

IT IS DARK IN THE BUSH

(Continued from previous page)

THE young man looked down at her with fond despairing eyes. For what else had he been striving these many days? If he could only break through her defences, carry her off her feet, rush her to town, marry her. Afterwards? She was very young; she had known her father only a few weeks; she did not really love him at all. It was the shock and the tragedy, not a daughter's love, that troubled her. He would make her forget in the end—whatever that end might be—as he had made her forget just now.

In the kitchen Judith was exhibiting the quilt, finished at last.

"You like it?"

"I think you have done it well. It was good of you."

"I liked doing it. I think it is rather sweet. It would be fun to see it on a baby's cot."

"You like children, Miss Anson?"

"I thought you had promised to call me Judith. Yes, I like them. Life's a poor thing without them, at least to most women."

"Yes. The ordinary woman spends her time in finding a substitute—and losing it."

"You don't mean John? You're not going to lose him. 'We'll have lots of fun together. Why do you look like that? I'm a true prophet. Wait and see. But I don't think you quite like my quilt. Is it the colour scheme?"

"I think it's very pretty. Perhaps—but you'll think me critical when I should only be grateful—but perhaps that little bit of grey-green linen's a mistake."

"Is it? I wasn't sure. But it's such a scrap."

"Yes, where did you find it?"

"Right in the bottom of the bag, and I've searched but I can't get one more bit to match it. No, I think it's rather nice there. I love that colour. It's like the grey-green of the bush and the hills. Now I must find something for lining."

MEANTIME, Charles Preston had been twice brought before the court and remanded. Now the preliminary hearing was to take place at the end of the week.

"If only we could find something—anything to prove that another man had been there," said David on Thursday morning, as they sat over breakfast. "The trouble is it's such a deserted place and on a clay by-road. A man may have easily gone up there that afternoon and been seen by no one."

"But there was that sale. A lot of that they may have caught sight of some—men must have been about that day."

"Yes, but the sale was over by mid-day and the stock all off the mud road by two o'clock. I've made very careful inquiries about times and so has Missen. Langley was not dead till five o'clock or thereabouts. There was plenty of time for a man to get up there and get back before we appeared. If only there had been some more footmarks, but we can't light on any. That one was in a bit of marshy ground and even it was blurred. Ashton will do his best with it, of course, but all he can hope to do is to cast a doubt, a very faint doubt, in the mind of some juror."

"Well," said John, "none of that will come up on Friday, will it?"

"No, none of it. The defence will be reserved. Meantime, we've got a month or so. I find myself catching at any straw. I see the police are advertising for a couple of drovers, strangers to the district, who came down the road that day. Their alibis are all right; it's not that. They rode straight through with stock and a dozen people can check up on their movements. No, the hope is that they may have seen someone."

"Preston, the police think?"

"Yes. But we know that Mr. Preston wasn't there. I have a sneaking hope

one on or near the place that afternoon."

"Where are they? Why did they disappear?"

"They were a couple of rolling stones just picking up a job anywhere. Now they've gone south, apparently, with a big mob of sheep. At present no one seems able to locate them. Meantime, there's only a couple more days till the Magistrate's Court. Come along, John, and let's have one more go."

"Surely you've searched every inch?" asked Judith as they set out.

"I suppose so, but you know the eternally hopeful feeling—the conviction that there must be something there. Come along and help us, Judith. Your dark eyes always see twice as much as anyone else's."

"Sorry, but my dark eyes will be bent on my patch-work quilt to-day."

"Oh, blow that quilt. I've heard a lot of talk about it but I don't believe the beastly thing really exists at all. Anyway, you won't show it to us."

"Never show children or fools things that are half done. You shall see it when you come home. Take Ann with you. She's nothing to do this morning and she's getting nervous about Friday. Good-bye and good luck!"

(To be continued next week)

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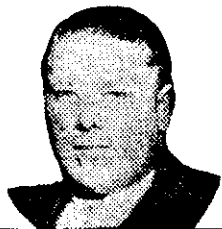
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