

# Two Blooming

# The Adventures of Two Criminals.

BY DOUGLAS WINTON.

# Bay Trees.

"I have seen the wicked . . . spreading himself like a green bay-tree."—Pal. xxvii. v. 35.

(Continued.)

"Now Jack," said Piggy, "get your coat and cap, say good-bye to our famous chest, for we shall soon have seen the last of it. By the way, if there is any more of that patent corpse-reviver, drink, you might fetch it along. We're not dead yet, though we are through the worst part; and I think we can give ourselves five minutes for rest and refreshment. Our next move has got to be a spurt."

"Seems to me that every move is a spurt tonight," said Jack laughing, as he came crawling along with a blazer and cricketer's cap, and the last flask of cyclist's mixture. "Talk about honest sweat! It's not a patch on ours!"

"That's as it should be," replied Piggy. "Honest men sweat for a miserable wage; we are sweating tonight for half a million sterling. Now, Jack, to it again! The tender with the passengers will be alongside in half an hour or so, and we must have all this lot overboard before then."

"Right you are," replied Jack, "what are the stations?"

"Simplest you can imagine," replied Piggy. "You stand just here, in the doorway, and I stand opposite, just inside my cabin. You hand me the wallets as quick as you can, and I put 'em through the port-hole. We ought to do them ten or a dozen a minute."

"You're not afraid of the splash?" suggested Jack.

"Not a bit; I had arranged an affair to lower them down to the water's edge before letting go; but it would have taken time. As it is, we shan't need it; there's quite a little blow on, and the noise of the waves, even here in harbour, will cover any sound of splash made by the wallets. No, the one thing of which I am afraid is that someone may come in to the alley-way, and see us at work. That's just the chance we must take. And it's not such a long chance either; till the tender comes with the new passengers, there is nothing to bring anyone here; and if anyone should pass, just by chance, it will probably be some sailor, who knows nothing except his own particular duty, and will never dream that anything illegal is being done. When the tender comes, and the new passengers are being shewn down to their cabins, it will be different; and oh, by Jove! there will be enquiries then for our friend the baggage-man, now in my cabin. All of which goes to show that we have no time to lose. You stand here, Jack."

So saying, Piggy opened the baggage-room door, glancing keenly along the alley-way as he did so. No one! Officers, no doubt, were on the

bridge, and sailors getting all ready for hoisting up the anchor; but that part of the ship was altogether deserted, and wrapped in slumber.

To say that they worked feverishly would be to poorly express it. The wallets flashed from Jack to Piggy, and by Piggy were dropped out of the port-hole like a juggler's balls. Some noise, of course, was unavoidable; and if Piggy had not taken the precaution of ensuring that cabin 130 should be vacant, might have caused trouble. But once into the swing of it, it was astonishing how rapidly and silently the work went on. The paddle-wheels of the tender were plainly audible while yet quite a pile of wallets remained. They set their teeth, and worked the harder. Piggy put the last wallet through the port-hole just as she grated a long-side.

"In here, quick, Jack!" he said.

When Jack was in the cabin, Piggy once more locked the baggage-room door, then sent the key flying through the porthole, to join the wallets at the bottom of the sea. Scarcely had he done so, when voices were heard outside.

"Hush!" he whispered, and extinguished the light.

"What's th' good o' lookin' 'ere?" came one voice. "Ee ain't 'ere. Must be forward in 'is berth."

"Call 'im," replied another voice. "Ee may be 'avin' a sleep in the baggage-room."

"Call yer grandmother," rejoined voice number one. "If I calls 'im I wakes up all the bloody passengers, and gets reported. Sides, 'ee ain't in the baggage-room, leastways not unless 'ee's boosed, 'ee ain't. Wot'd 'ee be doin' there?"

"Ow should I know?" was the reply. "But 'ee's got ter be found. Old man's in a rare stew about 'im; 'ole tender full o' baggage ter be got down, an' th' bloody baggage-man ain't ter be found."

"Go and look, yer sily, 'ee must be somewhere."

And the talkers shuffled off.

"It's our friend 'ere they want," said Piggy, indicating to Jack a huge figure, recumbent in the lower bunk, snoring with a snore that was almost a roar.

"Holl, it's none of our business to help them find him," said Jack.

"On the contrary," replied Piggy. "I think it will be very good business for us to do so. It's a markin' with me, that when you want to keep people from meddling with what they have no concern. There is no better plan than to give them something to amuse them. Now you and I will just give these ship people this beauty to amuse them. Take his head, Jack, and I'll take the heels."

"Where are we going to put him?" asked Jack.

"In the vacant cabin next door," Piggy replied, "with one foot on the sill, where he's bound to be found. It'll look as if he got boosed, and crawled in there to sleep it off. Now then!"

When they had carried out this plan, they stepped quietly back into Piggy's cabin.

"And now, I take it," said Jack, "the sooner we are off the better."

"Yes," replied Piggy, "we're both dressed in things that can easily be made decent again after a wetting. Here's your life-buoy."

So saying he handed Jack two bunches of corks, joined by a string.

"Home-made," he said, laughing. "But it's all you'll need. In fact, I don't suppose that we need anything, either of us; it can't be more than half a mile to the shore, and the water is warm."

"Money all right?"

"Hundred in belt, as usual," replied Jack, "and—"

He put his hand in his trouser's pocket, and drew out a collection of sovereigns and silver.

"That's all serene then," said Piggy. "I've got plenty too. Now, our business is to make for the quietest place on the main deck, and drop ourselves overboard as unobtrusively as possible. Not two people on the ship know me by sight, and anyone who sees you will take you for one of the new passengers, or one of their friends, come to see them off. Ready? Then forward, march! The only human beings they encountered were a couple of stewards and one of the ship's officers. One of the stewards held aside the curtain across doorway of cabin No. 130, and the officer was surveying the figure of the much-wanted baggage-man, recumbent on the floor."

"Well!" he said, as he made room for Piggy and Jack to pass. "Of all the drunken beasts!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Inspector Mackay Gets a Clue.

Earliest dawn saw two bedraggled figures make a landing on a shelving beach a mile or so from the town of Southampton, just opposite where, a few cables' length away, a big ship was heaving up her anchor, and starting on her voyage to South America.

"Hee-er!" said Piggy. "Feels a bit chilly, doesn't it? Never mind a sharp walk will soon nip up the circulation again. However, first we must look for some leading marks" (Piggy had not studied navigation for nothing).

"Ah!" he continued, "you see that church spire?"

"Yes."

"Well, notice that spire and ourselves, or, what is the same thing,

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she showed them into the best room she had. If the bed was hard, they were both a great deal too tired to notice it, and soon, covered up with blankets, they were fast asleep. Meanwhile, Mrs. Jones, who had worked for a tailor before she was married, not only dried, but ironed and pressed their clothes.

That evening, when they put them on, they looked so respectable and dapper, that they walked straight to Southampton Station and took the train for London.

"To we make for the studio?" asked Jack.

"Not!" said Piggy. "To the best of my knowledge I left nothing behind at Ratcliffe Street to connect me with the studio at Kew."

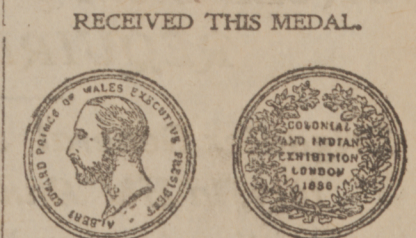
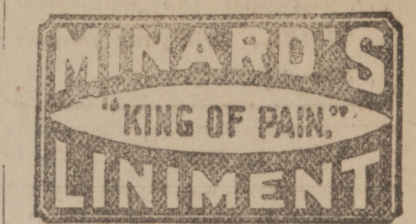
"And we certainly threw them off that night," said Jack.

"Yes," said Piggy. "I don't think that there is any doubt about that. I don't think that there is any other clue; but then, again, I don't know. I have a sort of presentiment. And if the police have tumbled to our connection with the studio, it would be a little too foolish to go walking, both of us together, into the trap. And there is something else."

"What?—or rather, you're right," said Jack, "there is something else: all the Tony Croft jewels are in the studio."

"I'll defy them to find them—that is, unless they regularly sack the place," said Piggy, "and they can hardly have enough to go on to do that. No, the something else I was alluding to was the fact that you and I ought to take a rest. No one can keep up the nervous strain we've been enduring lately for ever. So what I say is, let us go straight from Waterloo to one of those six-hundred little hotels in Stamford Street, close to the station—we can just step to buy enough luggage for restability—and lie up there for a few days. Smoke, eat, drink, sleep, read, and perhaps go to one of the smaller music halls in the evening. In fact, take a short rest cure. A few nights hence I will take a boat and investigate how things are at the studio."

(To be continued.)



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