

Complete Story.

The Divided Note.

I.

THE DEAD MAN IN THE SANDS.

A hot sandy beach, the flat expanse broken here and there by weather-worn pinnacles of rock, some ringed with surf, others high and dry in the sand billows. Seaward, the Pacific, blue as a jewel, pouring its waters at regular, deep-sounding intervals and thereafter spreading silently across the sands. Nothing in sight save the blue, dim sea and the blue, dim sky, the sea curved at shore and horizon as a pool of mercury. Shoreward, a desert of sand, all but vegetationless, stretching away to a pale horizon in ripples and billows as the last strong wind had left it.

In the narrow shadow of a towering rock sat two men, their faces turned to the sea, their eyes watching the ocean rollers as they somersaulted musically on the shining sands. Their gaze was on the sea, but their minds were otherwise occupied.

"Speak on, Billy," said the Doctor, dreamily. "We are alone—as they observe in melodrama."

"Gum-diggin's a slow game," said Billy Jones, digging a forefinger viciously into the sand. "It's 'and to mouth all the bloomin' time. 'Wot's thirty bob a week to a bloke like you, Doctor? It's a shine an' a disgrace, that's wot."

The Doctor lifted his shabby hat and punched out the crown with a rounded fist. "And so?" he said.

The little man wriggled nearer. "Know a bloke called Sandy George?" he whispered.

"Keep off, you little viper," said the Doctor, with a notion of repugnance. "You may shriek yourself hoarse here and no one hear you but the gulls. What about Sandy George?"

"Wot's the good of goin' on?" said Billy morosely. "You ain't gine to chip in. It's keep huff an' stan' back till I'm fair sick. An' ere was I hofferin' you a chanst, a—"

"What about Sandy George?"

The Cockney reflected. "There was grit in Patsy Briggs," he said. "I didn't expect 'im to pass in 'is cheeks like 'e done. 'Wot did 'e die of?"

"Consumption—a case of long standing."

"They 'ad a hospital fur that at 'Amstead," Billy said musingly. "Once my sisters was took there."

The Doctor looked him over with an inquiring eye. "Briggs," he said, "had only a portion of one lung left, and when the wind and the sand got up yesterday he coughed it away. I told him how it would be before he started, but he reckoned the weather would hold up till we got across, and he took the risk." The Doctor looked idly at a high rock further up the beach.

"Will 'e stop there?" Billy asked in a whisper, his gaze following the same direction.

The Doctor shrugged his shoulders. "Till the winds shift 'im. 'What about Sandy George?" he asked again.

"It was me and 'im and Patsy what planned it," Billy said evasively; "an' Patsy is dead—dead and buried."

"Don't lay too much stress on the buryin', Billy. Death, however, is a thing man clings to even better than he does to life. So it's dead men's shoes, then."

"There's more'n 'is shoes," said Billy, with nervous cunning. "But blimey if I know 'ow to take yer."

"When dealing with a better intelled than your own, William," the Doctor advised kindly, "speak straight out the thing you desire to say. It saves time."

"I was a educated bloke since as you," grumbled Billy, "but there was no gyver about 'im. If 'e'd been settin' alongside me now there wouldn't be no need of me to spin this 'ere yarn. Two words was enough fur 'im."

"It is the multiplicity of your words, Billy, which begets me. Give me the two that would have satisfied your friend yonder."

Billy's eye reverted to the rock. "Al-

mighty 'ot 'e must find t'lyin' there with two foot er sand on his chest, Doctor," he said, thoughtfully.

"We put 'im on the shady side."

Billy nodded eagerly. "We done 'im decent, Doctor; we couldn't 'ave done 'im no decenter than we done."

"We buried him as he stood, clothes and all; if he had any money or documents in his possession, he has them still."

The little man's gaze veered suddenly to the sea. Presently he laughed. "It was a ratty devil, Doctor," he said, with returning uneasiness, "allus quarrelin'. The las' thing 'e 'ad in 'is mind, the very las'—'e's a 'uggin' the thought of it now—was murder."

The Cockney's face whitened as he spoke, and he rose to his knees and then to his feet, looking inquiringly down at his companion. The Doctor lay motionless, regarding him through half-closed lids. "Go on with it, Billy," he said; "you are through the ice now."

"Sandy and 'im reckoned the thing couldn't be got without, an' they meant to 'ave it, whether or no," Billy said, moistening his loose lips, "and it looked dead promisin' the way they got it planned."

The Doctor sat up and leaned his back against the rock. "What was his part?" he asked, nodding towards the resting-place of the dead man.

"'E'd got the fattest of it. 'E was a 'andy man with 'is digits fur all 'is skin and bone. But I was thinkin', Doctor, you might do better amongst the ladies if it comes to sortin' up the parts afresh."

"Women in it," remarked the Doctor, frowning. "Sit down, you little beggar, and speak out."

Billy obeyed. "There's a 'ouse," he said, "about nine miles from 'ere on the East Coast, a white 'ouse with gum trees around it, lookin' art across the sea. You come up from Sodoranvisky's store a ten long mile over the sand; 'is till you get to a green 'eadland, and there it stands. It's a lonesome place, Doctor, an' 'ight days art of the seven you can't 'ear yerself speak cos of the wind. You might scream there most times an' the wind would blow the sound of it dahn yer throat, an' 'shoke yer, and nobody'd know yer spoke, not even yerself."

"Marsden's," said the doctor, briefly. "I slept in the shed there one night last summer."

"Wot's 'e doin' art there on 'is lone, Doctor? That's wot I should like to get at. It's a 'ell of a place fur a white man to live. And there's another curious thing. Patsy 'ah a fancy fur this country, too. Te Reinga, Spirit's Bay, Parengarenga—'e was allus 'ankerin' after 'em, and you couldn't drag 'im into a decent country. Blarst me if I can fathom it. Then there's another thing, a blimey funny thing. Did you ever see Marsden 'isself? Well, who was 'e like?"

"He was more like our friend than anyone," the doctor answered, after a moment's reflection. "He was curious-ly like him," he added a moment later.

"There y'are," said Billy eagerly; "they was as like as the peas in a pod. There was the same cut of the job to them, the same eyes, a sorter 'in red, the same kinder voice. If they'd said they was brothers, I'd a believed 'em. But they never said it—leastwise, 'e never"—and Billy nodded towards the rock. "If they was brothers, Doctor, they kep' it mighty dark."

The doctor nodded. "Go on, Billy," he said. "You develop your mystery well."

"There's nothin' abart that 'ouse to make you think it'd be worth stickin' up, Doctor, s'posin' you was in that line of business," Billy suggested, after a pause. "You didn't catch sight er no jewels nor bags er coin that time you was sleepin' in the shed. A bit er plite, may be—anythin' at all, Doctor?"

"Nothing, Billy. Moreover, the evidences were all in the other direction. If that is the place I am afraid the

dear departed was proposing to waste his energies."

"Yet fur all that there's somethin' there. It mayn't be jewels er plite, er even 'is Majesty's photographs, but wot it is, it's as good."

"Did he afford you no information on that point?"

"'E never said more'n 'e could 'elp abart anythin', didn't Patsy. But 'e said there was a thing there wot 'e wanted, and 'e said that if we 'elped 'im to get it, 'e would divide a 'undred golden quids between the two of us."

"Did he mention where the money was to come from?"

"We see that pint, Doctor, an' we put it to 'im. 'Syes we: 'Patsy, you ain't got no 'undred quids now. Is it money the old boy's got?' An' 'e 'syes: 'No, as it wasn't.' Then, 'syes we, nat'rally: 'Then wot abart our quids?' And Patsy 'syes: 'It's as I tell you, mites. If I get my fingers on the thing I wants I shall be worth a bit more'n a 'undred.' So, as there wasn't nothin' else to do, we took 'is word fur it."

"A most unbusinesslike arrangement," commented the doctor. "Well?"

Well, said Billy with a gulp, "I put it to you, Doctor; if there was a 'undred in it to give away, there was a bloomin' sight more to keep. 'Wot was good fur 'im ain't goin' to do us no 'arm, and if you're on fur carryin' it through, 'sye the word."

"Your proposition is that I should go a-burglin', then, Billy," said the doctor, mildly, a curious far-away, partly amused, partly desperate gleam in his eyes. "Well, putting aside for the moment the question you have raised as to whether burglary is or is not in my line, has it occurred to you that there are certain difficulties and a considerable amount of speculation attached to the venture?"

"As how?"

"Taking the speculative element first, it by no means follows because the thing, whatever it is, was worth a considerable sum to our friend that it would be worth anything at all to us. Then the difficulty arises that we do not know what we are after. It strikes me, William, that in the absence of fuller particulars, your proposition is more suggestive of the humorous than the profitable."

"Wot was 'e after?" mused Billy.

"My present impression is that he was after vengeance, and there is no profit for us in that. Briggs was a very likely man to go for vengeance."

"'E wanted a bit er that, Doctor, but there was more in it. There was money in it. And if there was money fur 'im, why not fur us?"

"I have already suggested why not. But before we go any further, let me hear your plan of campaign."

"'E ad it all mapped art," said Billy. "There's four of 'em in the 'ouse to deal with—Mrs Marsden, the gel, Marsden 'isself, and a bloke—a Zionist, Patsy

called 'im—that's been 'angin' round there fur the last three months, letchin' flies an' such. Patsy reckoned, 'e'd be some time gettin' on to wot 'e wanted, and the first thing, 'syes 'e, is to get the 'ole lot of 'em quiet."

"How did he propose to do that?" the Doctor asked.

"Well, we adn't got no firearms, so 'e reckoned it would take three of us to make a satisfactory job of it. 'E'd been watchin' 'em pretty close and 'e said that every night, reg'lar as clockwork, the two men took a walk down to the edge of the cliff to 'ave a squint at the sea. Sometimes if the weather was decent, they 'ad a smoke there, and if it wasn't they just took a look round and come back. The weather was goin' to be fair when we tackled the job," continued Billy, "and it was goin' to styve fair."

"Which of you were to deal with the men?"

"Me and 'im," said Billy, encouraged by his companion's sincerity; "and Sandy was to go up to the 'ouse and entertain the ladies till we come. Patsy said the part of the cliff where the men mostly went to was a good un fur doin' the job quick and clean. 'E was a devil 'un doin' things clean was Patsy, but I dunno."

"You mean they were to be murdered?"

"They was to meet with an accident," said Billy with a sinister grin. "If they 'ad luck, they would fall abart thirty feet; if they 'ad none they would go dahn p'raps two 'undred. Patsy reckoned that was givin' 'em a fair chanst, but I dunno. 'Wot do you think?"

The Doctor lifted his eyebrows and gasped. "Why kill the poor devil of a scientist?" he asked presently. "Why?"

"It wasn't so much the killin'; it was gettin' 'im art er the road. The Zionist's a young bloke and fairly active. Patsy said 'e seen 'im one time 'angin' on the side er the cliff, pickin' weeds or lookin' fur bird's eggs, and 'e said 'e was a good man."


"Exactly—a good man. Now, listen to me, you reptile," said the Doctor with sudden fury. "If one hair of his head comes to harm you shall swing for it. Great God, I would as soon think of offering that creature an injury as I would of trampling the life out of an infant. And to think that you and your brother devil yonder should propose in cold blood—Billy, I'm a stronger man than you; if I was to put my hands round your throat and choke the venomous soul out of you, I believe it would be counted to me as the one virtuous deed in a mis-spent life. Ah, would you! Drop it, or I'll break your wrists."

The long, pointed pig-knife fell gleaming into the sands.

"I ain't strong, Doctor," said Billy, white and cringing. "I got to protect myself. Don't you do me no 'urt."

The Doctor's savage hold relaxed, and

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