

Translation

An Astonishing Method of Torture

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Valentine Digby, relaxing in a lounge chair after lunch, was smoking a Havana cigar and appeared to be lost in thoughts. He sat watching the fragrant smoke of the cigar as it made rings and swirled upwards like the wavy hair of a maiden. At that moment, a melodious voice was heard singing, “*Your presence makes my heart rejoice and sing.*” And as the voice came closer, Digby saw the singer, sat up startled, and exclaimed, “Diana!”

The lovely Diana placed her delicate hands on the young man’s shoulder in a playful manner and asked with a coquettish smile, “Valentine, I thought you’d come home for breakfast today morning. I tired myself out waiting for you. Where have you been?”

Digby got up from his chair, held Diana’s hand and made her sit on the featherbed and said, “Diana, forgive me for this unbecoming behaviour today. As I have to leave for England soon, I was busy making arrangements.”

Taking advantage of this situation, Diana pulled Valentine gently towards her and making him sit next to her, “One shouldn’t trust men at all,” she said. This should have sounded like an objection, if it was not for the loving smile, and her arms around his shoulders in a manner that suggested an impending kiss and an embrace.

Diana was a beautiful lady with a radiant complexion. Though thirty or thirty-two years old, she was lively and poised, making her look twenty to anyone who knew not her real age. Her clothes were expensive and jewellery was beautifully crafted. A grape vine shaped clasp studded with sparkling stones arrested her dark locks. A strand of pearls with a shining diamond pendant dropped from her divine neck and adorned her décolletage. A ruby encrusted ring glittering like a live ember gave a rare lustre to her elegant hand. A mere glance from this fish-eyed beauty was enough to split open the hardest of men's hearts. Her lips which were red like the ripe Bimba fruit made boys and young men gaze at them unblinkingly as if they were filled with ambrosia. The dulcet tones of her voice, which would put even the cuckoo's voice to shame, and her delightful conversation, would enthuse even the simplest of people and make them sing her praises. When a lady of such charm smiles and speaks with such love, Valentine could only ask in a low subdued voice, "What is my fault?" as he sat leaning against her.

"What can I say? You cruel young man! You capture the heart of a poor woman and then decide to go far away across the seas forever. What about me?"

Valentine kissed the lovely lady's red lips passionately, smiled and said softly, "Diana, I am a poor man. If I have to be a husband of a charming lady like you and fulfill all your wishes, I need to have the wealth of Kubera. I would be a traitor to your beauty if I am not able to adorn every limb of yours with pearls, diamonds, and jewels."

"Dear, though it is an offence in our society for a woman to explicitly spell out her wish, can my heart be quiet when you decide to leave me and go thousands of miles away across

the seas?” said Diana dabbing her tear filled eyes with her handkerchief.

Valentine was overwhelmed. He forgot all resolutions he had made earlier, embraced Diana with ardour and drained her lips of all the accumulated nectar.

“Diana, I have always been enamoured of your beauty. But I am still a poor man, aren’t I? If god blesses me in my endeavour, I will become the richest among the rich in the coming months. Please be patient till then, don’t be so distressed,” Valentine assured her with his guileless words.

“Valentine, my late husband Edward Campbell met a watery grave within two months of our getting married and left me in widowed grief. I have inherited his considerable wealth. What if you are not wealthy? We can live in happiness as a married couple, can’t we? Anyway, what is this endeavour of yours that you talk about?”

“There are some forests in Brazil that have inexhaustible reserves of gold. I have a map of that region.”

“Oh! Really?” exclaimed Diana in surprise. “Valentine, you haven’t told me about this! I guessed that there was something like this on your mind. Where is that map?”

“I can’t show it to you yet. If people get to know that there is gold in such a place, I, who discovered this, would be left behind and crooks would make away with all the gold.”

“Is that so? But, why are you leaving for England now?” asked Diana, as she sat down and coyly leaned her face against his shoulder.

“If I have to arrange for machines and tools, chemical laboratories, and coolies for the mining work in the gold fields, I need a lot of money. The Forbes Bank in London has limitless money. If I explain my plan to the bank officials and obtain money from them, the forest in Brazil could become a large town filled with factories, workshops, and homes of coolies and traders. After that, I am the king there. And you, the loving wife of the king Valentine Digby, will shine radiantly like the moonstone at the centre of a golden girdle.”

“I am indeed blessed, dear Valentine! I hope your words come true and your dreams are fulfilled. If you have to go to London, don’t go alone. I will send my late husband’s friend, George Campbell, along with you. He is an expert in chemistry and I hear, he has set up a chemical laboratory in London. Let him go with you. He’ll be out of my hair for a while and you’ll have some company during your journey.”

After conversing for a while, Diana took valentine Digby’s leave and went home.

Valentine Digby reached London and met with Sir Arthur Russell, the Chairman of Forbes Bank. He spoke in detail about his plans with Sir Arthur and showed him the map and a sample of the gold ore. Sir Arthur took the opinion of a well-known geologist in London, approved of Digby’s plans and agreed to lend him the money. As Digby was an intelligent,

humble, and industrious young man, Sir Arthur Russell felt a lot of affection for him.

Since a new company had to be set up and new machines manufactured, Digby needed some time for this and decided to stay on in London for some more months. As he was the chairman of a potentially profitable company, he soon became a well-known figure in London. Rich people, entrepreneurs, mothers of young unmarried girls, all made their way to Digby's door and many became his friends.

One day, as Digby returned home after a stroll, the postman handed him some letters. Digby looked at the letters cursorily and kept them aside, except for one, which he read with great concentration, sat with his head down and looked deeply worried. Sir Arthur Russell saw Digby in this state and asked, "Why, has the contents of that letter caused you distress, Digby?" Digby smiled sadly and without replying handed over the letter to Sir Arthur Russell.

To,
Mr Valentine Digby
London

The fact that a lady named Diana Campbell is your friend is common knowledge in Brazil. Keeping friendship aside, it is rumoured that she has enticed you into falling in love with her and is ready to remarry and has agreed to marry you. There would be no reason to write this letter if Diana really intends to marry you. Where is the rule which says that the husband must be older than his wife? Even though Diana is older to you by four or five years, you could have lived a happy life in the company of a

wife who is wise to the ways of the world. But Diana has no desire to marry you. All her love abides in George Campbell. Diana's husband Edward Campbell died suddenly. People believe that Diana poisoned him. It is also believed that George Campbell himself prepared the poison and gave it to Diana. Whatever the facts are, I feel strongly that for your own good you should be vigilant and not be hoodwinked by this capricious lady.

Do you have the map of the gold mines with you? It looks like the time has come for you give up your life for the gold mines. Diana has sworn to steal the map away from you by hook or crook and it is three days since she has arrived from America for this purpose. Please be on your guard, or else you will be defrauded and lose everything. Beware!

I myself have arrived from America only two days ago.

– A. B. C.

Sir Arthur read the letter, smiled and asked, “So, you have got yourself entangled in Diana’s love? According to this letter her activities appear suspicious, is it true?”

“Impossible! Diana is a good-natured beautiful lady. A jealous woman or a wicked man appears to have written this letter.” Though Digby looked calm when he said this, his mind was filled with apprehension.

“Shall I hand over this letter to the investigative officers and seek their opinion?” asked Sir Arthur.

“That won’t be necessary. It is a sin to suspect a virtuous woman who is willing to surrender all her wealth and wants to marry me.”

The conversation did not proceed further. In the meanwhile, Diana had sent word to her beloved Valentine Digby that she had arrived in London and also the directions to the house where she was residing with a request to come and meet her. Valentine Digby hastened to her house. Their union was a display of extravagant pleasure. Diana rushed to embrace him with tears of joy and he hugged and kissed her.

“Diana, would you be able to guess what kind of vile person could have written this letter?” asked Digby as he showed her the letter that was signed *A. B. C.*

Diana read the letter once, twice, three times, knitted her brows, frowned, thought for a while, smiled, looked at Digby and asked, “Valentine, would you forgive me if I told you I have done something wrong?”

“My queen of love, I wouldn’t want to know what you have done, I have forgiven you,” reassured Digby as he placed his hand on her shoulder and shook her chins affectionately and smiled.

“Dear, I wanted to read your mind and so I asked one of my maids to write this letter. Now, is there any reason why you won’t forgive me?” asked the clever and charming Diana and gazed at his face in eager anticipation of an answer.

Hugs and kisses were his only response. “Darling, you wanted to read my mind using the same methods that would shatter somebody’s heart? Despite this, I have forgiven you,” said Digby, repeating his earlier words.

Diana was staying in the same large house that George Campbell had rented. Campbell's business in chemicals was flourishing. Bottles of sulphuric acid were stocked in one part of the house, in another part were bottles of nitric acid, fruit salt lay in a heap in a corner, Sanatogen was being prepared in a room, jars of cod liver were to be seen in the corridor; a number of similar ingredients were to be seen all around the house. Digby appreciated George Campbell's confidence and praised his industrious spirit.

"This is not all. I have captured air and have distilled it into a liquid and stored that in huge vats. This is being carried out in the cellar below. In the same place, we are conducting experiments to create amazing chemicals using electrical power," said Campbell swelling with pride.

"I am so happy for you, George! Diana, didn't you say you'd offer me tea?" enquired Digby, "Come, let's go."

"Aha! Why this haste? You wouldn't want to marry both mother and daughter together, would you?" taunted Diana.

"What are you saying, Diana?"

"Don't I know that you tried to win Amelia's love some years back?"

"It's true, so what? It was only because I used to visit your house to woo Amelia that I managed to gain your love. I was searching for gold and found a diamond. No harm done at all, I must say," said Digby as he pulled Diana towards him and held her in his embrace.

Amelia served tea to her stepmother and Digby, and stood watching their intimacy with growing misery. Diana gnashed her teeth in anger when she saw her stepdaughter watching

them. Valentine spoke to Amelia in an affectionate manner, and took their leave and left for his house.

Digby was very happy. He had no time to relax, not even for a second. The tailor had come with new clothes and Digby tried out coats and trousers. The jeweller was showing him rings set with sparkling stones. Many such traders were offering him a variety of things. Digby spoke with them cheerfully. Today, he would agree to anything anyone said.

“Valentine Digby, why are you in such a happy mood today?” asked Sir Arthur Russell, smiling.

“My good fortune appears to be smiling on me. Sir Arthur, you have played a significant role in my good fortune, would I desist from telling you the reason for my happiness?”

“When will you tell me? What is all this preamble for?”

“George Campbell’s letter has arrived today. He says, my beloved Diana desires we discuss our wedding plans today. That’s why I am so excited.”

“I am so glad! May god fulfil all your desires,” said Sir Arthur Russell and warmly shook Digby’s hand.

While Valentine Digby was reading a newspaper and relaxing after lunch, a servant came in and handed him a letter.

Charing Cross
No. 157

Dear Digby,

I had no alternative but to write this letter. You might feel that what I have written is exaggerated. Despite this, I hope you would act in a rational manner. You have been invited to this house today evening, haven't you? Please don't come to this house. If you come here today, you will be in danger. George Campbell and my stepmother, Diana Campbell, have together hatched a plot to take away your life as well as the map from your possession. I feel bashful in admitting that I was at one point of time favourably disposed towards you. I have to admit this now due to circumstances beyond one's control. It is with this affection in mind that I am writing this letter to you. You are surely going to lose your life tonight. That is why I implore you, please decline today's invitation and forget about coming over to our house. Please do not succumb to desire.

Yours sincerely,
Amelia Campbell

Digby sat stunned on reading this letter. All the pleasant thoughts that were swirling around in his mind were fading away into a fog of alarm and fear.

“Is it possible that Diana has written this letter too? But, why on a happy day like today? Did Amelia write this? Why ‘did,’ isn't it clear from the signature that Amelia has written this letter. But I just can't make myself believe that Diana can

be a killer.” With all these thoughts and worries swarming in his head, Digby fell asleep.

It was the time in the evening when office workers, clerks, officers, servants, and others finish their work for the day and like cattle released from their yokes, with the feeling that they had managed to survive the day, troop home happily. They walk to their respective homes, partake of some refreshment, wear fresh clothes, and set out to enjoy the cool evening breeze. Sir Arthur Russell too set out with his wife in a fine carriage to enjoy the evening. While people were enjoying their evening outside home, Digby was lying all alone in bed totally weighed down with conflicting thoughts.

At this very moment, walked in Diana wearing dazzling clothes and sparkling jewels, with a charming smile that could drive away all despondency from one’s thoughts. She called out to Valentine in her melodious voice and came close to his cot. When she saw him tossing around in misery, she was startled and cried out, “Valentine! Valentine dear!! What’s the matter?”

Just as a man being chased by a tiger feels relieved on seeing an armed saviour and says, “Thank god, I’m saved,” Digby felt relieved on seeing Diana, as if half his worries had already been driven away. He sat up with alacrity and said, “Come Diana, you have come at the right time,” and made some space for her to sit on the cot.

Like a kind lady who would console a sorrowful young boy by running her hand affectionately over his forehead, Diana put an arm around Digby’s shoulders and caressed his chest with the other hand and asked, “What’s the matter, darling? I thought you’d be in high spirits and thus came down

to be in your pleasant company. What has happened to you? Are you in two minds about getting married to me?"

"Sweetheart, if I were to refuse you, I would be negating my own life. Why should you harbour such dreadful doubts?" asked Valentine twirling her curly hair around his finger.

"Take your hands off me!" Diana exclaimed in mock anger. "You lie," she said and pulled away from Valentine.

Defeated, Digby held her in his arms and made promises and gave her assurances and pledged to marry her. At this, Diana got up, went over to the cupboard and took out a bottle of sweet-smelling wine and coyly poured it into a glass and cajoled Valentine into drinking it.

Valentine got tipsy after two glasses of wine. Diana put him in a hansom and took him to Hyde Park for a walk. While strolling in the park, Diana, very tactfully, was able to clear Digby's mind of many doubts that he earlier had.

As soon as he returned home, Digby changed into an elegant dress, took his Malabar cane with the golden handle and got ready to leave for Diana's house. As he was leaving, Sir Arthur Russel saw him, stopped him and asked, "My dear man, where are you off to at Dinner time? Where did you get this renewed enthusiasm from? When I saw you in the afternoon, you were crushed with worry. What had happened to you then?"

"I do not have the time to particularly discuss the issue in detail now. But, I will show you the letter that caused me such distress. Diana has since repudiated the claims made in this letter to my satisfaction," said Digby and took out the letter from his pocket and showed it to Sir Arthur.

Sir Arthur Russell read the letter, took Digby's arm and made Digby sit beside him, and said, "Valentine, as suggested in this letter, what is the harm if you do not go to her house tonight? You tell me that Diana is deeply in love with you. What you two have planned for today can happen tomorrow, can't it?"

"Sir Arthur, you surely would have fallen in love with a lady at some point of time in your life? How can I break Diana's heart? Moreover, I feel it is a sin to believe that there is something sinister in her love. Please forgive me if I have to transgress your orders in this case."

"Please do as you wish, but, please do not consume any intoxicant there. Once your task is completed, come back immediately without wasting your time," advised Sir Arthur, overcome with concern and affection for this young man.

Digby agreed to abide by Sir Arthur's counsel and set out. The moment Digby left, Sir Arthur telephoned the crime investigator Sherlock Holmes and summoned him. Sir Arthur explained the entire matter to Holmes and handed over the two letters that Digby had received.

Holmes thought for a moment and said he would do his utmost to save Digby's life and left in a hurry to make arrangements.

At around 10 o'clock that night, the police laid siege on house no. 157 in Charing Cross. The police cordon was so dense that even a kitten wouldn't have been able to pass through. No creature could come out of the house either. Digby had informed that he would certainly be out of that

house before 12 o' clock. It was past midnight now and Digby hadn't come out yet.

Fearing that Digby was in danger, Sherlock went straight to the main door and started kicking it.

“Who is that, creating this commotion at this late hour and disturbing our sleep with such audacity?” asked Diana in anger, but the voice was as sweet as a cuckoo's.

“Has a gentleman named Valentine Digby come to this house?” asked Sherlock.

“Valentine Digby! Who is he? Why would he come here? I don't even know anybody named Digby,” said the lady from inside.

“How is that possible? I have seen Digby entering this house with my own eyes. My name is Sherlock Holmes.”

“Sherlock Holmes!” exclaimed Diana and opened the door. “What brings you here? Please come inside,” said Diana courteously.

Sherlock went inside the house and sat on a chair and asked, “Madam Diana, hasn't Digby come here? I saw him entering this very same house.”

“No, he hasn't come here. You could look around the house if you wish. Why are you so anxious about him? Has he committed any crime?” asked Diana.

Sherlock was astonished at her hypocrisy, and said with a smile, “He hasn't committed any crime. Since many people

have seen him going into this house and have said so, I will search this house thoroughly. I hope you won't object."

"Of course, not! It is only a matter of losing sleep for a couple of hours," She said sarcastically.

Along with a group of policemen, Sherlock and Watson entered the house and started searching all the rooms. They searched the main hall, kitchen, bathrooms, and backyard; opened cupboards and boxes; rolled up mattresses. There was no sign of Digby anywhere. They looked for secret places under the floor by jumping on the floor at various spots. Tired and frustrated, they descended to the cellar. What do they see there? Sherlock was astonished. He took out a thick Havana cigar, lit it and stood there smoking and looked around perplexed. Sherlock smoked a few cigars in rapid succession, relaxed, and walked slowly towards a large brass mortar. He put his hand in it and saw that there was flour like substance. He took a pinch and smelled it. He smelled it once more and extended his hand towards Watson. Watson too smelled it and said, "This looks like some animal substance." As soon as he heard Watson's observation, Sherlock started laughing hysterically. Nothing could stop Holmes' laughter. "Why are you laughing like this, Holmes?" asked Watson. Holmes continued laughing. "I hope it is not some kind of powder that induces madness in humans," speculated Watson and smelled the powder again. At this Sherlock said, "Doctor, this is not a madness inducing powder, but if you know what powder this is, you would become mad too."

Sherlock lit another cigar, sat on a chair, leaned back comfortably, and started explaining: "Doctor, look here, here is a vat filled with a liquid distilled out of air. You are aware that if rabbits and such animals are killed and thrown into this

liquid, their bodies solidify and become like shiny sugar crystals or resins and it becomes easier to crush them into a powder. Similarly, can't human bodies be put into this liquid too and crushed?"

As soon as he heard this, Watson started jumping up and down like a madman. "I got it Sherlock, the powder in this mortar is the remains of a human body. Undoubtedly. Could it be that Valentine Digby was killed and his body was pounded and made into a powder like this?"

"Without a doubt. But we don't have evidence to prove that these people had killed Digby and ground his body. They killed Digby and put the body into the liquid made out of air kept in that vat. Then they took the body out, put it in that mortar shaped like a trough, and crushed it into a powder. They put the powder into that leather tube lying there and with the help of a machine scattered the powder into the air. If we continue to search this house any longer, I fear the tree will break and fall on all of us. As beautiful Diana as is to the eye, she is an evil and a cruel woman too. Valentine Digby was caught in her deception and died a pointless death. Here's a woman who defeated even me!
