

Beyond The Great South Wall:

The Secret of the Antarctic

BY FRANK SAVILE

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I A GREAT DEPRESSION

CHAPTER II THE TALE OF A COINCIDENCE

CHAPTER III THE TESTIMONY OF SIR JOHN
DORINECOURTE, KNT.

CHAPTER IV WHAT BAINES KNEW

CHAPTER V PROFESSOR LESSAUTION'S OPINION

CHAPTER VI WE SAIL SOUTH

CHAPTER VII A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

CHAPTER VIII BEFORE THE GALE

CHAPTER IX THE LEAPING OF THE WALL

CHAPTER X BEHIND THE BARRIER

CHAPTER XI A GLACIER CAVE AND WHAT LAY THEREIN

CHAPTER XII THE GREAT GOD CAY

CHAPTER XIII A CLOSED DOOR

CHAPTER XIV IN THE NINTH CIRCLE

CHAPTER XV THE MOUNTAIN WAKES

CHAPTER XVI THE TEMPLE AND THE LAIR OF CAY

CHAPTER XVII A LITTLE DOG'S STUMBLE

CHAPTER XVIII A DESPERATE BETROTHAL

CHAPTER XIX A WONDROUS BREACHING OF THE WALL



THERE WAS A HUM AND A FLICK AS THE ROPE PARTED.

CHAPTER I

A GREAT DEPRESSION

The purr and throb of London was quivering in stuffily through the open windows. The squeals of the “special” newsboys and the hansom-whistles of the early diners-out splashed across the blur and din, standing out against the immeasurable roar as against a silence. The heat of a London summer lay heavily over us; the undying rattle of wheels beat up to us wearily, the mid-season blare and hurry of town echoing irritatingly in their jingle and clatter as they streamed ceaselessly by. The stew and hubbub of the afternoon enclosed us as with a pall of depression.

By us I mean Gerry and myself. Flung back listlessly was I in my club chair, and watching him as he strolled monotonously up and down before the great bow-window that gave upon Pall Mall. His hands were scabbarded hilt high in his pockets. His brows and the corners of his eyes were hard and wrinkled. His gaze was cast steadfastly before his toes. He did a very sentry-go of moody vexation.

Each time he paused, as he turned against the light, every wrinkle and line was silhouetted mercilessly. Wretchedness covered his face as with a mask. My heart began to go out to him, bursting through its own crust of dejection. Wretched we both were, but I was seven years his senior. I began to commune with myself, seeking comfort for him out of my own hard-won store of disappointment, and trying to forget that our sorrows sat upon an even base.

Suddenly he turned towards me and broke the silence that had lasted between us the greater part of the afternoon.

“Well,” he said harshly, “that’s the end of most things for me.”

“Possibly,” answered I, “but probably not. The future’s very spacious yet, my dear boy. I don’t say it in any patronizing spirit, but you’re only twenty-four. Try to forget the ‘might-have-been,’ and buck yourself up into imagining the ‘maybe.’ It’s not all over yet.”

He grunted contemptuously, tramping off again upon his beat. A waiter who chanced in with the evening papers coughed ostentatiously, and with obvious intention towards the cloud of dust that followed hard upon his track. Gerry stared him down, and as the door closed behind him, brought himself to anchor before me again.

“That’s all rot, and you know it, Jack,” he said dogmatically. “Do you think I’m going to stay here and see Vi come back another man’s wife? I’m sick of it all—sick of the work, sick of the play. Deathly sick of the utter sameness of what we call life. I’m going to chuck it, I tell you. Hausa Police, Egyptian Army, Hong Kong Regiment—something of the kind I’m going to try. There’s nothing most assuredly to keep me any longer in her Majesty’s Foot Guards. I’m dipped, and I’ve lost the one thing that might have kept me to the collar. Great Heavens! what in the name of goodness *should* I stay for?”

I stared back at him answerless. I knew he was talking a cheap sentiment which a month or two later he would be the first to despise. I too was feeling in a modified form all he felt. To me had also come the animal desire for action that follows hard upon

mental stress. But that seven years made the difference. Though that day had brought me the supreme discontent of my life, I was still aware that the world continued to wag, and that we should swing along with it. Yet how could I comfort without offending?

Now the reason of all this affliction was simple enough and old as time. To each of us had come the desire of his life, and to each had it been denied. That morning we had spent at the Albert Docks, and had seen a tall ship sail out for foreign lands, bearing upon her decks two maidens who were taking with them our hearts to the world's end.

I never was much of a chap for lover's rhapsodies, so I will make no effort to explain to you how sweet a girl was Gwen Delahay, nor why she held my heart in the hollow of her hand. She was one of the many good and beautiful women—God bless them—who walk this earth, and are to their lovers peerless. And as I worshipped her, so did Gerry worship Vi, her sister—a thing perhaps inexplicable, in that he had seen Gwen, but one to be truly thankful for, seeing that we were friends beyond the ordinary sympathies of life. And now were we left hopeless.

Plain Captain Dorinecourte was I, with a slender six hundred pounds beyond my pay, and Gerry, poor lad, had less. You will not exhaust yourself with wonder then, when I relate the fact that Lady Delahay declined on behalf of her daughters our attentions, contemned our eligibility, and hated poisonously the sight of our ingenuous faces. For all these things, I take it, a Society mother is bound by her allegiance to Society to do. Yet though we felt that she played the game as we understood it, none the less did we cry out upon our luck in being the losers. And now it seemed that we might well throw down our cards.

The fond mother's fears of the blight which our undivided attentions might throw upon her daughters' careers had culminated that morning. A month before an announcement in the *Morning Post* had spurred her to an action which her fear alone would never have conceived. It ran as follows—

“Among the passengers by the s.s. *Madagascar*, which sails on August 4 for her winter's cruise around the world, will be the Earl of Denvarre. His lordship will be accompanied by his brother the Hon. Stephen Garlicke.”

This item of intelligence had caught the dutiful mother's eye, and taken vigorous root in her somewhat languid intelligence. Two eligible young men were to be shut up for eight or nine months in a space not more than one hundred yards long by twenty wide. Walking lawlessly in London were two extremely ineligible youths, unchained, ready and willing to wreck her daughters' happiness. Why not extract the victims from this hazardous propinquity, placing them at the same time in the financially commendable vicinity of a live earl and his brother. Action was born only too rapidly from reflection. We had seen them off that very morning.

So there sat we in the desolation of a mere club, disconsolate amid the roar of the city, while the sunset became the twilight, the shadows of the lamp-posts lengthened, and darkness fell upon the town even as upon our hearts. And out of the plenitude of my regret I failed to find the word of sympathetic comfort for Gerry.

Lost in our heavy-hearted musings, it was past eight when we realized that food was yet a distasteful necessity of existence, and sought the club dinner. Silently we entered the dining-room, Gerry with the air of one who approached poisoned dishes, and chose a

table apart. Though the soup and sherry warmed my companion to conversation, it had a bias of marked contempt.

Clubs, he showed beyond dispute, were traps for the unwary, committees were things of naught, secretaries insolent and overpaid. Waiters were plucked from the gutter to be trained in pot-houses, and cooks cherished the idea that to evolve a savoury it was but necessary to taint an olive with a decayed anchovy. Women who were guests of brother members—it was Wednesday night—were all dressed in seventeen tints of garish atrocity, and were of a mediocrity of feature which he plainly condemned. He mentioned the names of no less than six social resorts off which he purposed to take his name in the morning. This, of course, preparatory to stirring activities which would remove him beyond their sphere of usefulness. Still soured, but evidently relieved, he then retired behind the sheets of the *Westminster*, with which he screened himself from further intercourse with his fellows. Apathetically I proceeded with my repast.

Suddenly the decorum of the room received a shock. A sound burst from Gerry's throat which I can only term a crow. He endeavored frantically and indecently to masticate the portion which he had placed between his teeth, beating the paper at me furiously. The sounds which continued to issue from his lips were such as no one could approve. He mouthed unutterable things.

Hastily I rose and thumped him on the back, and noticed that his finger continued to tap viciously upon a headline which he thrust into my face. As the distressing symptoms modified themselves he gradually found his breath, but ceased not to bulge his eyes upon me.

“Look, old man, look,” he insisted faintly, and I took the paper from his hand.

“We regret to announce the death of Viscount Heatherslie at Greytown, Central America. His lordship had lately been travelling in the vicinity, and his death is ascribed to malarial fever. As yet no details can be ascertained.”—*Reuter*.

The words turned red before my eyes as they danced up and down the green columns. Uncle Leonard was dead—was dead. And I—well, I had to think it very hard indeed before I dared repeat it silently even to myself—I was Lord Heatherslie. Only one thought had possession of my mind. Not a regret did I spare for the dead, not a single reflection as to what this thing meant to me or my prospects did I give beyond the fact that my luck—my cursed Irish luck—had been too late. That one idea had hold of me. A week earlier—a few hours earlier, and what might have been?—what might have been? A curse snarled from between my teeth as I sat down again to stare white-faced across at Gerry.

The excitement had died from his face. His sympathy was quicker than mine had been. He stretched his hand across the table and gripped mine hard.

“Frightful luck, old chap,” he murmured; “I know what you’re thinking. But—but it needn’t be too late yet, Jack.”

I shook my head. Things had become blurred in my brain, but one fact stood out bright as a searchlight to my mind’s eye. Gwen was going out of my life, going away from me as fast as breeze and steam would take her. And the thing that might have stayed our separation—have given her to me—was a week—nay, only a

day—too late. I could have smitten my head against the wall in my agony of disappointment.

And yet I had resigned Gwen as fatalistically as any son of Islam. I had schooled myself to think of her as already belonging to another. I had bidden her good-bye without a quiver. Even the look she had given me at the last—a tender, questioning look it was too, and straight from her heart through her dear eyes—I had met with a smile that told of nothing. To me the hopelessness of it all had come home long days before, and I simply wouldn't sadden the poor child and prolong the pain of parting. I meant that parting to be the absolute separation of our lives—one that should leave no dropped threads to be gathered up in future days of further hopelessness.

And now—now I had the right to win her, and honourably. Only a soldier I might be, but I had a place of my own to take a wife to. Nor would she come to me to sink into a nobody. Half a county would welcome Lady Heatherslie, though half that county might be in rags. Poor we should always have been, but not desperately. Modestly we should have had to live, but we could have kept our rank befittingly. And now the chance was gone. Away beyond the seas she would set herself to forget me, and Denvarre would show her how. The black curses fell over each other in their haste to reach my tongue, and the salt tears nigh fled out along with them. I made an effort and pulled myself together.

“Come along,” said I hoarsely to Gerry in a voice that I hardly knew myself, and blundered out of the room. Without another word I crept into the hansom the commissioner called, and together we drove down the glaring streets to my rooms, Gerry

offering no sympathy but a silence which I understood and was grateful for.

You know the heavy, choking pain that lies leaden in your throat when one you love has gone out into the emptiness—the desperate unbelief in your torture—the mad hope that insists that this thing is too horrible to bear. My suffering came home to me like that. I could only think of Gwen as of one dead and gone from me, but with the added agony of knowing that to me she might have been life and love itself. I felt that I could beat the air, wrestling with my fate for my desire. I gasped, unmanned with wretchedness.

Then Gerry rose and put his hand upon my shoulder. Here again his selfishness was seven years younger than mine. He could lose his sorrow in sympathy.

“God be good to you, dear old chap,” he said; “it’s desperate, desperate luck, but after all *is* it too late? You’ve the place, the title, and all that—and after all, you know, the old boy might have come home and married any day—why can’t you follow them? Surely you might drop in with them somewhere.”

“Too late? Of course it’s too late,” said I bitterly. “Is a girl to wait for ever? Besides, they can’t hear of it for weeks—very likely not at all. By then Denvarre will have settled matters, if he isn’t the most consummate idiot on earth.”

“That may be all very well about Denvarre,” quoth Gerry wisely, “though I don’t see that it is for certain, all the same. But what about Gwen? You don’t allow her much independence of thought. Why should he happen to meet her fancy? Do you think she doesn’t *know* you worship the ground she walks on?”

I stared at him, gnawing uneasily at my moustache, and with the sense that he spoke the truth. Gwen knew it—must know it, but she must have seen, as did I, the hopelessness of the business—must have known that the farewell of that morning was to be the end. And yet—and yet that look she gave me. Was it merely questioning, or did it tell me something? I fell into that moody, unhealthy mind when one forbids oneself to hope for very hope of being mistaken—assuring myself that I knew there could be nothing but despair for me in the future, trusting all the same that wanton fate would prove me wrong. Which is a phase of unreason, I take it, more wearing than an utter yielding to desperation.

“Now, old chap,” went on Gerry soberly, “if you begin to muse and wonder you’ll never sleep to-night. I believe this thing comes in the light of luck for both of us. I feel twice the man I did half-an-hour ago, and I’m going to whine no more. However matters go you’re very much better off than you were this morning, and, as I said before, what’s to prove that either Gwen or Vi may not come back to us again? Heaps of things may happen in a year. Why,” he went on smiling, “with the influence of the Heatherslies at my back I mean to get an *attachéship* and marry Vi myself. At any rate I believe now that the game’s *not* over. I’ll be your best man yet, unless we’re both married together, and I won’t say that’s not possible.”

It was good to hear him say it, but all the time I was telling myself frantically that it was rot—that I mustn’t listen to him, and I backed my inward despondency with the spoken word.

“But even now,” I demurred, “what am I but a pauper peer? Fifty thousand acres of bog are mine, and a few English farms. What’s

that to Denvarre's forty thousand pounds a year and Gleivdon? I'd take an offer of five thousand pounds a year for all I possess."

He rose and slapped me on the back cheerily, smiling as he reached for his hat.

"There, there," said he, "that's quite enough, Jack. I'm off, and you're going to tumble in. You'll be twice the man in the morning. You're upset with it all, and to-morrow when you're a bit steadied you'll see it all in another light. We'll have a long colloque about it then, and you'll know what you're going to do. Night-night, old man, and don't dream if you can help it," and he passed across to his rooms whistling, though I could but notice it was a very reedy, quivering attempt.

In spite of Gerry's veto I did dream that night, seeing Denvarre in many a heroic attitude save Gwen from desperate perils by flood and field—masterful deeds which I could only watch in restless helplessness. I rode a nightmare which trampled my every aspiration in the mud of desolation, leaving me to awake heavy-eyed and low-spirited, but yet, as Gerry predicted, with some of the hope that each new day brings. And after my bath—and what a mental as well as bodily tonic a cold bath is—I was chastened, maybe, but myself again. I filled my clothes without feeling three sizes too small for them, and ate my breakfast with appetite. As I was at it, Barker brought in a telegram. I ripped the dirty orange-colored paper and read, "Please call at your earliest convenience. Meadows and Crum."

They are our lawyers—have been for generations. My former meetings with them had been, for the most part, embarrassing. Hunted by some pertinacious dun, I had occasionally fled to their

chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields as to a sanctuary, and they had always responded nobly to my appeals. I smiled to think how continually and tactfully they had warned me against backing other men's bills and such-like futilities. Well, at any rate that sort of thing was over. As a bachelor—I still assured myself that I should live and die celibate, with an eye to the possible fate which might be listening—I should not be so badly off. I could look forward to commanding the regiment some day without begging myself. Little rifts of sunlight like this began to break through the fog of my depression, and when I strolled forth to call upon my solicitors, I had pretty well regained the self-possession which that sudden announcement of a tardy good luck had knocked completely out of my system.

Crum received me. Meadows is an anachronistic figment of the imagination long deposited in a Hampstead vault. His partner continues the business with other partners, who are considered to be sufficiently dignified by the title of Co. He is a benignant old man, with an unblemished bald head and character. I believe a warm heart beats under his deliberation, and he has shown good faith and personal service to my family for more years than I dare say he cares to count. He welcomed me with a quaint subdued tolerance hovering on the outskirts of the chastened air he thought befitting the mournful occasion. For myself I will say frankly and at once that I could pretend no regret for the accident which led to my being Crum's future client. I had never even seen my uncle since I was at Eton. In point of fact I felt the matter to be, personally, only one for self-gratulation.

“Desperately sudden, my lord,” quoth the old gentleman, making me twitch in my chair as I heard myself addressed by my title for the first time, “desperately sudden. We received advises from his

late lordship on financial matters only a week ago, and now—it's come like a thunderclap, I assure you.”

“These are matters of fate, my dear Mr. Crum,” said I piously. “I suppose there's no doubt about the report?”

“None whatever, as I learn this morning. We cabled his lordship's valet last night and got the press message confirmed. Death took place up-country, it seems. Baines, his man, talks of bringing the body to the coast and sailing next week by the Pacific Mail Steamer.”

“That of course is the only decent and orderly thing to do,” said I, “and no doubt you'll kindly see to all these matters—arranging for the funeral and so forth. But what about funds now? I expect this horrible succession duty will make me as poor as a rat for the first year or two, won't it?”

He lifted his pince-nez, regarding me with a curious expression. I immediately divined by a sort of intuition that he purposed giving himself the pleasure of surprising me. There was a decorously cunning light in the corner of his eye that made him appear not unlike a respectable and intelligent magpie.

“I think you and your uncle were comparatively strangers to each other, were you not? Ah, I thought so. You have the impression, doubtless, that he was restless by choice and temperament alone? I can assure you, in that case, that you are mistaken. Your uncle, for the last few years of his life at any rate, has been dominated by a very determined purpose.”

“Philanthropic or personal?” I queried. “Not the former I sincerely trust, or the pickings will be even less than I hope for. I know he's

been roaming the wide world mysteriously ever since I can remember, but I thought it was the inherited taint of travel. We've had a lot of sailors in the family, Mr. Crum."

"That is very true," answered the man of law impressively, "and in a certain indirect sense I won't say you are altogether wrong. But the simplest way will be to put the whole matter before you as I learned it from your uncle. Excuse me a moment."

He turned to where a row of tin boxes, shiny and white-lettered, lined the walls along a broad shelf. Taking down one labelled "Viscount Heatherslie," he took up a key that had been lying handy upon the desk and opened it. He extracted a bundle of papers tied in red tape, and began sorting them with neat precision. I occupied myself in wondering with unaffected curiosity what on earth was coming next.

Of course Uncle Leonard had been a wanderer on the wide earth, but he had always been to me not so much a man as an impression. My poor dear mother used to remark occasionally, "I see your uncle's wintering in Egypt," or "Leonard's in Japan again," wondering always, as women do, what could induce him to leave the comforts of his native isle for such outlandish realms. But I had paid but slight attention. Uncle Leonard was nothing to me—I was his heir-at-law, of course, but then he had always been expected to marry late in life, as most of his ancestors had done, and I had never troubled about him. I remember his coming down one Fourth at Eton and stumbling across me, more by accident than intention, and tipping me a fiver. But that was a feat he had never followed up and improved upon in later life, so I had let him drop out of my calculations, and he—well, he never spent three weeks of the year in England, I suppose. Some men have the regular gypsy taint in

the blood. They must move in aimless joy of moving, or they absolutely shrivel up for want of occupation. The mania in his case was more or less inherited, I knew. Half-a-dozen of our forebears have been adventurers—not to say buccaneers—in the past. They pop up in various capacities all across the pages of Elizabethan and eighteenth century history. So the fact that in my late uncle's case there was more behind this activity than was his by birth and ancestry came to me truly as a surprise. I awaited developments pondering many possibilities.

Old Crum found what he wanted at last. Replacing all the papers but one—rather a musty-looking document—he kennelled his legs comfortably beneath his writing-table and began his revelation, tapping his fingers upon the dusty law books before him to emphasize his remarks.

I'll give you the tale as he gave it to me. Then judge me if I was a consummate fool or not, in that I followed in the footsteps of my uncle.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

