

THE MAN IN THE WELL

BY PIERRE SALES

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SYNOPSIS

The body of a man is discovered in the well located on the dividing line between the estates of Arthur and Louis Farades, two brothers. The body is called and upon learning that the body is that of M. Jean Farade, an uncle of the two brothers, Paul Merdus, who is engaged to the daughter of Arthur Farade, is befuddled. He is a French national, a receipt for 350,000 francs is given by M. Calesse, Velazzy and Merdus find a party belonging to Jean Farade. They go to the receipt given by M. Calesse, Velazzy finds that he had known M. Calesse when she was a dancing girl in India. He is suspicious of Calesse and the better to get evidence proposes to him that they go into business together.

"Pretty place, isn't it?" said Smith carelessly. "I could not have said this if I lived in the city. That is why I prefer to live out here. I am not much of a city man. I like the Indian prince. My life is free. When business is over I come down here. I am never dull, I assure you. Everything is to my taste here."

He pointed to a row of windows that were entirely enclosed by matting. "We will dine there presently in true Indian style," he said; "now we must change our dress. I will go to my room and get into my private robes, which were handsomely furnished. He opened a closet filled with Hind costume."

"Select which you like," he said; "help yourselves to anything you want."

"They were in a hurry to get out of their wet clothes, so they left them there. As soon as they were changed, the receipt out of his waistcoat pocket."

"The rogue," he said, "I have commenced to effect the link. If they expect for ten thousand francs had remained a little longer under water it would have been nothing but a piece of pulp. I wonder if his intention was to drown us," said Paul thoughtfully.

"I don't think so. He is too sharp to do that. He has not yet got the fifteen thousand francs from France."

"I am sure that his men were sent to pull us under," said Paul gravely. "Apart from getting our money, he may for some other reason want to get rid of us, but I don't think these men were trying to drown us."

"He has no reason to do that yet," insisted Jacques. "But I am going to hang on to this receipt all the time."

"It is his dinner that I am afraid of," said Paul. "Be careful and only eat after he begins."

They left the dressing room. A servant was waiting for them outside the door. He led the way to the dining room. On the walls were brilliant tapestries, the principal designs of which stood out in arabesques of silk.

In place of chairs there were low divans and immense cushions. In the middle of the room stood the table. On the table was a silver service of red silk, stood waiting for them at the entrance.

"Ah, here we are clothed and in your right minds," he said, smiling. "Yes, we thought we had saved ourselves in Oriental costumes like you," replied Jacques. Dinner was served immediately. During the first courses nothing unusual happened. Now and again they lightly referred to the accident.

As the dinner drew to an end they heard delicate music coming from the garden. The matting of the windows was drawn aside and invisible hands threw gorgeous flowers into the room, strewing the carpet with the fragrant blossoms.

"My compliments, Mr. Smith. You are certainly a good stage setter," said Merdus.

"When one no longer lives in Europe, if one wishes to enjoy life, one must adopt the customs of the country in which one lives," he said.

Two young girls dressed in blue gauze came into the room, carrying a tray which held a coffee service. A young negress followed them, and placed before each guest a pipe that was already filled.

"You will pardon me if I do not follow your example in this?" said Jacques.

He made a sign to his friend not to touch the pipe. He got up from his seat. Smith wanted to follow him. "Excuse me, I'll be back in a minute. I'll get my own cigarettes, I am so accustomed to the tobacco that I do not think I could smoke anything else."

He was already at the other end of the room, and disappeared down the passage by which he had entered.

Jacques found the dressing room where they had changed their clothes. The door was slightly ajar. He could see a man had a suit on, and previously called Girodet, and who had been in charge of the boat, turning over his garments. The pocketing was inside out.

"Sapristi! That scoundrel is giving too much attention to his pockets," said Jacques. "Thinking that it would be best to pretend not to have seen him, he knicked lightly at the door before entering."

At once the man began to spread out the garments as though to dry them. He was laying out a cigarette on the dressing table. He picked it up and returned to the dining room. Although he had been out for a few minutes, he saw at once that Smith was imbibing too freely. The old port had done his blotted face to a deep purple. He was reclined on his cushions, holding a glass in one hand and a decanter of whisky in the other. He was describing in grandiose phrases the delights of Asiatic life.

"No girls can beat the girls here," he said. "Here's to them!"

He drained his glass after having pushed the decanter to Paul.

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"They are not drinking, gentlemen," said Smith in a thick voice. He filled up the glasses.

Three beautiful women came in, dressed in their best. Jacques and Paul stared at this scene in amazement. They were women of some Oriental perfumes were thrown into the air, and placed about the room. The heavy, sultry atmosphere mingling with the fumes of wine and the smoke of cigarettes. Jacques began to feel his head whirling. He got up nonchalantly, and with his hands in the pockets of his wide pantaloons, he walked over to Smith. He gave him a smart slap on the shoulder. "You fool!" he cried, and laughed loudly.

"Come, both of you, and sit down beside me," he said, thickly, and beside me. He sat on his divan, swaying to and fro. The two friends sat on either side of him, but they could not exchange signs. "He's getting terribly drunk," said Paul to himself.

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