

The Mystery of the Feather.

By TOM GALLON

HESITATE a little before setting down here the record of the last of those adventures in which Enoch Voyce shares. That hesitation arises from the fact that the adventure was so strange and so out of the common, and involves the telling of so extraordinary a story; moreover, it concerns people who live at this moment, and whose names are not, as yet, in the public domain.

More than a year had elapsed since our visit to the quiet city of Romenster, and I had achieved something of my ambition by setting up a modest establishment in the neighborhood of Regent street; that small suburb that had seen my advent into the photographic world knew me no more. And Enoch Voyce—that man of mystery, and my good friend—had accompanied me and occupied a tiny room in my house, under the very roof.

It was on one hot August morning, when people were for the most part out of town, and business was consequently slack, that, looking out of the window of my studio into the street, I saw a cab stop and Inspector Clair get out. Remembrance of old happenings in his company swept into my mind at once, and it was with some eagerness that I welcomed him. The man seemed to be in a great hurry, and had kept his cab waiting. Enoch Voyce joined us even as we began to speak of the object of the Inspector's visit.

"You're a bit above my line just now, Mr. Rattenbury," began the Inspector, "but I should like you to do the business for me, if you will, for old times' sake."

"Is it in the country?" I asked hesitatingly, as I thought of possible clients.

"No," in London, replied Clair. "Rather a sordid business, but mysterious, and rather out of the ordinary. A man has been killed in a house in Lambeth. No one even knows his name or where he came from. He's one of that great shifting population of a big city, here today and gone tomorrow. Only in this case he's been arrested on his journey, as it were, by the hand of death."

"This seemed rather poetical for the Inspector, but I was interested. I begged that he would proceed, while I got my apparatus ready."

"The man, though poorly dressed, was evidently of a superior class, as compared with those with whom he had been associating. However, in spite of that, he had not down as low as Wick's Rents, Lambeth, had taken a room in one of the wretched houses there, and had lived there for two or three days. Last night he was found there, done to death, and with the weapon—a heavy poker from the fireplace—lying beside him."

"Any clues?" asked Enoch.

"Two," replied the Inspector slowly, "a scrap of paper in one of his pockets; in one of his clenched hands a feather."

"A feather?" we both exclaimed at once.

The Inspector appeared gratified by our surprise. He nodded and pursed up his lips.

"A feather," he repeated, "a small thin curled feather, some three inches in length—a white feather. I should say from a box belonging to a woman; though never could such a feather have come from anything worn by a woman in Wick's Rents. However," continued the Inspector, rising to his feet, "we'd better go to the place, we can talk on the way. As you are bringing your camera, and as our friend, Mr. Voyce, is, I hope, accompanying us, I'll dismiss my hansom and call a cab."

If there are in London any worse places than Wick's Rents, Lambeth, I should like to see them. I remember that we went through a low archway and found ourselves in a squalid court, with houses on either side and the high wall of the archway behind. I remember that there were frowny women and scowling men at the doorways, and a little knot of people gathered about one doorway in particular. The Inspector thrust himself through that knot, being made way for eagerly and even slavishly, and we came into the place where the man lay dead. A couple of constables guarded the door, which was closed immediately we had got inside.

He was not a pleasant sight, that dead man. He had only been discovered an hour or so before; the doctor had already reported that he had been dead since the previous night. The blow that had killed him had been a heavy one, and he had died with much strength and subtlety, and had been crushed in the side of his head; he must have died instantly. He lay, a huddled heap, against the table near which he had doubtless been standing.

He was a man of about 40 years of age, with hair going a little gray at the temples. His clothes were old and shabby; his face, even though smoothed by death, showed the marks of disrepair, and suggested, too, that the man had fallen from something better. While we looked at him we spoke in hushed tones, as though the dreadful thing at our feet could hear us.

"Unless we can get finger prints, or can find some motive for the crime there's not much chance of discovering who struck the blow," whispered the Inspector. "He was obviously too poor to rob, and so far as I can find out from my men, he was not known in the neighborhood. Of course, it may have been a quarrel; but then the man had kept himself much to himself during the three days he had been here."

The look of horror at the Inspector's request of the rusty poker at the end of an unspoked arm and the rusted scrap of paper that had been found in the man's pocket and which bore only two or three words, without signature. The words were scrawled in what was evidently a disguised hand; much as though some one had held a pen at the side of his head, and suggested, too, that the man had fallen from something better. The words were these: "Since you threaten me, I will meet you at the time you suggest. Burn this."

I saw also, spread out on the broad palm of Inspector Clair, the feather—a slight thing that a breath would blow away. It had been found caught between the fingers of the dead man—something at which he had snatched



probably as he died. And, as the Inspector suggested, it could scarcely have come from anything belonging to a woman of that neighborhood.

While I was at work there came a tap at the door, and a constable thrust in his head. The Inspector crossed the room to him and they whispered together for a moment. I thought that I heard another voice break in also. Then the burly form of the Inspector filled the doorway, and he stood with his back to us, talking to some one outside. And that some one had the clear, quiet voice of a lady, and I heard the voice distinctly.

"One does not like to think of any one dying so suddenly," said the visitor. "I am known here—the people all know me—and if I can do anything—"

"Nothing, I'm afraid, my lady," replied Inspector Clair. "And it's not a slight that a lady like yourself would care to look on—not a pretty sight."

"I am not afraid," said the clear voice again.

And almost before I knew what had happened the Inspector had drawn back and the woman was in the room.

She was, I think, the most beautiful creature I had ever seen; and she was beautiful in a fashion that had always appealed to me. She had the face almost of a pictured saint; great dark eyes, and the tenderest mouth imaginable, and dark hair flowing back from a broad forehead.

Almost before we knew what was happening she was on her knees beside that wreck of humanity. I saw the Inspector step forward to prevent her, but she waved him back.

"I'm not afraid," she said again. "This man was something better than his fellows. Somewhere in the past for which he must be judged some woman must have loved him; for that cause alone a woman should be beside him now." She looked up and glanced from one to the other of us. "You have no clew?" she asked.

"None, my lady," he said, shaking his head. "We are investigating matters now—taking photographs of finger prints."

"Will that give a clew?" she asked quickly.

"We hope so," said Clair brusquely. "Now, my lady, I must really ask you to leave us; this is no place for you."

She rose to her feet; she stood for a moment or two looking down at the dead man. Then, with her head bowed, she went out of the room, and the door closed behind her. I ventured to ask in a whisper who she was.

"Lady Blesswick," replied Clair. "Done a heap of good down here among these people, one way and another. They fairly worship her. I've counted her in places where I would scarcely have ventured alone myself; he went on, in a hushed voice, "but, as she says, she's not afraid. She's given her life to it for several years now."

My part of the work ended, of course, with the fulfillment of my duties as photographer. I left Inspector Clair to make arrangements for the removal of the body. And here I may mention that the case fell naturally by the verdict of the jury of "murder against some person or persons unknown." Into the category of mysteries left in the hands of the police. In due course I handed over the photographs to Inspector Clair, at the same time hinting to him that with my improved position I did not care to mix myself in such matters in the future.

Curiously enough, Enoch Voyce had refused to ex-

press any opinion in regard to the murder. Once or twice I had endeavored to sound him by suggesting, for instance, that there might have been a quarrel between the dead man and another, and Enoch Voyce had nodded and shrugged his shoulders. Or, again, I had suggested that this might be a case of a mere matter of vengeance long delayed—something that came out of the better part of the man, and had dogged his footsteps since; and again Enoch Voyce had nodded and shrugged his shoulders.

But at last one day, more than a week after our visit to Wick's Rents, he made a suggestion which at that time did not appear to have any connection with the murder. Indeed, it was purely a business suggestion.

"Why don't you ask Lady Blesswick to give you a sitting?" he demanded in his abrupt fashion one day.

"She is connected with all sorts of charitable affairs, meets royally occasionally, and is generally well known. It may lead to business for you. Why not write and ask her to give you a complimentary sitting?"

I did not suppose for a moment that she would accede to any request of mine. However, at Enoch's suggestion, I mentioned that I had had the pleasure of meeting her under somewhat unusual circumstances at the time of the discovery of the murder of an unknown man in Wick's Rents, Lambeth. And to my surprise she replied at once, in a formal but cordial note:

"Lady Blesswick presents her compliments to Mr. Rattenbury, and begs to thank him for his offer. She will willingly place herself in his hands for a photograph, although she scarcely likes to impose on Mr. Rattenbury's kindness in the matter. Soon after 11 on Wednesday next would suit her."

I showed the note to Enoch Voyce, who examined it critically and remarked that the writing showed force of character. To my surprise, too, he lingered over that ordinary note for some time, screwing up his lips and his eyes over it, and putting his hand more on one side than on the other. However, he said nothing, and the day came which was to bring with it Lady Blesswick.

She came simply and quietly dressed. She expressed her thanks to me for having suggested that I should take her photograph, and at the same time a little polite wonder that the photograph should be worth the trouble. Also, she apologized for having brought with her her maid; they were going on together somewhere else afterwards. Besides, this maid was her confidential attendant, and she seldom went anywhere without her.

The maid was, I think, the grimmest looking woman I ever have seen. Some 50 years of age, with hair that was beginning to turn gray and with a mouth that was simply one stern, straight line; with eyes of the fiercest and the brightest, and with ever a jealous gaze upon her mistress. But what attracted me most at that moment, especially having in mind the fact of the murder in Wick's Rents, suggested to me again by the presence of Lady Blesswick, was the fact that this elderly maid wore a white feather bonnet.

I remember that I first noticed it as I stood, after Enoch Voyce had left, and waiting for the few moments necessary for the exposure of the photograph. The fact that Lady Blesswick was an ideal sister, her calm, beautiful face never moved. My eyes strayed from that for a moment to the maid, who was holding her mistress's cloak. And then it was that I saw the bonnet, and remembered in a flash the feather that had been clutched tightly in the dead man's hand.

Of course, the mere suggestion was absurd. I dismissed it with a shudder at once. I told myself that this gentle lady had, on an errand of mercy, happened to come into the room where the man had been done to death. And now her maid was wearing a bonnet of which doubtless there were a thousand replicas in London at that moment. With a feeling of indignation against myself, I squeezed the bulb and closed the shutter. The next moment I was bowing to Lady Blesswick, who was smiling and thanking me. And at the same moment I saw that Enoch Voyce was quietly following the maid of the cloak and was assisting Lady Blesswick with it.

Enoch Voyce went downstairs with them. Returning in a couple of minutes, he closed the door of the studio and stood there with his back to it. I knew that something was wrong, or that he suspected something, by his manner.

"Rattenbury," he said at last, "can you stand a shock?"

"I think so," I replied.

He advanced from the door and came close up to me and spoke in a low tone.

"One of the women who went out of this room—mistress of maid—killed that unknown man in Wick's Rents," he said.

"I thought again of that feather box and I must confess I laughed. The idea was so palpably absurd. Enoch Voyce suddenly opened his hand and displayed on the palm a small, white feather.

"I got it just now when I was taking the cloak from the maid," he said.

"But, my dear Voyce," I remonstrated, "how many feather boxes do you think are being worn in London at this moment? Why, the idea would never have suggested itself to you if you had not seen Lady Blesswick in that room with the dead man?"

Enoch Voyce seated himself on the table near which I stood and spread out the feather on his palm and looked at it. Still looking at it he went on to explain what was in his mind.

"Now, my dear Rattenbury, I do not think you can accuse me of jumping at conclusions," he said. "You doubtless will remember that in the dead man's possession was found a note, which the writer had requested the man to burn, making the appointment with him which doubtless was to mean his death. You have a photograph of that letter and I have carefully examined it. You will remember that it begins with the word 'Since.' The initial letter is peculiarly shaped—a long, firm outline, quite different from the rest of the note, suggesting to my mind that the idea of disguising the writing came into the mind of the writer after the note was begun. Now, in that other note making the appointment for the photograph to be taken, that same capital letter again appears at the beginning of the sentence 'Soon after 11.' And, so far as I can judge, those letters are identical."

"Then what do you suggest?" I asked, in an awestruck voice.

"I scarcely know what to suggest," said Enoch. "It may be the maid; that is the more likely solution of the mystery. I would suggest that, back in the past, this man had had some power over the mistress. I seem to see the grim, determined maid striking him down when he threatens the woman she loves. The fact that the first note was written in a disguised hand and that the second

note was in the second person suggests to my mind that both may have been written by this confidential maid. The wearing of that feather bonnet, from which she could not possibly know that a tiny feather had been snatched on two occasions, confirms me in that suspicion. On the other hand, the man may have had to do with the maid only and the mistress be utterly ignorant of the whole affair. In any case I should like you to take a photograph of that first word in the sentence in the second note. I should like, if possible, to compare the two accurately. Can it be done?"

I informed him that I could take a photograph of the second note on gelatin, so that he could actually place the one capital letter over the other and see to what extent they fitted. So interested was I in the matter that I set to work at once, and was able later in the day to complete the experiment. And when standing beside Enoch Voyce, I placed the gelatin letter over the photograph of the note found in the possession of the dead man, our silence showed that his surmise had been correct, and that the letter "S" in each case was absolutely alike. I felt a little faint, I must admit, as I made the discovery.

"We will take the photographs when they are completed to Lady Blesswick ourselves," said Enoch, quietly. "In any case, she must know what we have discovered."

I remember that interview well. We were shown into a room where Lady Blesswick sat writing. She rose to receive us, and was altogether gracious. I remember that I had a passing thought as to the possibility that she might be connected with that awful tragedy in some way—that she had a pretty child—a fair haired boy—clinging to her skirts.

She was pleased to admire the photographs much, kneeling beside the boy, and making a beautiful picture. With her head close against the child, she showed the photographs to him. I would have given anything to be well out of the matter; but I knew that we must go on.

Enoch Voyce gently suggested that we had something of importance to communicate to her and that the child should be sent away. A sudden still look came into her face. She bowed and saw the child out of the room. Then, when the door was closed, she faced us once. She seemed to know in that moment what she had to face and she took it quite bravely; there was no appeal in her eyes.

Briefly enough Enoch Voyce told her what we had discovered. Of the feather found in the hand of the dead man, so exactly like a feather from a bonnet worn by her maid.

"I gave her that, it belonged to me," broke in Lady Blesswick, in a low voice.

Of the comparing of the two initial letters in the two notes; of the extraordinary fashion in which they fitted; of Enoch Voyce's own suspicion which I had then for the first time—that that dramatic entry of Lady Blesswick into the wretched room in Wick's Rents, Lambeth, was something more than accidental.

"I killed him," she said, quietly, after a pause. "Gentlemen," she raised those wonderful eyes and looked at us as a prisoner might look at her judges—years ago, when I was little more than a child, he came into my life and did me the greatest wrong a man may do to a woman. Slowly, by God's grace, I got away from him; slowly, along the thorniest path that ever a woman trod, I fought my way to the things—the sweeter, brighter things—for which God had meant me. I met and married a good man. I have little children, who think there is no woman in the world so good and so holy as their mother. That the bitterness has remained—I need not tell you. I have plunged down into the depths, from the height to which I have won, to drag back and save, other lost souls; that reparation, at least, I have made. And it was on such an errand that I came, face to face again with the man I had so much reason to dread."

She paused and put her hand to her throat, as though she were choking. Speaking always in that suppressed voice, she yet spoke with a note of passion that thrilled me.

"Once again he stood before me in that room and threatened what he would do. The money with which I could have supplied him to buy his silence was nothing; he did not want that. He would go to my husband and tell him the whole story. He would shame me in the eyes of my children. He would make my name a byword among decent men and women. In his foul hatred of me and of what I had become, he struck at me, and I seized the first weapon that was at hand to protect myself."

Again she was silent, again she mastered herself with a great effort for her final words.

"When I struck him down," she said, in a whisper, "I seemed to put into the blow all that I suffered, all that I feared, all my loathing of the man. He never stirred after that, and I was frightened and came away. That is all."

Enoch Voyce moved across the room and dropped something into the fire. I knew that it was the packet containing the photograph of the first note and the gelatin film of the second, and that second note was the one that Lady Blesswick, he said, simply waving a hand towards the fireplace, "there goes the record of the crime. And just in that way it goes from our minds."

When we looked back, as we were crossing the threshold of the room I saw Lady Blesswick kneeling, with her face hidden in her hands. I closed the door silently and came away.

"For the future, my dear Rattenbury," said Enoch Voyce that night, as we sat together in my studio, "let us confine ourselves to the portrayal by photography of the more or less interesting people who come here from motives of vanity. In your position you can't afford to do so, and it is less harrowing to the nerves and the feelings."

Remembering that figure I had seen upon its knees that day, and remembering certain other adventures that have been duly chronicled, I felt that I could cordially agree with him.

The Coming of Frankel

A Love Romance

TO UNDERSTAND this story from the beginning, your thoughts must journey to the clouds—or, rather, some hundreds of feet above them. And these clouds must be sailing along the Baltic sea, a little off the coast of Sweden. In the clear atmosphere above the clouds was flying a dirigible with a brilliant sun streaming upon the great silk gas bag. It carried one passenger. He was an aeronaut by profession, by name Frankel.

Such is the first scene. The second was taking place at the same time, only a thousand feet below, in the park of a rich landowner, on the island of Oland. That day the rich landowner of Oland was celebrating his silver wedding. Around his house the lovely grounds were thronged with guests. People of all sorts filled the well kept lawns—people from stately homes in Sweden and laborers from the village, workmen employed by their host. And among these, radiant and happy, moved the daughter of the house, laughing and chatting with all alike, regardless of purse or title.

A rule to the east a black speck sank slowly through a gray white bank of cloud. For a while it passed unnoticed, until some one, pointing, asked: "What is that?"

All eyes now turned to the sky. Some said the speck must be a bird, perhaps a golden eagle. But none felt sure, until at last the thing slowly resolved itself into a balloon.

Now they could see the aeronaut moving in the basket. He seemed to be in difficulties, for a stream of sand shot out suddenly from one of the bags suspended outside the wicker car. Then he lowered a long rope, shouting for them to catch the rope and to drag the balloon into the open.

A dozen men sprang to obey, and between them the balloon was brought safely to the ground. A young man sprang nimbly from the car. Hat in hand, he bowed respectfully to the landowner and his wife.

"My name is Frankel," he began, "and I must ask your pardon for appearing in this unceremonious fashion. But my balloon was damaged, and I had to depend whether I liked or not."

The landowner replied that he was welcome, and pressed him to join in the keeping up of his silver wedding. The aeronaut was charming, and beautifully well-dressed. That his host introduced as "my daughter" had not a little to do with his pleasure.

At any rate, he said. And, at any rate, he talked most of the afternoon with the girl. Moreover, before the evening was ended he had accepted his host's invitation to spend a few days with them.

Today the young aeronaut is married to the daughter of the rich landowner of Oland.

How to Get Small Waist Without Lacing

FASHION'S DECREE OF TWENTY-THREE INCH WAIST CAN BE OBEYED BY EXERCISING

Y OUR waist must not be more than twenty-three inches. Empire styles are in—and the corsets of the empire corset are at hand—unless you want to be in style and at the same time be comfortable.

To lace—or not to lace—is the question of the hour. One must have the twenty-three inch waist, yet one must not lace. The doctor says you must not lace—the modiste says the waist must be twenty-three inches, and round—and the solution of the whole problem lies in diet and exercise.

The empire corset has come back, and, unless the women of today are willing to suffer agonies to be squeezed and laced until their digestive apparatus is shoved out of place, their waist compressed, and their heart, and lungs affected—they will have to go into training or out of style—and the one seems to us as bad as the other. The new corsets are round walled, extremely high in the belt line, extremely small, and extremely round. To get into one would force a healthy girl to lie down and let her maid place one foot on her back and pull the strings until she can bear it no longer—until the waist is pinched and the abdomen compressed to the point of agony—and beyond the possibility of eating.

French Insist Upon Torture.

It is terribly unhealthy to lace the corsets tightly—but the French insist upon it—and the way they wear them is to squeeze the lower part just as tight as possible, then unlace the three top holes and lace them loosely with another cord, leaving the bust free—making it possible to breathe, but not to move.

To keep the waist round and high they lace the corsets tightly. Then around the waist they slip a circle of linen and bones, which is tightly hooked-up. This, with this instrument of race suicide and unhealth, is a piece—it will stay in spite of the efforts of nature to get rid of the vital organs.

But it is possible to have the twenty-three inch waist—combined with grace and comfort and the aid of the maid or the instrument of torture. You can make the waist line extremely small without the aid of any of these devices. The ancient Greek and Spartan warriors hips and shoulders, and beautifully maintained by the good old method of diet and exercise. That is exactly what the sensible woman would do today.

The modistes admit that the golf girls and the basketball girls—or many of them—slip into the twenty-three inch girdles with astonishing ease, and wear the empire corsets with but a tug or two—even though they wear medals for prowess in strength and agility.

They understand exercise and they understand the art of eating the right thing in the right amounts.

Exercises for Lessening Figure.

To make the waist little there are three important exercises. The first is a bending one. Seat yourself and bend forward until you touch your toes. Repeat seventy-five times. This is the rowing exercise.

For the second exercise remain seated, throw up your hands and bend backward. Repeat fifty times.

For the third exercise remain seated and bend from side to side. Saw this side and that side until your lips feel numb. This is a great waist reduction exercise.

There are exercises for reducing the weight which are to be taken as one stands erect. Bend from side to side, lifting the arms at the same time. Hold a fan in your hands to assist in the bending operation. Put on your corset before you try this exercise.

The second corset exercise is taken with the fan in both hands. Lift it high above your head. Bend backward so as to keep the arms raised, at the same time bend your body back as far as you can with your corset on. This is for reducing the waist line.

There is one waist exercise which is excellent. It consists of waist compression. Lay your hands on each side of your belt line and press hard. Compress your waist with your finger tips and keep on pressing. You will soon have a waist which you can almost span. Try the hip exercise. Hop up and down. Jump and skip, keeping the feet on the move as if you were dancing. In a little while your waist will grow less as your shoulders and hips grow broad. The chest will fill out, but the belt line will be small like that of a runner. Runners always have a tiny little belt line. A professional athlete can wear a belt of which a society girl would be proud.

Pinching Will Reduce Fat.

Women who wear waist measures thirty inches would do well to study the new method. Do not try to compress your belt line within the limits of a twenty-three inch

The Level Crossing

A Motor Car Experience

ABOUT the middle of last April a powerful automobile might have been seen whisking along one of the straight, hedgeless roads leading to Havre. In front, driving the car, sat a man clad in a heavy fur coat, his face half hidden by a motor mask. Beside him sat a woman, and two others sat behind, their thick winter coats pressing them to the wind. The driver was Sir Duncan Hay of Puckley. Two of the ladies were his sisters, and the third was a friend, Miss Tancred, seventeen miles from Havre, the road led through an avenue of trees. Overhead the thick branches met, forming a long, gloomy, green and brown tunnel, hiding from view everything but the white road. Down this the car rushed, raising a cloud of dust, while the thick trunks of the trees danced by in wild confusion. It was exhilarating to travel at such speed. Not a solitary pedestrian was in sight so there was little danger. And no speed regulations troubled the conscience of the driver.

Halfway down the avenue a gleam of steel flashed in Sir Duncan's eyes. Evidently they were approaching a level crossing. In France such places are not protected by gates, nor is a man employed to warn the wayfarer of approaching trains. Oblivious of danger, Sir Duncan approached the crossing at full speed. Suddenly a shrill whistle sounded above the rattle of the car's machinery. A cry of terror burst from one of the women as the heavy rumble of an approaching train fell on her ears. Sir Duncan heard it also. Despairingly he jammed on the brakes.

Another shrill whistle arose, and through the trees a train burst into view. The car swerved in answer to the brakes, but nothing could stay its mad rush to destruction. With a fearful crash it hurled itself against the engine. The train came to a standstill, and from the engine descended a white-faced driver. As he rushed toward the wrecked car his hands were raised in horror. It seemed well impossible that any one could have escaped.

His eye caught the prostrate form of a woman lying a few yards from the wreck. He wondered if she were dead.

As he bent over her he saw her open her eyes. Then she sat up, and with a cry of joy he helped her to rise.

But there were others. They at least must have been killed or badly injured. They also, however, had risen and were standing, with torn clothes, contemplating the car, now a crumpled mass of iron and smoldering wood.

The same night the four who had escaped death almost by a miracle left Havre for Southampton, no doubt glad to arrive in a country where the level crossings are securely guarded.