

I wonder how it feels to have something happen to you, something really remarkable.

"That orchid collector was only 36—twenty years old, and he was a mystery to us all. And he had been married twice and divorced once; he had had material fever four times, and once he broke his thigh. He killed a Malay once, and once he was wounded by a poisoned dart. And in the end he was killed by jungle-leeches. It must have all been very troublesome, but then it must have been very exciting, you know—except, perhaps, the leeches."

"I am sure it was not good for him," said the lady with conviction.

"Perhaps not." And then Wedderburn looked at his watch. "Twenty-three minutes past 8. I am going up by the quarter to 12 train, so that there is plenty of time. I think I shall wear my alpaca jacket—it is quite warm now, and my grey felt hat and brown shoes, I suppose."

He gazed out of the window at the serene sky and sunlit garden, and then nervously at his cousin's face.

"I think you had better take an umbrella if you are going to London," she said in a voice that admitted of no denial.

When he admitted he was in a state of mild exasperation, he was right. It was rare that he could make up his mind quickly enough to buy, but this time he had done so.

"There are Vandals," he said, "and a Dendrobium and some Paleomorphs." He surveyed his purchases lovingly as he consumed his soup. They were laid out on the spotless table cloth before him, and he was telling his cousin all about them as he slowly meandered through his dinner. He had his plan to live all his visits to London over again in the evening for her and his own entertainment.

"I knew something would happen to-day. And I have bought all these. Some of them—some of them—I feel sure, you know, that some of them will be remarkable. I don't know how it is, but I feel just as sure as if some one had told me that some of these will turn out remarkable."

"That one's—" he pointed to a shrivelled rhizome—"was not identified. It may be a Paleomorph—or it may not. It may be a new species, or even a new genus. And it was the last that poor Batten ever collected."

"I don't like the look of it," said his housekeeper. "It's such an ugly shape."

"I don't like those things that stick out," said his housekeeper.

"It shall be put away in a pot to-morrow."

"It looks," said the housekeeper, "like a spider shamming dead."

Wedderburn smiled and surveyed the root with his head on one side. "It is certainly not a pretty lump of stuff, but you can never judge of them by their appearance."

It turned out to be a very beautiful orchid indeed.

"How busy I shall be to-morrow! I must see to-night just exactly what to do with these things, and to-morrow I shall set to work."

"They found poor Batten lying dead, or dying, in a mangrove swamp—I forget which," he began again presently, "with one of these orchids crushed up under his head. He had been unwell for some days with some violent fever, and I suppose he faints."

"These poor men are like savages. Ever drop of blood, they say, was taken out of him by the jungle leeches. It may be that very plant that cost him his life to obtain."

"I think none the better of it for that."

"Men must work though women may weep," said Wedderburn with profound gravity.

"Fancy dying of a fever every summer in nasty places!" Batten being ill was with no one to take but chlorophore and quinine—if men were left to themselves they would live on chlorophore and quinine—and no one round you but horrid natives! They say the Andaman islanders are most disgusting wretches—and, anyhow, they can scarcely make good nurses, not having the necessary training. And just for people in England to have orchids!"

"I don't suppose it was comfortable, but some of us must do it for the kind of thing," said Wedderburn. "Anyhow, the natives of his party were sufficiently civilised to take care of all his collection until his colleague, who was an ornithologist, came back again from the interior; though they could not tell the species of the orchid, and had let it wither. And it makes these things more interesting."

"I think that disgusting. I should be afraid of those things if I had to come to them. And just think, there has been a dead body lying across that ugly thing! I never thought of that before! There! I declare I cannot eat another mouthful of dinner."

"I will take them off the table if you like, and put them on the window seat. I can see them just as well there."

The next morning he was indeed singularly ill in his steaming little hothouse, fusing about with charcoal, lumps of teak, moss, and all the other mysteries of the orchid cultivator. He considered he was having a wonderfully eventful time. In the evening he would talk about these new orchids to his friends, and over and over again he reverted to his expectation of something strange. Vandals and the Dendrobium under his care, but presently the strange orchid began to show signs of life. He was delighted, and took his housekeeper right away from jam-making to see it at once, directly he made the discovery.

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"That is a bud," he said, "and presently there will be a lot of leaves there, and those things coming out here are aerial rootlets."

"They look to me like little white fingers poking out of the brown. I don't like them," said his housekeeper.

"Why not?"

"I don't know. They look like fingers trying to get at you. I can't help my likes and dislikes."

"I don't know for certain, but I don't think there are orchids that have aerial rootlets quite like that. It may be fancy, you see they are a little flattened at the ends."

"I don't like 'em," said his housekeeper,

suddenly shivering and turning away. "I know it's very silly of me—and I'm very sorry, particularly as you like them so much. But I don't like the smell of that corpse."

"But it is not that particular plant. That was merely a guess of mine."

His housekeeper shrugged her shoulders, "Anyhow I don't like it," she said.

Wedderburn felt a little hurt at her displeasure to the plant. But that did not prevent his talking to her about orchids generally, and his mind in particular, whenever he felt inclined.

"There are such queer things about orchids," he said one day; "such possibilities of surprises. You know, Darwin studied their fertilisation, and showed that the whole structure of an ordinary orchid flower was contrived in order that moths might carry the pollen from plant to plant. Well, it seems that there are lots of insects known that can possibly fertilise the plant. But that did not prevent his talking to her about orchids generally, and his mind in particular, whenever he felt inclined.

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and, seeing that he was troubled by the puzzle of his position, she explained to him, "You have come to the wrong house."

"And the orchid?" she said.

"It will not do to let it out," she said.

Wedderburn had lost a good deal of blood,

but beyond that he had suffered no very great

injury. They gave him brandy mixed with

some pink extract of meat, and carried him

upstairs to bed. His housekeeper told her

incredible story to Dr. Haddon.

"Come to the window," she said.

The cold outer air was blowing in through

the open door, and the sickly perfume was

almost dispelled. The torn aerial rootlets lay

already withered amidst a number of dark

stains upon the bricks. The stem of the

inflorescence had burst with the fall of the

plant, and the flowers were growing limp and

brown at the edges of the petals. "I know

now that orchids are dead," she said.

"I mean to take great care of this."

"I mean to do that myself," she said.

She was not a person to argue with.

That is why these occurrences are given to the world in the guise of fiction. The habitual

soothsayer of the scientific person would

demand the production of the plant, and just

as I have done, call it a plant of the future.

For up to the present no further specimens of this particular orchid have come to hand, and one at least of those who cultivate root stocks in a speculative

spirit has resisted from this amusement, and buys his orchids in flower from the recognised

dealers.

Directly he entered the little glasshouse he

knew that the spike had burst out, although

his great *Pelecophyllum* had not.

There was a new one, however, which was

not quite so large, but which was

still in the corner of the glasshouse.

The flowers were white, with streaks

of golden orange upon the petals; the heavy

labellum was coiled into an intricate projection,

and a wonderful bluish purple mingled there

with the gold. He could see at once that the

genus was altogether a new one. And the

insufferable scent! How hot the place was!

The blossoms swam before his eyes.

He would see if the temperature was right.

He made a step towards the thermometer,

and a step away again, until he was

directly opposite the glasshouse.

The thermometer was at 70° F.

He stopped there, and then he went back

to the glasshouse again, and then he went

back to the thermometer again.

He stopped there, and then he went back

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