

# 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 presents a mysterious little bronze bell. "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 home 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. When Miss Farrell is mentioned Rutton is strangely agitated. Chatterji appears and summons Rutton to a meeting of a mysterious body. Rutton seizes a revolver and dashes after Chatterji.

## CHAPTER V. (Continued.)

Suddenly Rutton started and wheeled round, every trace of excitement smoothed away. Meeting Amber's gaze he nodded as if casually, and said, "Oh, Amber," quietly, with an effect of faint surprise. Then he dropped heavily into a chair by the table.

"Well," he said slowly, "that is over." Amber, without speaking, went to his side and touched his shoulder with that pitifully inadequate gesture of sympathy which men so frequently employ.

"I killed him," said Rutton dully. "Yes," replied Amber. He was not surprised; he had apprehended the tragedy from the moment that Rutton had fled him.

After a bit Rutton turned to the table and drew an automatic pistol from his pocket, opening the magazine. Five cartridges remained in the clip, showing that two had been exploded. "I was not sure," he said thoughtfully, "how many times I had fired." His curiosity satisfied, he reloaded the weapon and returned it to his pocket. "He died like a dog," he said, "whinpering and blaspheming in the face of eternity . . . out there in the cold and the night . . . It was sickening—the sound of the bullets tearing through his flesh . . . He shuddered.

"Didn't he resist?" Amber asked involuntarily. "He tried to. I let him pop away with his revolver until it was empty. Then . . ."

"What made you wait?" "I didn't care; it didn't matter. One of us had to die tonight; he should have known that when I refused to accompany him back to . . . I was hungry for his bullet more than for his life; I gave him every chance. But it had to be as it was. That was Fate."

With a wrench Amber pulled himself together. "Rutton," he demanded suddenly, without premeditation, "what are you going to do?" "Do?" Rutton looked up, his eyes perplexed. "Why, what is there to do? Get away as best I can. I presume—seek another hole to hide in."

"But how about the law?" "The law? Why need it ever be known—what has happened tonight? I can count on your silence—I have no need to ask. Doggott would die rather than betray me. He and I can dispose of it. No one comes here at this time of the year save hunting parties; and their eyes are not upon the ground. You will go your way in the morning. We'll clear out immediately after."

"You'd better take no chances." Suddenly Rutton smote the table with his fist. "By Indur!" he swore strangely, his voice quavering with joy; "I had not thought of that!" He jumped up and began to move excitedly to and fro. "I am free! None but you and I know of the passing of the Token and the delivery of the message—none can possibly know for days, perhaps weeks. For so much time at least I am in no danger of . . ."

He shut his mouth like a trap on words that might have enlightened Amber. "Of what?" "Let me see: there are still waste places in the world where a man may lose himself. There's Canada—the Hudson bay region, Labrador."

"You shall go on a long journey, David," he said slowly—"a long journey, to a far land, where you shall brave perils that I may not warn you against. It will put your friendship to the test."

"Well?" "Any orders, sir?" "Yes; begin packing up. We leave tomorrow."

"Very good, sir."

Rutton replenished the fire and stood with his back to it, smiling almost happily. All evidence of remorse had disappeared. "Free!" he cried softly. "And by the simplest of solutions. Strange that I should never have thought before tonight of—" He glanced carelessly toward the window; and it was as if his lips had been wiped clean of speech.

Amber turned, thrilling, his flesh creeping with the horror that he had divined in Rutton's transfixed gaze.

Outside the glass, that was lightly silvered with frost, something moved—

the spectral shadow of a turbaned head—moved and was stationary for the space of 20 heartbeats. Beneath the turban Amber seemed to see two eyes, wide staring and terribly slight. "God!" cried Rutton thickly, jerking forth his pistol.

The shadow vanished. With a single thought Amber sprang upon Rutton, snatched the weapon from his nerveless fingers, and, leaping to the door, let himself out. The snow had ceased; only the wind raved with untempered force. Cautiously, and, to be frank, a bit dismayed, Amber made a reconnaissance, circling the building, but discovered nothing to reward his pains. Only, before the window, through which he had seen the peering turbaned head, he found the impressions of two feet, rather deep and definite, toes pointing toward the house, as though some one had lingered there, looking in. The sight of them reassured him ridiculously.

"At least," he reflected, "disembodied spirits leave no footprints!" He found Rutton precisely as he had left him, his very attitude an unuttered question. "No," Amber told him, "he'd made a quick getaway. The marks of his feet were plain enough, outside the window, but he was gone, and . . . somehow I wasn't over keen to follow him up."

"Right," said the elder man dejectedly. "I might have known Chatterji would not have come alone. So my crime was futile." He spoke without spirit, as if completely fagged, and moved slowly to the door.

"David, a little while ago I promised to ask your aid if ever the time should come when I might be free to do so; I said, 'That hour will never strike.' Yet already it is here; I need you. Will you help me?"

"You know that." "I know. . . . One moment's patience, David," Rutton glanced at the clock. "Time for my medicine," he said; "that heart trouble I mentioned."

He drew from a waistcoat pocket a small silver tube, or phial, and uncorking this, measured out a certain number of drops into a silver spoon. As he swallowed the dose the phial slipped from his fingers and rang upon the hearthstone, spilling its contents in the ashes. A pungent and heady odor flavored the air.

"No matter," said Rutton indifferently. "I shan't need it again for some time." He picked up and restored the phial to his pocket. "Now let me think a bit." He took a quick turn up the room and down again.

"A mad dance," he observed thoughtfully; "this thing we call life. We meet and whirl asunder—notes in a sunbeam. Tonight Destiny chose to throw us together for a little space; tomorrow we shall be irrevocably parted, for all time."

"Don't say that, Rutton." "It is so written, David." The man's smile was strangely placid. "After this night, we'll never meet. In the morning Doggott will ferry you over—"

"Shan't we go together?" "No," said Rutton serenely; "I must leave before you."

"Without Doggott?" "Without Doggott; I wish him to go with you."

"Where?" "On the errand I am going to ask you to do for me. You are free to leave this country for several months." "Quite. I corrected the final galley of my 'Analysis of Sanskrit Literature' just before I came down. Now I've nothing on my mind—or hands. Go on."

"Wait," Rutton went a second time to the leather trunk, lifted the lid, and came back with two small parcels. The one, which appeared to contain documents of some sort, he cast negligently on the fire, with the air of one who destroys that which is no longer of value to him. It caught immediately and began to flame and smoke and smoulder. The other was several inches square and flat, wrapped in plain paper, without a superscription, and sealed with several heavy blobs of red wax.

Rutton drew a chair close to Amber and sat down, breaking the seals methodically.

"You shall go on a long journey, David," he said slowly—"a long journey, to a far land, where you shall brave perils that I may not warn you against. It will put your friendship to the test."

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"Bear with me, David, for yet a little while," Rutton begged. "Sit down." "All right, but—" Amber resumed his seat, staring.

"You and Doggott are to seek her out, wherever she may be, and rescue her from what may be worse than death. And it shall come to pass that you shall love one another and marry and live happily ever after—just as though you were a prince and she an enchanted princess in a fairy tale, David."

"I must say you seem pretty damn sure about it!" "It must be so, David; it shall be so! I am an old man—older than you think, perhaps—and with age there sometimes comes something strangely akin to the gift of second-sight. So I know it will be so, though you think me a madman."

"I don't, indeed, but you . . . Well! I give it up," Amber laughed uneasily. "Go on. Where's this maiden in distress?" "In India—I'm not sure just where. You'll find her, however."

"And then—?" "Then you are to bring her home with you, without delay."

"But suppose—?" "You must win her first; then she will come gladly."

"But I've just told you I loved another woman, Rutton, and besides—" "You mean the Miss Farrell you mentioned?"

"Yes. I—?" "That will be no obstacle."

"What! How in thunder d'you know it won't?" Amber expostulated. A faint suspicion of the truth quickened his wits. "Who is this woman you want me to marry?" "My daughter."

"Your daughter!" "My only child, David."

"Then why won't my love for Sophie Farrell interfere?" "Because," said Rutton slowly, "my daughter and Sophie Farrell are the same. . . . No; listen to me; I'm not raving. Here is my proof—her latest photograph." He put it into Amber's hands.

Dazed, the younger man stared

blankly at the likeness of the woman he loved; it was unquestionably she. He gasped, trembling, astounded.

"Sophia . . .!" he said thickly, coloring hotly. He was conscious of a tightening of his throat muscles, making speech a matter of difficulty. "But—but—" he stammered.

"Her mother," said Rutton softly, looking away, "was a Russian noblewoman. Sophia is Farrell's daughter by adoption only. Farrell was once my closest friend. When my wife died . . ."

"He covered his eyes with his hand and remained silent for a few seconds. "When Sophia was left motherless, an infant in arms, Farrell offered to adopt her. Because I became, about that time, aware of this horror that has poisoned my life—this thing of which you have seen something tonight—I accepted on condition that the truth be never revealed to her. It cost me the friendship of Farrell; he was then but lately married—and I thought it dangerous to be seen with him too much. I left England, having settled upon my daughter the best part of my fortune, retaining only enough for my needs. From that day I never saw her or heard from Farrell. Yet I knew I could trust him. Last summer, when my daughter was presented at court, I was in London; I discovered the name of her photographer and bribed him to sell me this." He indicated the photograph.

"And she doesn't know!" "She must never know." Rutton leaned forward and caught Amber's hand in a compelling grasp. "Remember that. Whatever you do, my name must never pass your lips—with reference to herself, at least. No one must even suspect that you know me—Farrell least of all."

"Sophia knows that now," said Amber. "Quain and I spoke of you one night, but the name made no impression on her. I'm sure of that."

"That is good; Farrell has been true. Now . . . you will go to India?" "I will go," Amber promised.

"You will be kind to her, and true, David? You'll love her faithfully and make her love you?"

"I'll do my best," said the young man humbly.

"It must be so—she must be taught to love you. It is essential, imperative, that she marry you and leave India with you without a day's delay."

Amber sat back in his chair, breathing quickly, his mouth tense. "I'll do my best," Rutton, why? "Won't you tell me? Shouldn't I know—I, who am to be her husband, her protector?"

"Not from me. I am bound by an oath, David. Some day it may be that you will know. Perhaps not. You may guess what you will—you have much to go on. But from me, nothing. Now, let us settle the details. I've very little time." He glanced again at the shoddy tin clock, with a slight but noticeable shiver.

"How's that? It's hours till morning." "I shall never see the dawn, David," said Rutton quietly.

"What—?" "I have but ten minutes more of life. . . . If you must know—in a word: poison. . . . That I be saved a blacker sin, David?"

"You mean that medicine—the silver phial?" Amber stammered, sick with horror.

"Yes. Don't be alarmed; it's slow but sure and painless, dear boy. It works infallibly within half an hour. There'll be no agony—merely the drawing of the curtain. Best of all, it leaves no traces; a diagnostician would call it heart-failure. . . . And thus I escape that." He nodded coolly toward the door.

"But this must not be, Rutton!" Amber rose suddenly, pushing back his chair. "Something must be done. Doggott—"

"Not so loud, please—you might alarm him. After it's all over, call him. But now—it's useless; the thing is done; there's no known antidote. Be kind to me, David, in this hour of mine extremity. There's much still to be said between us . . . and in

fession, he never seemed to have any practice to speak of—and he invented this stuff and named it the B-Formula." Rutton tapped the silver phial in his waistcoat pocket, smiling faintly. "He was a good little man. . . . Two minutes. Strange how little one cares, when it's inevitable. . . . He ceased to speak and closed his eyes. A great stillness made itself felt within the room. In the other, Doggott was silent—probably asleep. It was close upon two in the morning.

"Amber," said Rutton suddenly and very clearly, "you'll find a will in my dispatch box. Doggott is to have all I possess. The emerald ring—the Token—I give to you."

"Yes, I—?" "Your hand. . . . Mine is cold? No? I fancied it was," said the man drowsily. And later: "Sophia. You will be kind to her, David?"

"On my faith!" Rutton's fingers tightened cruelly upon his, then relaxed suddenly. He began to nod, his chin drooping toward his breast.

"The Gateway . . . the Bell . . ."

The words were no more than whispers dying on lips that stilled as they spoke.

For a long time Amber sat unmoving, his fingers imprisoned in that quiet, cooling grasp, his thoughts astray in a black mist of mourning and bewilderment.

Out of doors something made a circuit of the cabin, like a beast of the night, stealthy footsteps muffled by the snow; pad—pad—pad . . . In the emerald ring on Amber's finger the deathless fire leaped and pulsed.

CHAPTER VI

Red Dawn.

Presently Amber rose and quietly exchanged dressing gown and slippers for his own shooting jacket and boots—which by now were dry, thanks to Doggott's thoughtfulness in placing them near the fire.

The shabby tin clock had droned through 30 minutes since Rutton had spoken his last word. In that interval, sitting face to face, and for a little time hand in hand, with the man to whom he had pledged his honor, Amber had thought deeply, carefully weighing ways and means; nor did he move until he believed his plans mature and definite.

But before he could take one step toward redeeming his word to Rutton, he had many cares to dispose of. In the hut, Rutton lay dead of poison; somewhere among the dunes the babu lay in his blood, shot to death—foully murdered, the world would say. Should these things become known, he would be detained indefinitely in Nankomis as a witness—if, indeed, he escaped a graver charge.

It was, then, with a mind burdened with black anxiety that he went to arouse Doggott.

"Mr. Rutton is dead, Doggott," he managed to say with some difficulty. Doggott exclaimed beneath his breath. "Dead!" he cried in a tone of amazement. "He had left Amber and was kneeling by Rutton's side. The most cursory examination, however, sufficed to resolve his every doubt.

"Dead!" whispered the servant. He rose and stood swaying, his lips a-tremble, his eyes blinking through a mist, his head bowed. "E always was uncommon good to me, Mr. Amber," he said brokenly. "It's a bit 'ard, comin' this way. 'Ow—'ow did it—" He broke down completely for a time.

When he had himself in more control Amber told him as briefly as possible of the head at the window and of its sequel—Rutton's despairing suicide.

Doggott listened in silence, nodding his comprehension. "I've always looked for it, sir," he commented. "E'd warned me never to touch that silver tube; 'e never said poison, but I suspected it, 'e being blue and melancholy-like, by fits and turns—'e never told me why."

Then, reverently, they took up the body and laid it out upon the hammock-bed. Doggott arranging the limbs and closing the eyes before spreading a sheet over the rigid form.

"And now, what, Mr. Amber?" he asked.

"Mr. Rutton spoke of a dispatch box, Doggott. You know where to find it?"

"Yes, sir."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Salutary Example.

Every legal expedient for delay having been exhausted, and their appeal for executive clemency having been made in vain to the president, five wealthy Alabama lumbermen have entered the federal prison at Atlanta to serve penal sentences for the crime of peonage. Pity will be extended to the families of these men, but the event itself cannot but be regarded as one of the most important and significant in the whole course of the recent awakening of the public conscience. It is a demonstration to the country that only by holding to personal accountability the men responsible for violation of the law can respect and obedience to law be enforced. The futility of fines as a punishment in such cases has been shown, but it will only require a few such applications of the law as in these Alabama convictions to instill a wholesome regard for law everywhere.—Exchange.

Contrary Enthusiasm.

"Funny, wasn't it, how that lecturer warmed up to his subject?"

"Why so?"

"Because it was on cold storage."—Baltimore American.



Studied it for Several Minutes, in Silence.

blanly at the likeness of the woman he loved; it was unquestionably she.

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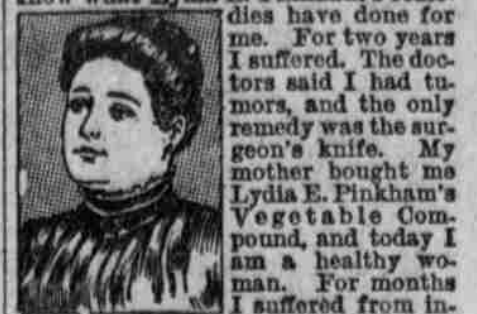
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"That is good; Farrell has been true. Now . . . you will go to India?" "I will go," Amber promised.

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## IN THE COUNTRY.



The City Man—Your father, I believe, cleared the land of everything. The Countryman—Yes—everything but the mortgage.

Baffling the Mosquito.

Last summer we were pestered with the awful nuisance, mosquitoes, night after night, and on one occasion killed between thirty and forty in our bedroom, at midnight. The following day I took a woolen cloth, put a little kerosene oil on it, and rubbed both sides of the wire mesh of the screens with it. That night one lonely mosquito disturbed our rest. Two or three times each week I rubbed the screens in like manner, and we enjoyed peace the rest of the summer. The odor from the oil remains only a few minutes, and the oil itself preserves the screens and keeps away flies.—Good Housekeeping Magazine.

## The Ground of Their Love.

"Let us have peace," said the English invader. "Can you not see that the white strangers love the redmen?"

"Ah, yes," replied the intelligent Indian, "they love the very ground we walk upon."—Sacred Heart Review.

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Is often said of

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