreadful night at Fontainebleau. Had it been its original strength I would have been spared that humiliating abdication.

Some one is coming. It is a man. I can hear his footsteps in the corridor. The door is opening slowly; oh, so slowly! What suspense!

What, you, D'Enghien! Go back to your grave! Go, go, I say! It was not my fault. They carried out an order that I would have countermanded had I known in time. They were always in a hurry to obey me when I wished them to be slow. Go back, I say, or if you must haunt your slayer turn to him who blundered. I hate him, as you do. In shooting you he concentrated Europe and cost me my throne. It put me here on this desolate island to die a lingering death.

Gone? I can't stand this. I must end it. How? My razor? My valet has it. A rope? I have none. With a penknife I can open a vein. The knife I have. Shall I get it? Twice I tried when about to fall from the top of my self built pyramid, and twice I failed. Fate has never deceived me. Fate has worked in my case on converging lines. Fate will not let me take my own life. Nevertheless I can try.

Constant will get the knife for me. Constant!

No one answered.

I lay deliberating whether I should end it all or let my disease finish me till I fell asleep.

Then I dreamed that it was all over. I was in a casket perched upon an immense funeral car, passing down the Champs d'Elysee. The sidewalks, the windows, the housetops, were all crowded with vast throngs of people who as I passed uncovered, some of them waving, some crossing themselves, all excitedly lamenting. Ah, my French people, without your active enthusiasm I could not have humbled Europe!

But this Bourbon king! Fool! How dare he reawaken that spirit which has been slowly dying? Let him look out for his throne. It is more tottering than this casket away up where it sways with every rut in the street.

Well, my body is at the Invalides. Now I may rest.

I was awakened by a slight noise and opened my eyes. It was morning. The caretaker had come into my room and was setting down a pitcher of hot water. I was myself. But I had a queasy feeling from the crown of my head to the sole of my feet as if I had been keel hauled.

"Not feelin' very well this mornin', sir?" remarked the caretaker.

"No; I've had an ugly dream."

"How did the winder get broken, sir?"

"I don't know. I didn't know it was broken."

"And there's blood on the right arm of your nightshirt."

I saw the broken window and the blood and was taken all aback.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"The sash was nailed, sir," was the only reply.

I arose, dressed myself and went straight down to my uncle, finding him at breakfast. He was astonished to see me, and I told him that I had not gone home, but had slept in the hexagonal house. He started.

"Well?" he asked eagerly.

I gave him my experience.

When I had finished he arose from the table and paced the floor.

"What do you think about the broken window and blood on my nightshirt?" I asked.

"Have you the nerve to hear how you have narrowly escaped death?"

"Yes; I have."

"Well, then, listen. The last man who lived in the hexagonal house was one who had lost his reason. He fancied himself to be Napoleon. One morning his body was found under the window of the room you slept in."

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed, with a shudder.

My uncle went to the telephone and called up Professor Starkweather of the University of D., located a few miles distant, and conversed with him, after which I was informed that several of the professors would be down within an hour to take my statement.

I was too shaken up to eat any breakfast, so I went and walked in the garden till the professors arrived. They took me into a room and heard my story from beginning to end. Then Professor Starkweather asked me some questions.

"Have you read much of Napoleon's life?" he asked.

"Nothing but a little history, which I have forgotten."

"Did you know that Napoleon believed that the English were poisoning him while he was at St. Helena?"

"No."

"Did you know who were with him there?"

"No."

"Did you know that Constant was Napoleon's valet and that Napoleon gave him a bag supposed to contain poison with which Napoleon tried to commit suicide just before his abdication at Fontainebleau?"

"No."

"Did you know that in 1840 King Louis Philippe brought Napoleon's body to France from St. Helena and that the Napoleonic enthusiasm excited largely contributed to the revolution which dethroned that king and made Louis Napoleon president?"

"No."

"Did you know that Napoleon's shooting of the Duke d'Enghien concentrated the European powers against him?"

"No."

"Gentlemen," said Professor Starkweather to his colleagues, "it's a clear case of reincarnation."

"Rather," said Professor Markland, dean of the medical college, "it proves that insanity may in certain forms be a brain disease and that the germs of the patient who had formerly inhabited the room worked upon this young man."

"Why, then, has he recovered so suddenly?"

"Insanity in any event is affected by pure air, sunlight and other revivifying causes. The young man was not exposed long enough to enable the germs to get a permanent foothold."

"But how do you account for the knowledge the young man did not previously have of events in the life of Napoleon?"

"Psychologically considered, I admit my position is weak, but you must remember that there is such a thing as a transference of soul. However, that part of the problem is in your field rather than in mine. We study the body, you the soul."

"There is one point in the story that looks suspicious," said Professor Blenker. "Napoleon calls on Constant. Constant was not at St. Helena."

"That may be explained," replied Professor Starkweather, "by the fact that Napoleon was near his end and likely delirious. He had formerly called on Constant for everything."

While they were wrangling four more of the faculty of the university arrived, and all agreed that my statement should be taken down at once while the impression was fresh on my mind. One of their number was appointed to write, and as I told the story any one who wished would ask a question. When the statement was finished it was taken in charge by Professor Starkweather, the meeting broke up and, bidding goodby to my uncle, I started for home, glad to get as far as possible from the scene of my adventure.

His Typewriter

She Was Fair and Innocent and Very Bright.

By KINGSBURY WELCH

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When I was a young man I was a teller in an eastern bank. There I learned the banking business, and, having saved some money and inherited a little more, I concluded to go west and start a bank of my own. I chose Nevada and opened up in a mining town where I had no competition.

It was when the business was increasing and I was thinking of taking on more help that a young woman came to me one day asking for a position as stenographer and typewriter. My unanswered letters were accumulating, and it occurred to me that I had better save time in this way rather than employ men whom I would have to intrust with the handling of money. The young woman said she had just come from the east to find employment and would begin for a small salary. She was rather too good looking to suit me. I was afraid of passing every day in a region where women were scarce, especially pretty ones, with her, but by cutting off a couple of hours a day on my letters I would be enabled to hold on to the handling of the cash. That decided me, and I engaged her.

Imogen Bradley looked to be about twenty years old. Her face would have made a good model for a picture of a Madonna. From the first she took an interest in my business, posting me if she saw anything going wrong and assisting me to right it. The only thing I couldn't get her to do was to handle any cash. She said that she was not used to money matters and if she should make a mistake I would blame her and that would break her heart.

What I feared when I employed her came to pass. I was cooped up from morning till night with a pretty young woman who in my eyes grew prettier every day. One evening after banking hours while I was dictating to her she made a bad blunder, and I gently chided her. Tears came into those "heaven's windows" of hers. The temptation was more than I could bear. I kissed them away.

The next two or three days I spent ruing my folly. I didn't want a wife and if I felt inclined that way my mind was bent on a girl in the east whom I thought some day I might marry. I didn't know what to do to rectify my rash act. The consequence was that I did nothing. I simply let matters drift, though I controlled myself sufficiently to refrain from any further kisses. I looked for her to reproach me either for having kissed her or for not continuing to kiss her, but she made no reference to the first kiss and didn't indicate that she would like another. Indeed, she seemed to me to possess that innocence to be found especially in a girl hovering between childhood and womanhood.

It was about this time that "Handy Andy," a noted desperado, was terrorizing the surrounding country. He worked alone but did not fear to undertake what was usually undertaken by half a dozen men. He had robbed an express car single handed and got away with the plunder. The passengers of half a dozen stages at different times had handed him their valuables. He had tackled a bank located in the center of a town of 3,000 inhabitants, though in this case the only thing he took away with him was a bullet in the leg. When I was informed of this robbery I naturally began to feel solicitous for my own funds. True, we had weapons, but bank robbers don't usually wait for people to use them. I was no hand to tackle them myself, and with two young boys and a girl for support in case Mr. Handy Andy should drop in and ask for the loose cash lying about my bank I didn't feel very secure.

The day the news came of the bank robbery I have mentioned we—myself, my typewriter and my two clerks—were talking over the matter of defense in case the robber should come down upon us. One of the boys suggested that a gun be fixed on a swivel at the paying teller's window and one at the receiving teller's window so that it could be fired by electricity by pressing a button on the floor with the foot. This was, of course, ridiculous. Who was to aim the gun? Certainly not the man behind the window, for he would be covered. The other boy, who was thinking rather of his own safety than that of the funds, suggested that the back door that led from the space behind the fixtures be always kept open. Miss Bradley's face wore a terrified expression while we were discussing these expedients, and she put her hands to her ears that she might not hear them.

I playfully pulled her hands from her ears and said to her:

"You women are always frightened when there is nothing to be frightened at, but in presence of real danger you often astonish us men by your coolness. Besides, women often have better heads at hitting on devices than men. Come; tell me what you suggest in case Handy Andy makes us a visit."

"I don't like to think about it, and I'm sure if he should come I would faint. One thing I would recommend while he is operating in the neighborhood, I would keep the funds in the box under the paying teller's desk, so that in case of a visit from him some one of us may catch it up and run away with it. Of course the back door should be always kept open."

"I knew," I exclaimed, "that you would display more foresight than any of us. That's exactly what we'll do."

"Another thing I would do," Imogen continued. "I would have some rope handy in case it should become possible to get the better of him so one could hold him very long. It might be necessary to tie his hands and feet."

"Bravo!" I cried. "There's more in that little head of yours than in the heads of ten men. Where did you get such ideas? One would think you had worked with the police."

"Oh, I don't know about such things," was the modest reply. "These precautions seem to me to be merely common sense."

"Common sense! They're just the thing. You're idea of keeping the funds in the tin box is a bright one. No one could keep us all covered at once, and some one of us might very likely have a chance to pick up the box and skip. You, being a woman, would probably have the best chance to get away with it."

"Oh, I would be too frightened to do anything like that."

I was not prepared for so much forethought in this modest girl. After all, I thought, would not a woman who has had the energy and pluck to come out here to earn her own living instead of sitting around at home waiting for a husband make a better wife for me than the girl I had been thinking of? I was very much inclined to continue my caresses, so be wound up with an honorable proposal of marriage.

I got a tin box out of the vault and, scraping together all the loose funds necessary for making payments during the day, put them in it and placed it under the paying teller's desk in order that he could use it without continually running outside his compartment for it. But after it had been filled and placed in position Imogen suggested that while there it would be handy for the teller it would not be handy for the person who was to snatch it up and run away with it. I therefore placed it under a small table by the back door through which it was to be carried in case of attack. I also bought a few yards of quarter inch rope, which I deposited in a closet. The only thing remaining to be done was to see that the revolvers we kept in the different drawers were loaded and in good condition. These things having been attended to, I dismissed the matter from my mind.

My thoughts dropped from war to love. I had a problem to settle. Would I or would I not propose to Imogen Bradley? I resolved to ask her from what part of the east she came and to make inquiries. So I asked her the question one day carelessly, that she might not suspect my intention, and she gave me the name of a college town in Massachusetts. I knew no one there, so I was no better off than before. The truth is I was pining for her, and it seemed to me that I would rather be marrying her than her family. So I never wrote. I was satisfied from what I had seen of her that she was an odd mixture of gentleness, pluck and natural ability. What more could I want, especially in a rough country like Nevada?

It was but a few days after our preparations to receive Handy Andy when at 12 o'clock the boys broke off work and went to dinner. I never left the bank myself after opening in the morning till closing in the evening, always eating a lunch in my private office. Miss Bradley usually went out for her dinner, but today she said she had a headache and would not go. She sat reading a newspaper. As I munched a sandwich I could look at her—so fair, so pure, so gentle—and I made up my mind I would propose to her that evening.

Suddenly there was a man's step outside the fixtures. Imogen looked up, and I saw by her expression that she recognized the comer. A wonderful change came over her innocent face, which took on one of hard resolution. Quickly rising, she unlatched a door leading into the space she occupied. A masked man stepped in and covered me with a revolver. Imogen darted to the closet and took out the rope, and the man who had ordered me to throw up my hands took it from her, giving her his revolver, which she kept pointed at me. The masked man then proceeded to bind me hand and foot.

This done, he took the weapon from Imogen. She picked up the tin box containing the bank funds and, turning to me, threw me a kiss.

"That's in return for the one you gave me," she said, smiling, "and I'm much obliged to you for saving us the trouble of collecting the money, which would have taken time. Ta, ta!"

She walked out of the back door with some $20,000, leaving the masked man to keep guard over me till she had got far enough away to render pursuit unavailable. When she had gone my watcher said to me:

"Nice young woman, isn't she? Sorry for you, but she's got a husband already, and two is against the law. She's my wife, Mrs. Handy Andy, and my cleverest work is done by her."

The boys were not to be expected back till 1 o'clock, and the robber had undoubtedly been informed of the fact, for after keeping me covered half an hour he left me at ten minutes to 1. The boys came in at the regular time and unbound me.

My funds were never recovered. I learned as soon as I was freed that Imogen had been seen slowly carrying the box to a carriage, which she entered and was driven away.