

IT IS DARK IN THE BUSH

(Continued from previous page)

It seems so damnably callous," John's handsome face was clouded.

"Curiously enough, or perhaps naturally enough," said the lawyer, "the thought of the corpse and its indecent lack of burial doesn't seem to have troubled Preston at all. He was far more concerned over the necessity for destroying a good and faithful dog. He had no feeling at all about Langley, save one of relief that he was dead. To him it was no more than the hanging of a vermin's carcase would have been to us.

"Men get like that in gaol," said Mr. Murray thoughtfully. "They lose any sentiment and become hard, or perhaps only sensible. After all, what difference did it make? The man was a villain and far better dead. There would have been no mourners at the funeral and Preston's own life and liberty were at stake."

"Well, there's the story," said the lawyer rising. "That's what we've got to work on and round. I'm keeping Missen on. With such a wide area, he may yet happen on something. Meantime, I invite you all to do your best with it—chew it over, get hold of anything you can, even if it seems irrelevant—and let me have it."

"Our last clue didn't do much good," said David gloomily. "Someone must have worn that dress that got torn on the track. Why can't we get on to the person?"

"We may yet. Even if we don't, even if nothing more ever comes of it, don't imagine the find did no good. It does this, it creates doubt. It's something that they can't explain. Someone was there—no getting over that. Someone won't come forward. Why? It's suggestive, if it's nothing more, and we may have to lean on every faintest suggestion. No, don't feel discouraged because no woman in this district has a dress like that—or at least owns up to having one."

"Well, well," said Mr. Murray getting up also. "Just now we seem in a hopeless tangle. But I suppose we have some time?"

"The next Supreme Court session is not till February. If there's any need we can put it off after that—but I can't see any likelihood of that at present. I must be off, Mr. Murray. I'll leave you to tell Miss Preston her father's story."

"He would," said David grimly, kicking a lump of turf savagely as they walked back to the house after seeing the lawyer off. "He would leave it to us to tell Ann—and a nice job it's going to be to describe that gruesome scene with her father as chief actor."

CHAPTER XVII.

David Armstrong had come to town and was bitterly bored by it. The city is at its least attractive in January, and he had been spoilt by a month in the country under ideal conditions. The hot pavements burnt his feet; the grimy buildings seemed to meet overhead, obscuring the summer sky; all the air was filled with clatter and noise, with hurry and heat and smells.

Worst of all, he missed Ann, and her absence would have turned any paradise into a desert. Not for a moment was she out of his thoughts; the pathos of her face when she said good-bye haunted him, but not even then would she yield to his entreaties and marry him. They had a job to do, she said; not till her father's innocence was proved would she consider it.

So David moped and dreamed through a week of baking summer days, trying to concentrate on the mystery of the bush, trying to find any solution that would set Preston free. He grew bored and irritable but dared not take any work, not even a temporary job as locum to a doctor who wished to get out of town. He felt that he must hold himself free for any emergency.

As he was coming out of a cinema one evening, feeling a little crosser than

usual because of an idiotic plot which nevertheless had a happy ending, he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned irritably. The one advantage town possessed in January was that all your friends were out of it.

"Hello, stranger," said Stephen Bryce. David gave a sigh of relief. He had almost forgotten that Stephen would, of course, have resumed work in his father's office now that the legal holidays were over. It would be a relief to talk to him since he already knew all about the case.

"You don't look as if your hiking holiday had done you much good," said the young lawyer. He was very bronzed and fit himself; his fortnight in the mountains had evidently been a success.

"I'm absolutely fed up. Simply putting in time till the case comes off."

"Come home with me this evening and tell me all about our mystery in the bush. How are things going?"

"Damnably. I'd like to come, Stephen, but I'm not feeling fit for human society just now."

"There isn't any human society there. The family's at the beach and I'm baching. Come along."

(To be continued next week)

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