

# THE GOLDEN FETICH BY EDEN PHILPOTTS

THIS is the first installment of "The Golden Fetich," a new mystery story that promises to out rival "The Mystery Box" and "Tainted Gold," both of which were published complete in the Sunday Call. You remember those? They were intensely absorbing and thrilling to the last extreme.

Well, under the Sunday Call's literary policy of not only giving its readers the very latest and best novels of the day, by world famous authors, you will not only get "The Golden Fetich" complete as it was originally written, but you will get it quickly—four installments at the most. No interminable series of "Continued in our next," and no long waits between installments. This book would cost you \$1.50 anywhere else. In point of fact you cannot get it in any other paper in America.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FETICH FOUND.

"PLEASE God, I'll never hear the sound of an auctioneer's hammer more," said Roy Meldrum.

"Yesterday it fell like a tolling bell on my heart and beat away everything—everything I thought I had in the world."

His companion looked at him with a sort of grudging admiration.

"You must have been made of tough stuff to see it through."

"Well, it wasn't a pleasant experience, though I had long feared the thing had to come. After the governor died I knew the deluge must follow. Out of respect for the dear old boy the harpies held off, but the moment he was under ground down they flung thick as starlings in autumn. Happily my back proved broad enough to bear it."

Roy Meldrum's position was rather a trying one, despite his light tone and assumed contempt for his fate. His father had been celebrated and a wealthy man, but had died poor, says in honor, and now that the famous officer, General Sir Rupert Meldrum, V. C., K. C. B., and some time aid de camp to her Majesty, had passed away, it was found that his affairs were sadly involved, and that the open-handed and too liberal manner of life pursued by the old soldier had left his only son much poorer than he expected to find himself.

A week before this story begins young Meldrum had been present at the sale of things he formerly regarded as precious heirlooms—trinkets, the chalice, rare curios from India and China, from the South Seas and Central Africa—but now all had vanished under the auctioneer's hammer; and Roy walked for the last time through the home of his youth, and knew that in all human probability his feet would never tread the shining oaken floors of Tamlin Hall again.

He wandered through the empty place, paused at each wide window to see some well-remembered view for the last time, puffed his pipe, and returned, but briefest possible replies to the questions and expressions of sympathy which proceeded from his companion.

Both men were above average height, but while Tracy Fain was dark and wiry and only scaled eleven stone for all his six feet, the other man had a form of which any Viking might have been proud. Roy Meldrum stood six feet four in his socks and was built on massive lines. Strength rather than speed was indicated in his tremendous limbs and he had held for two years the heavy-weight wrestling championship of the German gymnasium, but this was his sole claim to athletic eminence, for though tried in the pack of the Cambridge Rugby team, he had been found too slow to represent his varsity.

In face Roy Meldrum was that type whose Anglo-Saxon is stamped and can be read the wide world over. His voice came from his tremendous chest; he looked all men in the face, was a clean liver and a man of simple old-fashioned principles. Now, at 39, and after imagining for years that a very large income would revert to him upon his father's death, he was suddenly faced with widely different future prospects.

He stood at this moment rich in masculine friends of his own age, poor in those who could furnish him with wisdom. Both his parents had now passed away and of near relations he had few left and none could do him service. Indeed, Roy Meldrum seemed likely to represent the last of his line and upon his marrying and adding another generation to the ancient race depended its chance of enduring beyond the limits of his own career.

Marriage, however, was the last thing in his thoughts. He found himself now heart-whole, hale and energetic, with all the world before him to choose from and a total capital of some £10,000, where he had once supposed his income would be little short of that sum.

"Ten thousand!" said Tracy Fain. "Do you mean to say that your hopes and expectations have dwindled down to that, cousin? What in the name of fortune did Sir Rupert do with his money?"

"Nothing," answered Meldrum stoutly. "Good-bye from morning till night. Never lived a more charitable and generous man. His hand was always in his pocket and those who gained his benefits were the sort who could pay no benefit back again, the men who came to our place were those who seldom got asked anywhere else, and so with everything and everybody. He had half a regiment of old soldiers on the estate, and, of course, not one in a dozen was earning his salt. Poor old dad! He didn't know how he had sent the money spinning. Why, he died under the impression he was leaving me quite a tidy fortune."

"And you're built of the same stuff as he was, worse luck." "Don't say that. I'm proud to think I've got a nose like his; but I'm not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with him. He was a father in ten thousand."

Roy reloaded his pipe and looked out over the rolling hills of Kent. Autumn already mellowed the woodlands and powdered the great tracts and glades of bracken fern with gold. His cousin regarded him with a kindly though slightly contemptuous glance.

Tracy Fain had a shrewder intellect than Roy, and his dark eyes shot forth a keener intelligence than the frank blue ones of the big man; but life had yet to show where his heart was and prove the young fellow's nature. He was a three years' junior to Meldrum, but they had seen much of one another in early life, and to-day Fain, from mingled emotions, perhaps not wholly devoid of sentiment, had come down for the day from London to Tunbridge and had driven out with his cousin to take a last look at Tamlin Hall. It represented half the sum total of the past happiness of both men; as boys they

had dwelt there together; and their earliest recollections were stirred as they paced the chambers now echoing and empty.

"That's the room my mother died in," said Roy as they stopped for a moment in a small apartment flooded with western light. "It was her boudoir, and the governor had it shut up after her death. Then, two days before he went himself, he insisted on having it opened again and would occupy the couch mother passed away upon. There he died, too, and if ever a man saw things hidden from his watchers he did it at the end. He spoke and stretched out his arms and greeted her, as though she had come to welcome him from the other side of the dark valley. And I think he knew that she was going to do so and expected her."

"I know you believe all that sort of thing, old chap," said Fain, quietly. "Long may you continue to do so, if you get any solid satisfaction out of it. I envy the man with faith. It must be very comforting in this weary world. Now, let's go and look at the smoking-room, the general's sanctum sanctorum. There I smoked my first cigar—stolen when Uncle Rupert had his back turned."

"It looks naked and awfully wretched now. Everything's gone, of course—the pictures, the trophies, the ornaments, the helmet I put on that day to frighten your sisters and couldn't get off again—all vanished. And for such ghastly low prices. I could have smashed some of the brutes hanging over sixpences at the sale last week, only that wouldn't have done any practical good, of course."

"Probably not—except make an additional hole in your last few thousand pounds. This was the room. How different now!"

They entered a handsome apartment with dark oak ceiling and carved paneling reaching to the height of a man's shoulder. Upon wallpaper which covered the room above the lofty wainscot appeared strange impressions, where the various trophies that had hung there sometime had left the paper clean behind them.

"What's that above the mantelpiece?" asked Fain. "They've forgotten something."

He pointed to a small square object hanging high on the wall.

"By Jove! I thought it was a ventilator, I'll bet. But I know what it is."

"How are we going to get it?"

"I'll lift you on to the mantelpiece, Tracy. I'd climb on to it myself, but it's not guaranteed to carry 14 stone."

"All right. Steady! Great Scott! I feel like an infant in arms."

The simile made Roy laugh till the oak ceiling echoed, but meantime he had picked up his cousin with consummate ease and lifted him to a broad stone mantelshelf four feet from the ground.

The little object on the wall was now well within Fain's reach. A moment later he had dislodged it and jumped back to the floor.

"What is it?" he asked.

Roy took the thing in hand, blew the dust off it and then cleaned it with his pocket handkerchief. The curio was a small, hard packet three inches long, two broad and about one inch deep. It was covered in a piece of sand-colored lion-hide and tightly sewn with fiber. It depended from a circular string of small black seeds in shape of a necklace.

"It looks like some mumbo-jumbo foolery of niggers," surmised Fain.

"That's what it is," answered his cousin.

"Governor got that and a big exhibit shield and a sheaf of assegais when young Tarrant of the Cape mounted police came back from South Africa. He was on a holiday right up in Central Africa, near the Batoucas country, you remember. A horde of black men were kept at bay all through a long pitch-black night by a hunting party of ten Englishmen and a parson, who loaded the guns, but wouldn't shoot. I mean the parson wouldn't. They came off without any losses, though several were wounded. And the good old parson said it was frightful to see about 200 black men on their backs when the sun rose, because of the fact that there would be 200 less Christians go to glory."

"That amulet there came off a dead man's neck. A big man, too. He was called M'wenga, and afterward when the blacks saved in and made peace, they dug up the chap and took him back to his kraal up the country and buried him in style. And they made a rare row when the fetich couldn't be found. They said the new chief wanted it."

"Young Tarrant had all the dead warrior's spears and his headdress and everything, and as for that little packet, no doubt it hung around the baggar's neck to protect him against trouble. But the charm didn't work against a rifle bullet, somehow."

"What's in the thing, I wonder?" mused Tracy Fain, regarding the object with slight interest.

"A dried-up toad, or a few berries from a medicine man's tree, or a lion's tooth, or some such rubbish. Tarrant said lots of the slaughtered Batoucas had charms, and all those the fellows opened were full of such things. But one amulet had a jolly good diamond in it—only in the rough, yet there it was, and a man from the Transvaal gave a hundred guilder for it. After that, Tarrant said, there were not many charms or fetiches left unopened."

"Perhaps this thing has treasure in it, too."

"I hardly like to open it—yet we may as well."

Tracy laughed.

"Open it by all means. Here we stand on the threshold of grand mystery for all we can say. Your life lies before you and you have no inclination one way or another. The contents of this charm may decide you. Why not? Stranger things have happened. Besides, you have such a solid trust in Providence."

"Yes, I have, for all your sneers," said Roy, stoutly. "But even I don't know what the evidences of Providence hidden away in a Batouca warrior's necklace. However, here goes. If it's a diamond we'll share and share alike. I should never have seen the thing hanging up there but for you."

Fain put out his hand and arrested the other's knife which was about to cut open the fetich.

"One moment. I've got a rum feeling about this. Will you go further and say share and share alike, whatever it contains?"

"Good or bad?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're a rum chap! If you don't believe in Providence you evidently believe in something."

"I believe in my own presentiments."

Meldrum did not answer, but a moment later had cut into the mysterious packet, torn off the lion's hide covering, and revealed the contents. First came a piece of coarse paper neatly and tightly folded into the necessary shape, and within it appeared a flat, thin, irregularly shaped disc of gold, upon which was set a curiously shaped diamond figure.

But the talisman, or whatever it might be, paled its interest before the paper which contained it. Fain occupied himself with this and spread it out carefully, while Meldrum studied the disc. A loud

exclamation made him almost drop the gold.

"Look—look, man! English! English writing in some brown sort of ink and—ah! what's that great, rusty-red splash at the bottom?"

Roy was now staring over the other's shoulder.

"Bring the paper to the window," he said, "the light begins to wane."

They scanned the scrawl and the splash closely before endeavoring to decipher it.

"We need not detective to read this riddle," said Tracy Fain. "The poor soul who began to write it never lived to finish. If you see the blot at the end where his pen suddenly fell!"

"Yes, in the middle of a word. And the splash at the bottom?"

"An Englishman's blood, I'm afraid. As he bent over his work some black-guard came up behind and put a knife through his back or a bullet through his head. As for the writing, it's wonderfully neat and fine, though probably the materials were very rough—a porcupine quill for pen and some decoction of berries for ink."

"Better read it if we can," said Roy. "That may save the trouble of making any more theories."

Together the two men bent over the crumpled paper. Then, as Fain slowly made out the strange document, now for the first time since its creation spread before a white man's eyes, Meldrum wrote a fair copy in his pocketbook and afterward let it aloud. Thus it ran:

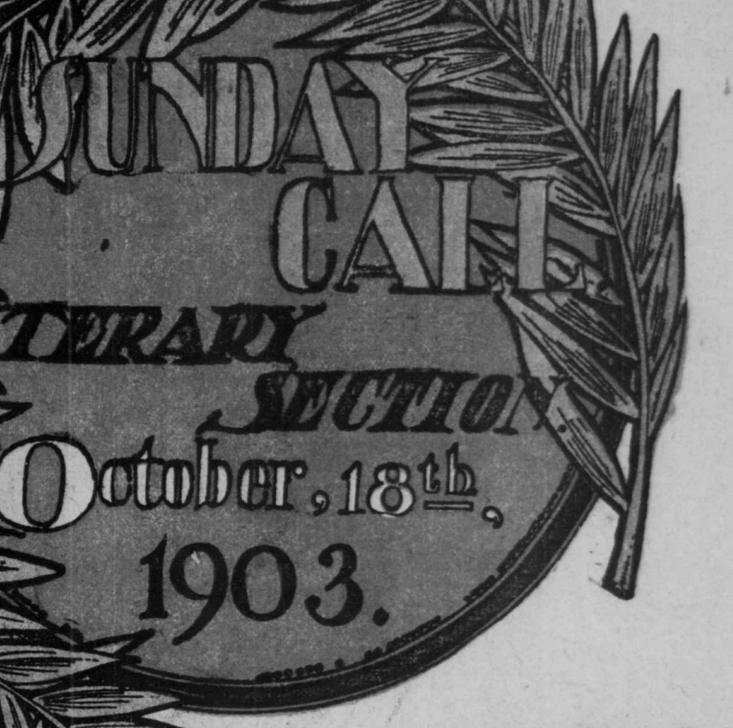
"Being this day in sound mind and body, yet having the fear of death most violently and vividly before my eyes and in my ears, I set down these facts with some slight hope that through the honesty and faithfulness of my servant, Pomba, all that I have achieved and suffered may not be lost with some monkey-trick of fate.

"In brief space the facts are these; and let any honest man, if such shall ever become acquainted with them, look to it that those presently to be mentioned here in this story. Through the hands of Pomba, if I fall, I hope and pray these words may reach civilization, and by his help alone can my treasure be recovered.

"Long years ago I worked at Kimberley, in the old days before the Amalgama-



"A BIG MAN CALLED IT WENGA"



I will cheerfully surrender the keeping of the manuscript to you.

"They are actually valueless, I fear."

"Impossible to say that. I'm jolly sanguine myself. Take my advice and see me through. What is there about your present work that fascinates you so much? Three hundred a year isn't so grand that you need stick to it when you might stand a rosy chance of making ten thousand a year for all we know. Chuck up your office and put in a year or so in the wilds with me. If we succeed you won't regret it; if we fail I can promise you as good as you have got."

"Just like a Meldrum," said Fain. "Always up in the clouds, always over-sanguine and overbold."

"My father would have seen this thing through as a young man, so I shall. It must be a grand experience any way and experience is always useful."

"If you live to avail yourself of it."

"Well, exactly. And I shall live. I'm not bent on flicker out at a breath of swamp air."

"If abnormal dice could do it, the diamonds would be yours all right, no doubt. But more than dice go to success in Central Africa."

"You mean brains?"

"Well, I know my upper story is a bit light, but the few things I have managed to cram into it are just the sort to be useful on a job like this. Anyway you've got plenty of brains for us, better than change your mind and come. You can only live your life once, as I said before. Why not enjoy it?"

"As to enjoying it, old man, I can't say a trip of this sort would give me the life enjoyment in itself. But I should like to make a fortune and you wouldn't believe me if I said I didn't."

"Well, let it be a bargain. We may do something that will wake the world up. Who knows?"

"You don't know what this hot-blooded way. You don't know what you're doing. Only one white man ever gets through to about 100 who go down on these expeditions to Central Africa. Besides the expense. Your money will go like water. It's certainly 100 to 1 against us—perhaps more. Let me review the position from these scanty beginnings and you'll see I'm right. First, here's a poor beggar, name unknown, who has on his own confession been residing with the niggers in the bush for years. He gets away from the Matabele at last and discovers a native, called Pomba, at death's door. They become tremendous chums and keep going together until the white man strikes it rich and apparently finds himself kicking diamonds about in the heart of Africa. We are to understand that he and his trusty Man Friday buried the bulk of their treasure near a place called Golden Falls, then got knocked on the head for their pains, and we don't know to within 100 miles or so where all this happened."

"Yes, we do. The directions are explicit as can be. The river is named and the tribe of niggers that he thought he was friendly with—the Batoucas—Who killed him we can't see, but seeing his message was 'don't waste your money. Second thoughts are best.'"

"At Charing Cross the men parted after an engagement to dine together on the following evening in Tracy Fain's diggings. Meldrum sought his club, and Fain returned to his quarters in Westminster. After he had done so he lighted a lamp, drew his armchair to the table and again produced the manuscript. He looked round him half as though he expected to see another person, then spread the paper, turned it over and examined the back of it.

On the reverse of the sheet, in calligraphy even more minute than that he had already recited to Roy Meldrum, was one line of forty words. This he had caught a glimpse of when first he opened the manuscript, but after reading the main document, from some impulse he had not repeated the single line to his cousin. The words ran along the bottom of the paper, and now, taken in connection with the dead man's other statement, they possessed peculiar significance.

For a moment Tracy was in doubt whether they had in reality any reference to the main body of the document; then he decided that they must have.

Thus ran the strange direction:

"Stand where the peaks of the Antelope Head Bluff are in one line. Then wait till the hour when the rainbow shines upon the mist of the falls, and where the purple of the arch touches the forest—there in white ants' nest."

Tracy Fain wrinkled his brow over this enigmatic direction, then read and reread the unfinished record on the other side. Soon he defined his position with the added knowledge contributed by this single line. It amounted to an exact direction as to the position of the treasure. Somewhere about the limit of British territory in the direction of Lake Tanganyika, or in the extreme south of the Congo State, a dead Englishman had made a marvelous find of precious stones. The approximate position of his discovery he had survived long enough to define pretty closely, and it occurred on the river

and being unsuccessful there, wandered northward with three friends—tried men all. But they have gone and the spears of the Matabele let the life out of them near twenty years ago. We had struggled north by slow stages and through many adventures, and when my companions fell I would have welcomed death gladly enough but for those at home.

"The Matabele took me prisoner and, love of life growing again within me as the chance of it dimmed, I conformed to the demands of my masters, instructed them in the arts of civilization and dwelt with them for the space of four years. Then, opportunity offering and war breaking out between two neighboring tribes, I made my escape and endeavored to get back south. But chance led my steps astray and I avoided one danger to fall in with others.

"The man Pomba of the tribe of the Batoucas I found sore wounded by the warlike and was moved to play the good Samaritan. Never did human being save a nobler and worthier life. Now on the eve of my last attempt to return whence I came it is Pomba's right arm, his strength and his skill I trust to. But even he will have his powers taxed to the utmost, for this cursed country is in uproar, his own people, friendly until now, have grown cold against me, and it may go hard with us at any moment. Therefore I write this much in hope that if die, my treasure may not lie hidden here forever.

"To be brief, after falling in with Pomba and saving his life, he attached himself to me, proved my lucky genius and marked the turning-point in my fortune. Within two months of our meeting in the land of the Kalongas, I had struck wealth as great as any that man has dreamed of since the tales of Arabian Nights' entertainments; and now, with such diamonds as I can carry, and that is a number huge enough, I set forth.

"But half my stupendous discovery lies hidden close at hand—buried deep and safe in the stony seed pods of the umzimbebe—a wild tree abundant hereabout. There it will be hidden from the knowledge of all men but Pomba and myself until I return to claim it if ever I shall do so.

"To know the exact region, leave the southern confines of Lake Mweru due north, then press along by the river Luapula, that forms a boundary between the Congo State and British territory. And, where divers lesser rivers enter it south of the lake of Mweru, take that stream called Wambasi and follow it within the territory of the Batoucas. Here stands my hut, under an umzimbebe, without the village boundary, beside the Golden Falls. Appro—"

Roy Meldrum stopped abruptly.

"That's where death ended his interest in diamonds and everything else," he said; "yet—well, what one man has hidden another might find—is it not so? The ruins of his hut may still stand under the tree."

"A gorgeous wildgoose chase! You wouldn't spend your scanty patrimony like that?"

"I don't know. I should have a great time anyway, and kill some heavy game, and live every moment of each thrilling day. And at worst a man can only die once."

"So this poor chap found. The fee fell on him like a whirlwind of doom; and his faithful Pomba were sent to 'kingdom come' together."

CHAPTER II

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE PAPER.

Through the shadows of evening, and where pale blue mist-wreaths twined like fingers over the gold of the autumn woods, Roy Meldrum and his cousin passed rapidly. The elder's last glimpse of his father's home showed its dark mass and twisted chimneys rising against a rusty red sunset. The dog cart which Meldrum drove quickly, soon rattled them back to Tunbridge, and, after a comfortable dinner at the hotel, the cousins strolled to the railway station and caught the last train back to town.

Conversation quickened over their cigars in a first-class smoking compartment, of which they were the sole occupants, and Roy's gloomy reflections were assailed and scattered before thoughts of the future in connection with the curious discovery of that afternoon.

"By the way," he said, "as we are to share and share alike, I suppose one must keep the talisman, the other the paper. Let me retain the gold disc and

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