

The VANGUARD *of* VENUS

by LANDELL BARLETT

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(Extract from letter dated February 16, 1927, from Oliver Robertson, banker of Calcutta, India, to J. B. Cardigan, President of Cardigan Press Service, Inc.)

.....we got into a pretty hot argument over it, too. Of course, I thought Morrison was kidding me at first; but he kept insisting that Murdock wouldn't have done such a thing if he really hadn't meant it for the truth.

I told him that Murdock had probably had his little secret hobby of fiction-writing unknown to any of his friends, that he had thought up this story, for his own entertainment, and had taken this means of making it "plausible." I admit I don't understand why he should want to do such a thing, but I think you will agree with me that at least it is very clever. You can never tell what these serious-minded, middle-aged bachelors are going to do next. I was really quite exasperated at Morrison for believing this story. He knew poor Stanley better than I, it is true; but as joint executor of the estate, I insisted that if it were to be published at all, it should be as fiction, pure and simple. Then, if anyone wants to believe it, let him go to it.

Morrison argued that the notarial seal and the definite instructions on the envelope showed Murdock meant business—that he wasn't the kind to clutter up a strong box with junk. He reminded me that Murdock had chucked a fine position in the United States to come to India on a smaller salary and in a technically inferior rating, which was a fair indication of the truth of his story. Murdock was unimaginative as far as I know, but this story seems to indicate otherwise. He was a splendid chap, sober and industrious. He was the only one killed in that wreck of the Central of India at Coomptah ten days ago . . .

Knowing you are in touch with publishers that can handle this sort of thing, I have taken the liberty of sending you Murdock's document herewith, together with the envelope in which it was found. You will note that the instructions on the envelope indicate that it was to be opened only in the event of Murdock's death, by his executors, or by himself, on June 21, 1931. If you can dispose of this material for profit, I certainly will appreciate it.

N. B.—Touched up a bit, it might make good reading—in fact, I think it is deucedly interesting as it stands.

Let me know as soon as possible, old man, what you think of this and what disposition you want to make of it. I'll appreciate it very much if you can find a publisher, for it was Stanley's wish . . .

Your old, hard-headed cousin,

Oliver Robertson.