

The BRONZE BELL

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SYNOPSIS.

David Amber, starting for a duck-shooting visit with his friend, Quain, comes upon a young lady equestrian who has been dismounted by her horse becoming frightened at the sudden appearance in the road of a burly Hindu. He declares he is Behari Lal Chatterji, the appointed mouthpiece of The Bell, addresses Amber as a man of high rank and pressing a mysterious little bronze box, "The Token," into his hand, disappears in the wood. The girl calls Amber by name. He in turn addresses her as Miss Sophie Farrell, daughter of Col. Farrell of the British diplomatic service in India and visiting the Quains. Several nights later the Quain honor is burglarized and the bronze box stolen. Amber and Quain go hunting on an island and become lost and Amber is left marooned. He wanders about, finally reaches a cabin and recognizes as its occupant an old friend named Rutton, whom he last met in England, and who appears to be in hiding.

CHAPTER IV. (Continued.)

"The same man. He asked me down for the shooting—owns a country place across the bay; Tanglewood."
"A very able man; I wish I might have met him. . . . What of yourself? What have you been doing these three years? Have you married?"
"I've been too busy to think of that. . . . I mean, till lately."

"Ah?"
Amber flushed boyishly. "There was a girl at Quain's—a guest. . . . But she left before I dared speak. Perhaps it was as well."

"Why?"
"Because she was too fine and sweet and good for me, Rutton."

"Like every man's first love."
"The older man's glance was keen—too keen for Amber to dissimulate successfully under it. "You're right," he admitted ruefully. "It's the first sure-enough trouble of the sort I ever experienced. And, of course, it had to be hopeless."

"Why?" persisted Rutton.
"Because—I've half a notion there's a chap waiting for her at home."

"At home?"
"In England." The need for a confidant was suddenly imperative upon the younger man. "She's an English girl—half English, that is; her mother was an American, a schoolmate of Quain's wife; her father, an Englishman in the Indian service."

"Her name?"
"Sophia Farrell." A peculiar quality, a certain tenseness, in Rutton's manner, forced itself upon Amber's attention. "Why?" he asked. "Do you know the Farrells? What's the matter?"

Rutton's eyes met his stonily; out of the ashen mask of his face, that suddenly had whitened beneath the brown, they glared, afire but unseeing. His hands writhed, his fingers twisting together with cruel force, the knuckles gray. Abruptly, as if abandoning the attempt to reassert his self-control, he jumped up and went quickly to a window, there to stand, his back to Amber, staring fixedly out into the storm-racked night. "I knew her father," he said at length, his tone constrained and odd, "long ago, in India."

"He's out there now—a political, I believe they call him, or something of the sort."

"Yes."
"She's going out to rejoin him."

"What!" Rutton came swiftly back to Amber, his voice shaking. "What did you say?"
"Why, yes. She travels with friends by the western route to join Colonel Farrell at Darjeeling, where he's stationed just now. Shortly after I came down she left; Mrs. Quain had a wire a day or so ago, saying she was on the point of sailing from San Francisco. . . . Good Lord, Rutton! are you ill?"

Something in the man's face had brought Amber to his feet, a prey to inexpressible concern; it was as if a mask had dropped and he were looking upon the soul of a man in mortal torture.

"No," gasped Rutton. "I'm all right. Besides," he added beneath his breath, so that Amber barely caught the syllables, "it's too late."

As rapidly as he had lost he seemed to regain mastery of his inexplicable emotion. His face became again composed, almost immobile, and stepping to the table he selected a cigarette and rolled it gently between his slim brown fingers. "I'm sorry to have alarmed you," he said, his tone a bit too even not to breed a doubt in the mind of his hearer. "It's nothing serious—a little trouble of the heart, of long standing, incurable—I hope."

Perplexed, yet hesitating to press him further, Amber watched him furtively, instinctively assured that between this man and the Farrells there existed some extraordinary bond; wondering how that could be, convinced that his soul that somehow the entanglement involved the woman he loved, he still feared to put his suspicions to the question, lest he should learn that which he had no right to know.

and while he watched was startled by the change that came over Rutton. At once, one moment, outwardly composed, it absorbed in thought, the next he was rigid, every muscle taut, every nerve tense as a steel spring. His head jerked back suddenly, his gaze fixing itself first upon the window, then shifting to the door. And his fingers, contracting, tore the cigarette in half.

"Rutton, what the deuce is the matter?"

Rutton seemed not to hear; Amber got his answer from the door, which was swung wide and slammed shut. A blast of frosty air and a flurry of snow swept across the room. And against the door there leaned a man puffing with breath and coughing spasmodically—a gross and monstrous bulk of flesh, unclean and unwholesome to the eye, attired in an extravagant array of colored garments, tawdry silks and satins clinging, sodden to his ponderous and unwieldy limbs.

"The babu!" cried Amber unconsciously; and was rewarded by a flash of recognition from the coal-black, beady, evil eyes of the man.

But for that involuntary exclamation the tableau held unbroken for a space; Rutton standing transfixed, the torn halves of the cigarette between his fingers, his head well up and back, his stare level, direct, uncompromising, a steady challenge to the intruder.

Then, demanding Amber's silence with an imperative movement of his hand, Rutton spoke. "Well, babu," he said quietly, the shadow of a bitter and weary smile curving his thin, hard lips.

The Bengali moved a pace or two from the door, and plucked nervously at the throat of his surcoat, finally managing to insert one hand in the folds of silk across his bosom.

"I seek," he said distinctly in Urdu, and not without a definite note of menace in his manner, "the man calling himself Rutton Sahib?"

Very deliberately Rutton inclined his head. "I am he."

"Hazor!" The babu laboriously doubled up his enormous body in profound obeisance. Having recovered, he nodded to Amber with the easy familiarity of an old acquaintance. "To you, likewise, greeting, Amber Sahib."

"What!" Rutton swung sharply to Amber with an exclamation of amazement. "You know this fellow, David?"
The babu cut in hastily, stimulated by a pressing anxiety to clear himself. "Hazor, I did not err, being misled by his knowledge of our tongue as well as by that pale look of you he wears. And, indeed, is it strange that I should take him for you, who was told to seek you in this wild land?"

"Be silent!" Rutton told him angrily.
"My lord's will is his slave's." Resignedly the babu folded his fat arms. "Tell me about this," Rutton demanded of Amber.

"The ass ran across me in the woods south of the station, the day I came down," explained Amber, summarizing the episode as succinctly as he could. "He didn't call me by your name, but I've no doubt he's telling the truth about mistaking me for you. At all events he hazoor-ed me a number of times, talked a lot of rot about some silly 'Voice,' and finally made me a free gift of a nice little bronze box that wouldn't open. After which he took to his heels, saying he'd call later for my answer—whatever he meant by that. He did call by night and stole the box. That's about all I know of him, thus far. But I'd watch out for him, if I were you; if he isn't a raving lunatic, I miss my guess."

"Indeed, my lord, it is all quite as the sahib says," the babu admitted graciously, his eyes gleaming with sardonic amusement. "Circumstances conspired to mislead me; but that I was swift to discover. Nor did I lose time in remedying the error, as you have heard. Moreover—"

He shut up suddenly at a sign from Rutton, with a ludicrous shrug of his huge shoulders disclaiming any ill-intent or wrong-doing; and while Rutton remained deep in thought by the table, the babu held silence, his gaze flickering suspiciously round the room.

At length Rutton looked up, suppressing a sigh. "Your errand, babu?"
"Is it, then, your will that I should speak before this man?" The Bengali nodded impudently at Amber.

"It is my will."
"Shabash! I bear a message, hazoor, from the Bell."

"You are the Mouthpiece of the Voice?"

"That honor is mine, hazoor. For the rest I am—"

"Behari Lal Chatterji," interrupted Rutton impatiently; "collector of the Inner Temple—disbarred; anointed thief, liar, jackal, liekappitie, and perjurer—I know you."

"My lord," said the man insolently, "omits from his catalogue of my accomplishments my chiefest honor; he forgets that, with him, I am an accepted Member of the Body."

"The Body wears strange members that employ you, babu," commented Rutton bitterly. "It has fallen upon evil days when such as you are charged with a message of the Bell."

"My lord is harsh to one who would be his slave in all things. Fortunate indeed am I to own the protection of the Token." A slow leer widened greedily upon his moon-like face.

"Ab, the Token!" Rutton repeated tensely, beneath his breath. "It is true that you have the Token?"
"Aye; it is even here, my lord." The heavy brown hand returned to the spot it had sought soon after the babu's entrance, within the folds of

silk across his bosom, and groped therein for an instant. "Even here," he iterated with a maddening manner of supreme self-complacency, producing the bronze box and waddling over to drop it into Rutton's hand. "My lord is satisfied!" he gurgled maliciously.

Without answering Rutton turned the box over in his palm, his slender fingers playing about the bosses of the relief work; there followed a click and one side of it swung open. The Bengali fell back a pace with a whinger of awe—real or affected: "The Token, hazoor!" Amber himself gasped slightly.

Unheeded, the box dropped to the floor. Between Rutton's thumb and forefinger there blazed a great emerald set in a ring of red old gold. He turned it this way and that, inspecting it critically; and the lamp-light, catching on the facets, struck from it blinding shafts of intensely green radiance. Rutton nodded as if in recognition of the stone and, turning, with an effect of carelessness, tossed it to Amber.

"Keep that for me, David, please," he said, and Amber, catching it, dropped the ring into his pocket.

"My lord is satisfied with my credentials, then?" the babu persisted.

"It is the Token," Rutton assented wearily. "Now, your message. Be brief."

"The utterances of the Voice be infrequent, hazoor, its words few—but charged with meaning; as you know of old." The Bengali drew himself up, holding up his head and rolling forth his phrases in a voice of great resonance and depth. "These be the words of the Voice, hazoor:

"To All My Peoples:
"Even now the Gateway of Swords yawns wide, that he who is without fear may pass within; to the end that the Body be purged of the Scarlet Evil."

"The Elect are bidden to the Ordeal with no exception."
"The sonorous accents subsided, and

word of two edges." Noah, thanks; the servants of the Bell do not linger by wayside, soe to speak. Besides, I am in great hurry. Mieter Amber, good night. Rutton Sahib—with a flash of his sinister humor—"a revolver; I mean to say, till we meet in the Hall of the Bell. Good night."
He nodded insolently to the man whom a little time since he had hailed as "my lord," shrugged his coat collar up round his fat, dirty neck, shivered in anticipation, jerked the door open and plunged ponderously out.

A second later Amber saw the confused mass of his turban glide past the window.

CHAPTER V.

The Goblin Night.

Amber whistled low. "Impossible!" he said thoughtfully.

Rutton had crossed to and was bending over a small leather trunk that stood in one corner of the room. In the act of opening it, he glanced over his shoulder. "What?" he demanded sharply.

"I was only thinking; there's something I can't see through in the babu's willingness to go."

"He was afraid to stay."
"Why?"

Rutton, rummaging in the trunk, made no reply. After a moment Amber resumed.

"You know what Bengalis are; that fellow'd do anything, brave any ordinary danger, rather than try to cross that sandbar again—if he really came that way; which I am inclined to doubt. On the other hand, he's intelligent enough to know that a night like this in the dunes would kill him. Well, what then?"

Rutton was not listening. As Amber concluded he seemed to find what he had been seeking, thrust it hurriedly into the breast-pocket of his coat, and with a muttered word, unintelligible, dashed to the door and flung it open and himself out.

With a shriek of demonic glee the



"Till We Meet in the Hall of The Bell. Good Night."

a tense wait ensued, none speaking. Rutton stood in stony apathy, his eyes lifted to a dim corner of the ceiling, his gaze—like his thoughts—perhaps ranging far beyond the dreary confines of the cabin in the dunes. Minute after minute passed, he making no sign, the babu poised before him in inscrutable triumph, watching him keenly with his black and evil eyes of a beast. Amber hung breathless upon the issue, sensing a conflict of terrible forces in Rutton's mind, but comprehending nothing of their nature. Rutton awoke as from a sleep.

"The Voice has spoken, babu," he said, not ungraciously, "and I have heard."

"And your answer, lord?"
"There is no answer."

"Hazor!"
"I have said," Rutton confirmed, evenly, "there is no answer."

"You will obey?"
"That is between me and my God. Go back to the Hall of the Bell, Behari Lal Chatterji, and deliver your report; say that you have seen me, that I have listened to the words of the Voice, and that I sent no answer."

"Hazor, I may not. I am charged to return only with you."
"Make your peace with the Bell in what manner you will, babu; it is no concern of mine. Go, now, while yet time is granted you to avoid a longer journey this night."

"Hazor!"
"Go," Rutton pointed to the door, his voice imperative.

He rolled sluggishly toward the door, dragging his inadequate overcoat across his barrel-like chest; and paused to cough affectingly, with one hand on the knob. Rutton eyed him contemptuously.

"If you care to run the risk," he said suddenly, "you may have a chair by the fire till the storm breaks, babu."

"Beg pardon?" The babu's eyes widened. "Oah, yes; I see. If I care to run risk? Verree considerate of you, I'm sure. But as we say in Bengal, 'these favor of kings iss ass a

wind entered into and took possession of the room. A cloud of snow swept across the floor like a veil. The door battered against the wall as if trying to break it down. The cheap tin kerosene lamp jumped as though caught up by a hand; its flame leapt high and blue above the chimney—and was not. In darkness but for the fitful flare of the fire that had been dying in embers on the hearth, Amber, seeking the doorway, fell over a chair, blundered flat into the wall, and stumbled unexpectedly out of the house.

His concern was all for Rutton; he had no other thought. He ran a little way down the hollow, heartless with horror and cold with dread. Then he paused, bewildered. Whither in that whirling world Rutton might have wandered, it was impossible to surmise. In despair the Virginian turned back.

When he had found his way to the door of the cabin, it was closed; as he entered and shut it behind him, a match flared and expired in the middle of the room, and a man cursed brokenly.

"Rutton?" cried Amber in a flush of hope.

"Is that you, Mr. Amber? Thank Gawd! Wyte a minute."

A second match spluttered, its flame waxing in the pink cup of Doggott's hands.

He succeeded in setting fire to the wick. The light showed him barefoot and shivering in shirt and trousers. "For pity's sake, sir, w'at's appened?"

"It's hard to say," replied Amber vaguely, preoccupied. He went immediately to a window and stood there, looking out.

"But w'ere's Mr. Rutton, sir?"
"Gone—out there—I don't know just where." Amber moved back to the table. "You see, he had a caller."

"A caller, sir—on a night like this?"
"The man he came here to hide from," said Amber.

"I knew 'e was tryin' to dodge something, sir; but 'e never told me s'bout it. What kind of a per-

son was 'e, sir, and what made Mr. Rutton go aw'y with 'im?"
"He didn't; he went after him to . . . Amber caught his tongue on the verge of an indiscretion; no matter what his fears, they were not yet become a suitable subject for discussion with Rutton's servant. "I think," he amended lamely, "he had forgotten something."

"And 'e's out there now! My Gawd, what a night!" He hung in hesitation for a little. "Did 'e wear 'is topcoat and 'at, sir?"
"No! he went suddenly. I don't think he intended to be gone long."

"I'd better go after 'im, then. 'E'll 'ave pneumonia. . . . I'll just jump into me clothes and—"
He slipped into the back room, to reappear with surprisingly little delay, fully dressed and buttoning a long ulster round his throat. "You didn't 'appen to notice which w'y 'e went, sir?"

"As well as I could judge, to the east."

Doggott took down a second ulster and a cap from pegs in the wall. "I'll do my best to find 'im; 'e might lose 'imself, you know, with no light nor nothin'."

The door slammed behind him. Alone, and a prey to misgivings he scarce dared name to himself, Amber from the window watched the blot of light from Doggott's handlamp fade and vanish in the storm; then, becoming sensible to the cold, went to the fireplace, kicked the embers together until they blazed, and piled on more fuel.

A cozy, crackling sound began to be audible in the room, sibilant jets of flame, scarlet, yellow, violet, and green, spurted up from the driftwood. Under the hypnotic influence of the comforting warmth, weariness descended upon Amber like a burden; he was afraid to close his eyes or to sit down, lest sleep should overcome him for all his intense excitement and anxiety. He forced himself to move steadily round the room, struggling against a feeling that all that he had witnessed must have been untrue, an evil dream, akin to the waking visions that had beset him between the loss of Quain and the finding of Rutton. The very mediocrity of the surroundings seemed to discredit the testimony of his wits.

In a setting so hopelessly commonplace and everyday, one act of a drama of blood and fire had been played; into these mean premises the breath of the storm, as the babu entered, had blown Romance. . . . Incredible!

And yet Amber's hand, dropping idly in his coat-pocket, encountered a priceless witness to the reality of what had passed. Frowning, troubled, he drew forth the ring and slipped it upon his finger; rays of blinding emerald light coruscated from it, dazzling him. With a low cry of wonder he took it to the lamplight. Never had he looked upon so fine a stone, so strangely cut.

It was set in ruddy soft gold, worked and graven with exquisite art in the semblance of a two-headed cobra; inside the band was an inscription so worn and faint that Amber experienced some difficulty in deciphering the word Rao (king) in Devanagari, flanked by swastikas. Aside from the stone entirely, he speculated, the value of the ring as an antique would have proven inestimable. As for the emerald itself, in its original state, before cutting, it must have been worth the ransom of an emperor; much had certainly been sacrificed to fashion it in its present form.

To gaze into its depths was like questioning the inscrutable green heart of the sea. Fascinated, Amber felt his consciousness slip from him as a mantle might slip from his shoulders; awake, staring wide-eyed into the emerald eye, he forgot self, forgot the world, and dreamed, dreamed curiously.

The crash of the door closing behind him brought him to the right-about in a panic flutter. He glared stupidly for a time before comprehending that Rutton and Doggott had returned.

If there were anything peculiar in his manner, Rutton did not remark it. Indeed, he seemed unconscious, for a time, of the presence either of Amber or of Doggott. The servant relieved him of his overcoat and hat, and he strode directly to the fire, bending over to chafe and warm his frost-nipped hands. Unquestionably he labored under the influence of an extraordinary agitation. His limbs twitched and jerked nervously; his eyebrows were tensely elevated, his eyes blazing, his nostrils dilated; his face was ashen gray.

From across the room Doggott signaled silence to Amber, with a forefinger to his lips, and with a discretion bred of long knowledge of his master's temper, tiptoed through into the back room and shut the door.

Amber respected the admonition throughout a wait that seemed endless.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Significant.

"A barber was picked up on the sidewalk yesterday, foaming at the mouth."

"What, do you suppose, brought on his attack?"
"I don't know, but he was found in front of a billboard, on which there was a safety-razor advertisement 20 feet high."

Where the Charm Failed.

Loomis—Carey, the aviator, seems to bear a charmed life; trip after trip he has made in his airship, ascending hundreds of feet, and never has had the sign of an accident.

Ranier—But I heard he broke his leg yesterday.

Loomis—Oh, he broke that by falling down his cellar stairs.

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By Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound

Peoria, Ill.—"I wish to let every one know what Lydia E. Pinkham's remedies have done for me. For two years I suffered. The doctors said I had tumors, and the only remedy was the surgeon's knife. My mother bought me Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and today I am a healthy woman. For months I suffered from inflammation, and your Sanative Wash relieved me. Your Liver Pills have no equal as a cathartic. Any one wishing proof of what your medicines have done for me can get it from any druggist or by writing to me. You can use my testimonial in any way you wish, and I will be glad to answer letters."—Mrs. CHRISTINA REED, 106 Mount St., Peoria, Ill.



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New Orleans, La.—"For years I suffered from severe female troubles. Finally I was confined to my bed and the doctor said an operation was necessary. I gave Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound a trial first, and was saved from an operation."—Mrs. LILY PEYRON, 1111 Kerlerec St., New Orleans, La.

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HE WAS HUNGRY, TOO.



Mrs. Justwed—There's nothing in the house fit to eat. I'm going home to my mother.
Mr. Justwed (broke)—Wait till I get my hat, and I'll go with you.

A Bitter Critic.

Ex-Governor Peenypacker, at a dinner in Philadelphia, said of the divorce evil:
"There would not be so many divorces if there were not so many families of the Dash type."
"Mr. Dash said sternly one day to his little son:
"Your mother and I agree that you require a sound whipping."
"The little boy's lip curled, and he retorted bitterly:
"Oh, yes; that's the only thing that you and mother ever do agree about."

The Egotist.

"Thinks he's in the same class with Abraham Lincoln, does he?"
"Yes, and confidently expects a promotion."—Harper's Bazar.

LUCKY MISTAKE.

Grocer Sent Pkg. of Postum and Opened the Eyes of the Family.

A lady writes from Brookline, Mass.:
"A package of Postum was sent me one day by mistake.
"I notified the grocer, but finding that there was no coffee for breakfast next morning I prepared some of the Postum, following the directions very carefully."
"It was an immediate success in my family, and from that day we have used it constantly, parents and children, too—for my three rosy youngsters are allowed to drink it freely at breakfast and luncheon. They think it delicious, and I would have a mutiny on my hands should I omit the beloved beverage."
"My husband used to have a very delicate stomach while we were using coffee, but to our surprise his stomach has grown strong and entirely well since we quit coffee and have been on Postum."
"Noting the good effects in my family I wrote to my sister, who was a coffee toper, and after much persuasion got her to try Postum."
"She was prejudiced against it at first, but when she presently found that all the ailments that coffee gave her left and she got well quickly she became and remains a thorough and enthusiastic Postum convert."
"Her nerves, which had become shattered by the use of coffee have grown healthy again, and today she is a new woman, thanks to Postum." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich., and the "cause why" will be found in the great little book, "The Road to Wellville," which comes in pigtails.

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.