

IT IS DARK IN THE BUSH

(Continued from previous page)

"Do you think you could prove that? Tell me, when the car broke down and you took it to the garage, what did the people there say?"

"That it would take a week to get the missing part. My father was so annoyed."

"Why?"

"Because he was so restless. He wanted to be on the move all the time."

"Did he tell the garage people that?"

"Yes. He said the delay was most annoying and asked if they couldn't hire him a car; but they hadn't a spare one."

"Then he showed clearly that he was in a hurry to get on?"

"Yes; he said he had to get over to the coast at once. I particularly remember because I was surprised; he'd always seemed so vague before."

"And there was no doubt that he wanted to get right away?"

"None. He ended by saying, 'Then, damn it all, we'll walk. I won't hang about here for a week.'"

* * *

DAVID groaned and the girl looked at him aghast.

"Is that bad, too? Oh David, I can see it is—it looks as if he was in a hurry to get to Langley."

"You don't know, Ann, why he was so determined to get right on down to the coast?"

The girl shook her head despondently.

"I only know that he said he hated inland towns, that the sea was calling to him all the time. He said, 'Fourteen years with never a sight of it, when always I've loved it so. Now I feel that I can never have enough.' I gaped at him and said, 'But you're just off a long sea voyage,' and he said, 'Long?'—then pulled himself up 'short. You see, I thought he'd come all the way from England. He got a little cross then and said, 'Don't argue, child, don't argue. Let's pack our swags and go.'"

"And you left at once?"

"Yes, that same morning. We bought a sleeping bag for me and camped out that night. Next day I was most awfully tired and we lost our way. Then we turned up at Te Rata and the very next day my father got influenza. You know the rest. He was in bed for a week and Mrs. Marsden looked after him just as if she was a proper nurse."

"Yes, I know that part. But tell me, Ann—was your father up and about long before the day when the—when the murder took place? He seemed recovered when we first saw him the next day."

"Oh yes. He'd been up for about a fortnight and was talking about moving on. But he liked it here—and went about a lot with the men and helped on the farm. I remember the very day before the murder he'd been riding all morning with Mr. Murray, and when he came back he and John pressed a bale of odd wool that was in the shed. He must have been quite all right then, because I remember they said they'd never seen any man so powerful as my father."

Again David sighed. Only a powerful man could have pulled that dead body up into the tree. Even now it was exercising the minds of the police whether one man could have done it alone or whether there was a confederate.

"Ann, how much can you remember of that particular afternoon? Could you say where your father was?"

"Oh David, I wish I could. I know how much depends on it. I know they were talking of the clearing sale at breakfast time and my father seemed interested and asked whether the man was going to leave the district at once. He said he wouldn't bother to go up to it, though, but would spend the morning rolling the lawns instead. He was there all the morning, I know."

"Yes, but the afternoon?"

"That's the trouble. Oh, if only I hadn't gone out!"

"You were away all afternoon?"

"Yes. I was just longing for a ride. I'd meant to go out with Mr. Murray but he forgot and went off without me. John was in town and it seemed so quiet and dull at the house. Mrs. Marsden was resting in her room, she always does in the afternoons; and my father was asleep on the veranda. So I saddled Playboy and went for a ride. It was such a lovely day and I rode on and on."

"Did you meet anyone?"

"Not a soul. You often don't if you take the by-roads here. Why do you ask that, David? They won't want to know where I was, will they?"

* * *

HE shook his head with every appearance of reassurance.

"Of course not. Still it would be simpler if you all had nice watertight alibis. Instead of that, really John's the only one who can bring witness to prove where he was that afternoon."

"But it's often like that here. We're so isolated and the farm's so big. There are only three men always employed on it and that day they happened to have all taken their lunches out and be fencing at the very back of the place. Who could have seen us?"

"I know, my dear—but the jury won't. They'll be a crowd of men from town who imagine that every man knows what his neighbour's up to all day long. However, what did you see when you got back?"

"Mr. Murray and John were still out and Mrs. Marsden was getting tea."

"And your father?"

"He was lying down. I went into his room and he said he was all right. Only a little tired after the lawn rolling. I remember he said, 'One seems apt to develop a heart after these attacks of flu, so I suppose I shouldn't have taken any violent exertion. A bit of a nuisance, because we want to get away to-morrow or the next day.'"

"Was that a surprise to you?"

"Yes, it was. He'd seemed so contented before. But I thought it was just another of his restless fits, probably because he wasn't feeling well. You know, lawn rolling is really hard work, David."

Hard work! David thought of the terrible strain of raising that dead body and shuddered. Was this child going to help to tighten the noose about her own father's neck?

* * *

CHAPTER VIII.

THE days between Preston's arrest and the preliminary proceedings in the magistrate's court passed like some strange nightmare to the

people at Te Rata. There was a constant coming and going of lawyers, detectives and police, and a thorough combing out of the district in search of clues by both parties. Ann passed like some dark-eyed shadow of herself through the long hot days, always with David at her side to protect her from reporter or photographer, from inquisitive sightseer or over-zealous friend.

Three days after her father's arrest an immaculate car drew up at the door and the little maid announced with some awe the arrival of Mrs. Eliot Duncan. Ann was in the kitchen, trying to shell peas, and she raised startled eyes to Judith.

"Aunt Margaret! She's come to take me away. Oh, where's David?"

"He went up to Langley's cottage this morning with that private detective of his. My dear, there's no earthly reason why you should go away with your aunt if you don't want to, but you must see her. Go into the drawing-room and I'll find Mr. Murray."

George Murray was courteously hospitable. "You may be sure, Mrs. Duncan, that we will be only too happy to do anything in our power. Won't you wait and interview Morgan, the lawyer who has been engaged for your brother-in-law? He is due out here this morning to take a report from Missen, the private detective he is employing. We will be very happy if you will remain with us as long as your care to do so."

"Thank you, but now I can do no good. I am satisfied that it is best left in your hands. I came only to take Ann back."

The silent entreaty in the girl's eyes went to George Murray's heart.

"Could you not trust her to us until—until this unhappy affair has reached its next stage? In town she will have to see so many people. Here she has a substantial bodyguard and we are fairly isolated, even under these circumstances."

IN her heart Mrs. Duncan was immensely relieved. The publicity was going to be trying enough, even for a sister-in-law. It would increase immeasurably if the girl was with her, for there was something extraordinarily appealing about Ann. She was not the sort of girl whom it was possible to hide away; the complications would be endless, especially with the number of men that such an affair must inevitably bring about. The girl would be better and safer here—for as long as she could decently leave her. For herself, family pride would compel her to stay and see the business through; moreover she had been warned that her evidence might be necessary. But once it was over—and the hard, capable woman of the world winced at the thought of what the end might be—she would go for a long trip; the Islands, certainly; possibly England or America. By that time interest would have died down and she could decide whether to stay on in New Zealand or seek fresh fields.

She seemed to hesitate, for appearances must be kept up.

"Of course, the public interest is at white heat just now," she admitted. "There was always so much interest and sympathy for—for my brother-in-law, especially after his wife's death. Now, it is all revived. It's just the sort of romantic and sentimental story that the wretched public loves."

If George Murray thought this a hard and unsympathetic way to refer to her niece's tragedy, he was careful to give no sign.

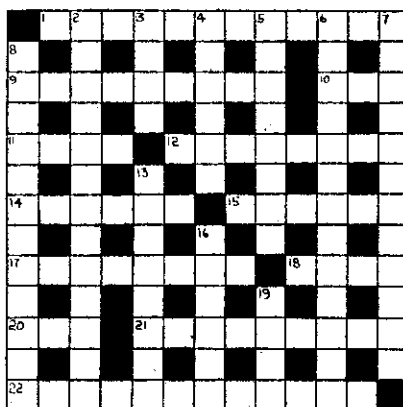
"The publicity is inevitable at this stage," he agreed. "Far better, then, to leave Ann with us, where she is safely hidden and among friends... and now, will you allow me to offer you lunch?"

(To be continued next week)

THE LISTENER CROSSWORD

(No. 82)

(Constructed by R.W.C.)



Clues Across

- Never bite tar (anag.).
- All I meant is to do with food.
- Depression in a mountain chain.
- Even part of a peach may give you a pain.
- An archaic tale and a poetic lake combine to give a word found in the title of one of the solos in "The Messiah."
- Our Dan is on every side.
- This first name of the star of "Seventh Heaven" also contains her second name.
- Sore word (anag.)

- Spice made from the husk of nutmeg.
- Motion picture company.
- It's method that gives you this.
- Don't! It's inane to make notches.

Clues Down

- Edinburgh is to be found in this district.
- Potatoes and needles have these in common.
- Reel.
- Nowadays this is quite in tune, Bill.
- Commotion with a cad to obtain lodging.
- Green mantles (anag.).
- A mobile dwelling on a rise.
- Rare.
- You'll find her in the bar.
- Desert in Central Asia.

(Answer to No. 81)

W	H	O	L	E	M	E	A	L	P	P	S
C	A	D	E	T	T	A	V	E	R	N	S
A	I	S	A	E	M	C					
I	N	N	S	I	N	U	N	D	A	T	E
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A	L	L	E	G	E	R	E	P	E	A	T
N	I	G	R	M	I						
D	E	B	A	T	I	N	G	D	U	M	B
A	A	A	O	F	L	L					
B	E	R	A	T	E	S	A	G	A	T	E
E	E	E	I	I	T						
L	A	D	D	E	S	E	R	T	E	R	S