

IT IS DARK IN THE BUSH

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which I believed he meant to put into immediate execution. Therefore I had brought with me a bottle of luminal which I had got in Auckland six weeks before. I got it through a doctor's prescription, but I gave the doctor the name of Maxton." (Here followed the name and address of the doctor, the number of the prescription and the name of the chemist). "The luminal was in powder form because I meant even then to poison Langley if necessary, and I knew that the pills are hard to dissolve in liquid. The powder was done up in little two-grain packets but I had emptied these into the bottle and burnt the papers before leaving Te Rata.

"I made an excuse to get Langley out of the room and then emptied the contents of the bottle into the half-empty mug and filled it up with neat whisky; he came back and the last I saw of him he was tossing the whisky off without apparently noticing the bitterness. I went out and walked about in the bush for some time, how long I cannot say, probably two or three hours. When I came back Langley was dead; this surprised me as I had expected him only to be stupefied, but I remembered that he had told me stories of a weak heart and this probably explained his succumbing sooner. I then wiped off all traces of finger-marks or traces of my presence there. I left the bottle there to explain what I hoped would pass for a suicide and then went away.

"On the way down the hill I saw Mr. Preston coming up, but I must repeat that Langley had then been dead for at least an hour. I had of course no idea then that Mr. Preston had ever known Langley before and no knowledge that he possessed any luminal. My reason for killing Langley was that he had been connected with an unhappy episode in my past life and had been systematically blackmailing me ever since he came to the district; in fact, that had been the reason for his first settling in it, and, if you consult my bank pass-book, you will see that I first began to draw out large sums of money, all in open cheques, just after he came to the farm. Now that he had exhausted all my savings he was threatening to expose this episode of twenty-five years before. When you see this we shall both be dead and there is no deed to rake up that miserable past, but I may add that this exposure would have affected others besides myself. I felt then, and I feel now, no remorse over killing a treacherous blackmailer and a villain.

"I should like as little fuss and publicity made over this business as possible, not for my sake but for that of those with whom I have been happily connected for many years. Mr. Preston will, I know, forgive me the suffering I have caused him. I am sorry to have caused him and also the country so much unnecessary expense. I have tried to atone for this by directing in my will that all of which I die possessed—and I have still some possessions though very little cash—should be sold and paid in to the Crown in part defrayment of the expense of the trial. I wish that I had more money left, but you will see from my bank account that I had almost five hundred pounds two and a-half years ago. Langley has had it all. My only regret in the whole matter is that I was obliged to delay my confession and death in this way and thus cause a great many people trouble, pain and expense."

David looked up and met the Superintendent's gaze.

"An extraordinarily lucid and unemotional document," the official said. "She must have been, as I have said before, an exceptional woman."

"She was. I have never known anyone the least like her, although we had all learned to take her very much for granted."

"Perhaps that was her wish. . . . I wonder what Langley's hold was over her. Some past indiscretion, I suppose. Strange that she should dread it so much that she should submit to blackmail for two years and then murder him in the end."

"Yes. I suppose we shall never understand that part, but I feel that if we did we'd find it was because that past of hers involved someone else. I can't imagine Mrs. Marsden ever doing anything mean or cowardly."

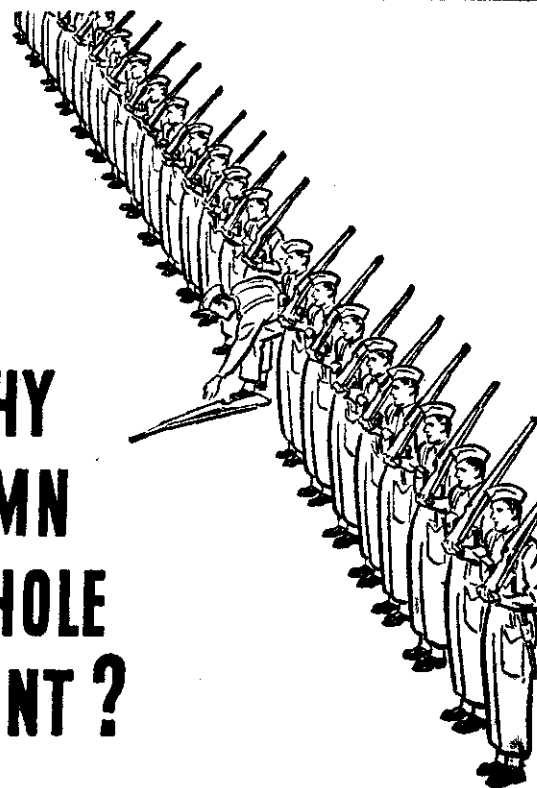
"I wonder why she waited so long. I suppose in the hope that Preston would be acquitted."

"Naturally. It would have saved her life and all this scandal. From her letter to me I fancy there was someone else for whose sake it was vitally necessary to keep silent, someone whose happiness was involved—though I can't imagine who or why."

David was wondering next morning as he sped once more south to Te Rata whether they would ever know that real story. Mrs. Marsden had been a strange and mysterious woman, and her death had now left behind it a mystery that would never be solved. Ah, well, at least she had saved Preston's life and Ann's happiness, had cleared away all that dreadful haze of suspicions and fear that had long clouded them all.

(To be continued next week)

BUT WHY CONDEMN THE WHOLE REGIMENT?



Human nature being what it is, there are bound to be one or two inefficient soldiers in every regiment. But why condemn the whole regiment?

The same applies to the licensed trade. Among many hundreds of law-abiding hotel-keepers, there is bound to be a small minority who are tempted to disobey the law and neglect certain regulations governing the conduct of their business.

This small minority, however, are not representative of the licensed trade. The majority of hotel-keepers realise they are rendering a valued service to the public, and that their success depends upon obedience to the law and the maintenance of public goodwill.

The majority of the public who enjoy the hospitality and fellowship of a licensed house are likewise sober, reasonable individuals. If human nature were perfect, moderation would be a universal virtue.

In time of war, with many thousands of men and women employed outside their ordinary routine, and other thousands living in a state of mental stress, it is more than ever necessary to keep a brake on excess, to encourage the spirit of moderation.

An announcement issued in the Nation's interests by the National Council of the Licensed Trade of New Zealand.



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