IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

John T. McIntyre



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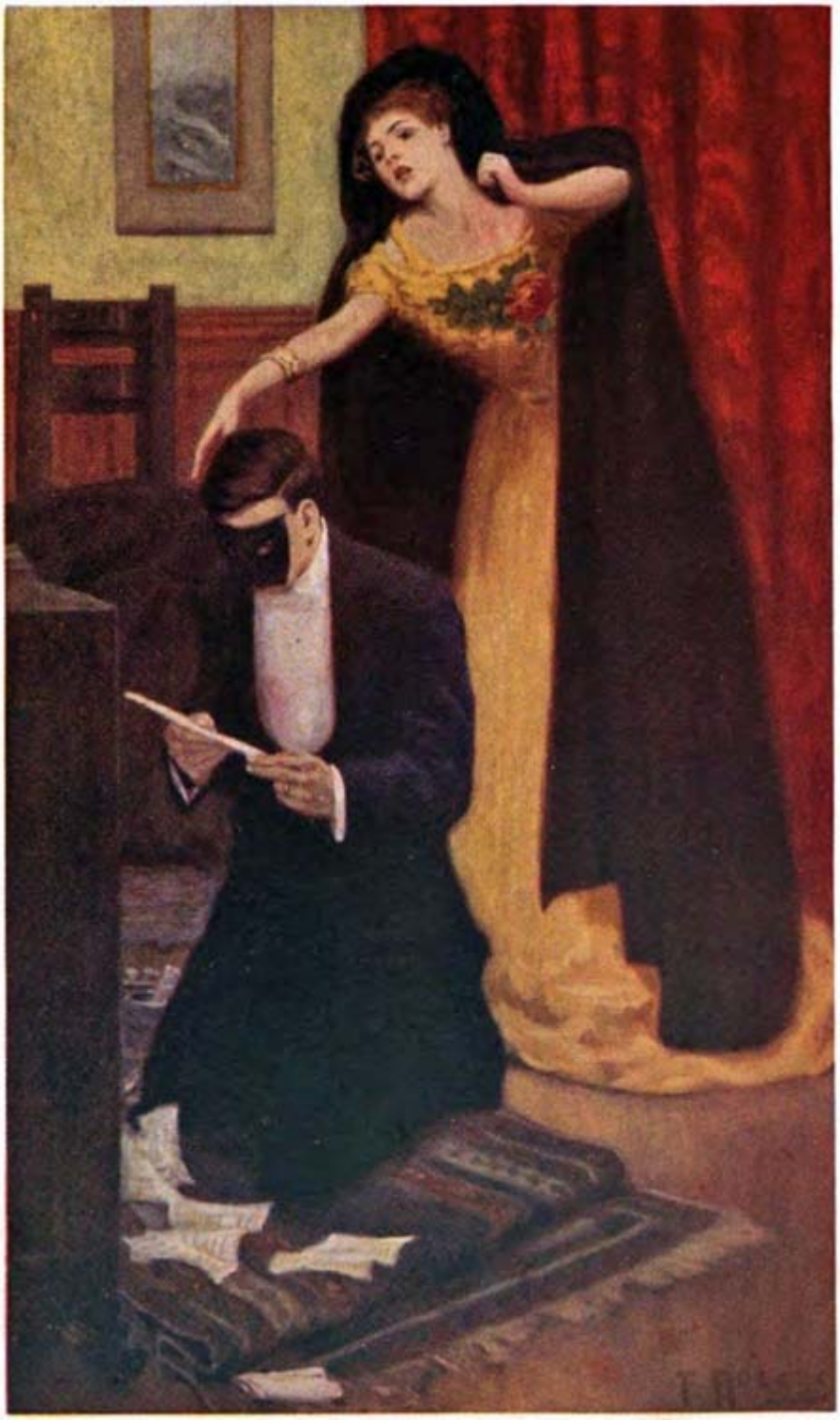
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Published: 1908
Source: Project Gutenberg
Ilustrator: Frances Rogers
Edition: United States : J. B. Lippincott, The Washington Square Press, Philadelphia, U. S. A, 1908



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A SMALL WHITE HAND DARTED OVER HIS SHOULDER

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

BY

JOHN T. McINTYRE

Author of "With Fighting Jack Barry," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

FRANCES ROGERS



PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1908

Transcriber's notes:

Obvious typographical errors have been corrected.
Inconsistencies in hyphenation have been standardized.
Archaic or alternate spelling has been retained from the original.

To Alice Mumford Roberts

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I
The girl in the hansom cab

“Mysteries, my boy, are always things of the night.”

—*A Saying of Garry Webster.*

Kenyon ate the good little German dinner which the Berlin always served, and looked amusedly out upon Broadway.

“Apparently it’s the same old town,” said he. “A little more light, a few more people; but the same cocksureness, the same air of being the goal of all human effort.”

With a smile, he lay back in his chair and watched the tide ebbing along. It was a November night and the pulse of Broadway beat heavily: the stream of life that flowed through the great artery was as flippant and as garish as a vaudeville. An orchestra was drooning behind some palms in the Berlin; it played one of those Indian things, filled with the throb of tom-toms and unusual combinations of tone.

But Kenyon listened inattentively. He ate the last morsel of his dessert with satisfaction, and drained the last drop of wine with appreciation; then he turned once more and watched the crowds. It was the first time he had been in New York in ten years; yet the glare and effrontery of its big highway was waking the fever of the city in his blood.

“Will there be anything else, sir?” asked the precise German who had served him.

“Only the check,” answered Kenyon. He felt for his card-case, after the waiter had turned away; it held a single ten-dollar bill, and this he regarded ruefully.

“It is not much of a defence against the aggressions of the world,” said he. “And I fancy that this little dinner will put a rather large-sized breach in it.” He turned the check over gingerly. “Seven-fifty! Whew! Why, that would have kept me half a lifetime in Rio.”

Then he stood up to be helped on with his long top-coat. His dress clothes had been made in Montevideo, but a good English tailor had done the work, and they looked well even under the searching eyes and lights of the Berlin. But almost anything would have looked well on Kenyon; he was of the tall, wide-shouldered type that wear even shapeless things with distinction.

“*Danke schön*,” said the waiter as he slipped the coin handed him into his waistcoat pocket, and gravely bowed his patron out.

Drawing on his gloves Kenyon leisurely walked up Broadway. People turned and glanced after him with curious eyes, for there was always a sort of elegance in Kenyon’s manner of dress that commanded attention. But it was not alone the hang of a smoothly fitting coat over the shapely, powerful figure; there was the good-humored, good-looking face, also an air of quiet distinction and breeding; and then, stamped all over him, so to speak, was the resolution that makes victors of desperately circumstanced men.

No one, to look at him as he walked slowly along, would have dreamed that this immaculate creature had stood, only seven hours before, stripped to the waist in the stoke-hole of the British ship *Blenheim*. Yet it was so. He had boarded her at Rio when she touched there two weeks before; and though the fire-room was no inviting prospect, still it was better than Rio. A Latin-American city is never a place for a penniless Gringo.

The section called the “Great White Way” lay before Kenyon like a shimmering vortex.

“It screams like a phonograph,” pronounced the young man, critically. “And it’s just as ceaseless, as senseless, and as raucous. This is the spot, I think, that old Colonel Ainsleigh at West Point used to call a phosphorescent ulcer. And it looks it. It’s the pride spot of the habitual New Yorker from the small town—the money dump—the place of cakes and ale.”

Then he laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“I really think the Berlin’s dinner does not set well on me,” he told himself. “I once liked New York very well. But it may be that thirty is a great deal more than ten years older than twenty. My taste for many things has slackened in those ten years, and who knows but what the big town has suffered along with the other old likings.”

Hard-worked hansoms and goblin-eyed motor-cars spun along the smooth asphalt; jeweled women and carefully attired men streamed in at the light-flooded lobbies of the theatres. Electric cars loaded with pleasure seekers flashed clanging up and down.

At Herald Square Kenyon paused. The miraculous presses, turning out the pink-tinted *Telegram*, held him fascinated. As he stood there, the sharp staccato of a newsboy began to reach him. At first he paid no attention to the high-pitched, complaining cry; but above the grind of cab wheels and the thousand sounds of Broadway, it gradually began to take shape in his mind.

“Extree! Eight o’clock!”

The thin voice pierced the air like a thing with a point; and without actually being aware of the burden of the cry, Kenyon began to be annoyed by its abrupt dissonances.

“Full account! Great fortune! Extree!”

A great fortune! Kenyon was irritated by the idea. One does not contemplate another’s calm possession of a vast sum of money with any great degree of equanimity when one has but a few dingy dollars in the world.

“And suppose this gold-fat fool has his millions,” muttered the young man, as he turned away from the windows. “That is no reason why he should shatter the eardrums of people as they pass about their business.”

“Extree! Eight o’clock! Great fortune!”

Kenyon beckoned the boy, and in a moment he had a paper. Somehow, as he turned and walked toward Thirty-sixth Street, the realization suddenly came to him of how badly off he was; and he scowled at the shadowy future, a sudden, sobering fear at his heart. But this was only for a moment. The man who had stood at the side of Nunez on that last dreadful night in Montevideo was not one to allow a little ill-luck to cast him down; so with chin up and shoulders squared, Kenyon threw the thing from him with a laugh.

At the corner of Thirty-sixth Street he paused and opened the paper. In great, black type the following stared at him:

WHO IS THE HEIR?

$200,000,000!

COLOSSAL FORTUNE OF STEPHEN AUSTIN
HANGS IN THE BALANCE.

Kenyon did not read farther, but folded the paper and stood tapping it thoughtfully in his open palm.

“The human mind,” he muttered, “can scarcely grasp the meaning of such a sum. And for one man to possess it all makes me suspect that something is out of kelter with our system of doing things. Here I am broke, and with the prospect of a succession of dinnerless days before me; and then here is another fellow with tons of money and no one to give it to. If I had the running of things I’d take down the bars on some of the fat pasture-land and let the lean cattle do a little private grazing.”

Upon the opposite side of Broadway a hansom was drawn up at the curb. Kenyon’s eyes rested absently upon the veiled woman who sat within it. He saw her speak a few hasty words to the driver; then he noted the man’s quick glance in his direction, and the smart swish of the long whip over the roof of the vehicle. The hansom rattled across the street and drew up beside him; the woman leaned forward.

“I was beginning to think that you had failed us,” she said.

A whimsical look came into Kenyon’s eyes; then he smiled good-naturedly.

“I beg your pardon,” he began; but she interrupted him.

“It is quite unnecessary,” she said. He noted that the tone and the gesture that accompanied the words were rather cold and imperious. “I suppose,” she continued, “that you did not know that he was ill; but, even so, you should not have delayed. However, it is not yet too late. The physicians have assured us that he will live until morning—that he may even get well.”

The whimsical look left Kenyon’s eyes and with it went the smile.

“Has there not been a mistake?” he asked, gravely. But she gestured impatiently.

“The physicians are the best in New York.”

Notwithstanding the coldness of the tone, there was a certain sweetness in the voice that attracted Kenyon; that she was a woman of gentle breeding was very evident. And then she was young!

Regretfully, he was about to inform her that he was not the person she thought him to be—that he was a stranger in New York—that he did not know a soul among its four millions. But she stopped him once more.

“The others are already there.” She made room for him beside her, as she spoke. “Will you get in? The matter must be adjusted quickly if at all.”

He noticed a quick flash of something like indignation in this last sentence, and smiled. She caught this and instantly her head went up like that of an offended queen.

“I will take this occasion to say,” she said, freezingly, “that I have considered his safety, alone, from the beginning. My own feelings do not enter into the matter.”

“I ask your pardon, again,” began the young man. “But the fact is —”

The small white hand went up once more and waved back the words.

“I repeat,” she said, “that you are still in time. However, it would have been much better if you had come earlier. The ship reached port some seven or eight hours ago; and there could have been nothing to detain you.”

Kenyon bent his brows, and looked puzzled.

“What ship do you refer to?” he asked.

“The *Blenheim*,” came the prompt answer. Her eyes were searching his face intently; even the thick veil could not hide the fact that they were big, dark, and lustrous. “That was the ship, was it not?”

“It was,” answered Kenyon, and the puzzled look grew deeper.

“He is very low,” the girl continued, “and he is very anxious to see you.”

A number of people stood about. Those who overheard were beginning to stare; and as this could not be endured, Kenyon entered the hansom. Instantly the driver called to his horse; the vehicle went rattling along Thirty-sixth Street, heading east, and Kenyon settled back by the girl's side, smiling his astonishment into the darkness.

II

The dark house in selden's square

"When strange eyes peer through the veiling dark,
Take care, my friend, take care!"

—*From the Doggerels of Balmacenso.*

It was Kenyon's idea, upon entering the cab, to afford himself an opportunity, out of earshot of the idlers, of bringing this bizarre situation to an end. But as before the girl gave him no chance.

"When you left Rio," she began, in a rather hesitating way, "you had but little money, I understand."

"That," smiled Kenyon, "is very true." And, for all the smile, he gazed at her searchingly. For it was a very odd thing that she should know so much about him. Within fifteen minutes she had told him that he had arrived on the *Blenheim*, that he had sailed from Rio, and that he had been hard put for money when he left there. But the thick veil hid her face from him, and he turned his gaze away, baffled.

In a few moments she spoke again; and once more he detected the slight note of hesitancy in her voice.

"Have you seen Moritze & Co.?"

"Moritze & Co.?" he repeated wonderingly.

"Oh!" suddenly. "I had forgotten. Of course you have not yet heard of them in connection with this matter."

Kenyon laughed.

"Why, no," he admitted; "I must confess that I have not heard of them in connection with this matter; nor of anyone or anything else having to do with it. It's all a mystery to me."

“Could you expect anything more, under the circumstances?” She was fumbling in a small handbag as she spoke. He watched her, amazed at how the thing drifted on.

“It does not do to speak freely of some things before all is ready,” she continued, with a return of the cold manner of a few moments before. “You should have learned that while you were with Nunez.”

He caught his breath.

Nunez! She knew about that! And he had not thought that any person north of Panama knew of the part that he had played in that ill-fated expedition in Uruguay. He was still confusedly groping amid the mental haze which her words had produced, when she spoke again.

“I was entrusted with this and asked to give it to you.”

She placed a slip of crackling paper in his hand; the cab lamps were too dim for him to discern the figures, but a glance showed the young man that it was a check.

“No, no,” he cried, hastily. “I cannot accept this!”

“Why not? It is the exact sum that you demanded.”

If there had been scorn in her voice before, it now seemed to have increased a hundredfold; and the undisguised contempt in her manner showed her disbelief in him. This was very evident to Kenyon; he was too young to be indifferent to a woman’s scorn, and a hot flush arose to his face. When he spoke his voice was sharp and had a ring that she had not heard before.

“The reason why I cannot take this is very plain to myself, at least,” said he. “There has been some mistake made. I am not the man you take me to be!”

He saw her start at this, and peer at him through the changing light. The veil seemed to obstruct her vision and she flung it aside; for the first time he saw her face.

“Dark,” he muttered, “and beautiful. And her eyes! Heavens! I never saw anything like them before.”

And her head had a proud, youthful lift to it that caught his attention instantly. It was the sort of thing that he had always admired, but had never seen so completely possessed before.

“I am afraid,” she said, coldly, “that I do not quite understand. There can be no mistake. You are the person for whom I was sent.”

“I think not.”

“Yet you admit that you are just from Rio?”

“Yes.”

“And that you came in the *Blenheim*?”

“I did.”

“And you served with General Nunez in Uruguay, did you not?”

“Yes.”

“Then there is nothing wanting. You are the man. But,” and the dark eyes flashed as she spoke, “I hardly think, were the choice of my making, that I should have fixed upon you.”

The continued scorn of her manner piqued him. He was not accustomed to it.

“No?” he questioned.

“No. You resort to odd and useless evasions. You do not speak straightforwardly. You dodge the point at issue. You seem uncertain as to whether you shall go on, or go back. I expected, at least, to find a man of firmness and decision.”

This aroused Kenyon. Youth, as a rule, desires to show to good advantage before a pretty woman. And to this he was no exception.

“You do me an injustice,” he said. He spoke calmly, slowly, and evenly enough, but there was heat behind the words. “If I have shown any lack of decision it is because of my natural reluctance to proceed farther in this, to me, incomprehensible affair. I desire to be honest, and have no wish to penetrate deeper into a matter which cannot in the least concern me.” He leaned toward her and continued. “Once again I tell you that I am not the man you take me to be.”

She drew back from him as far as the limited space of the cab would permit, but said nothing. He crackled the check paper in his fingers, as he held it up and proceeded.

“This money is not for me. I cannot accept it. I think you had better assure yourself that all is right before going any farther.”

Sudden anger filled her eyes, even in the dimness he could see it glinting in amber points. But her voice, when she spoke, showed no trace of it.

“What more can I do?” she asked. “You have satisfactorily answered every question that I have asked.”

“You might ask one more,” suggested Kenyon, coolly.

“And what is that?”

“My name.”

He could feel her searching his face with those beautiful eyes once more. But there was no doubt in them now; neither was there any abatement of the anger that glowed in them.

“Why should I ask your name?” she asked. “I know it already.”

“I question that,” said Kenyon, confidently.

“It is written upon the check which you hold in your hand.”

As they passed a street lamp, Kenyon held up the check so that the light would fall upon it.

She had spoken the truth! In a cramped, quavering hand he saw that it was drawn to the order of Steele Kenyon!

Once more he settled heavily back against the cushions of the cab. He was lost in astonishment. But almost at the same instant the vehicle pulled up and the apron was flung open.

“And now,” remarked the girl, evenly, “if you have made up your mind that everything is right we will get out.”

He sprang down and helped her to alight. It was an instinct that prompted him to do so, however, for his mind was groping in a maze of wonderment. The strangeness of the whole incident was beating sluggishly in his brain; and try as he would he could make nothing of it.

She knew his name! She knew of Nunez, of Rio, of everything. And, now, incredible as it seemed, there was little doubt but what he was actually the person wanted. He could not intelligently grasp any part of it, and with military abruptness ceased trying.

“Let it work itself out as it will,” he muttered, “I’ll not say another word in protest.”

So when the girl opened a heavy door with a pass-key, he asked no questions; and when she closed the door softly behind them, he followed her down the wide, dimly lit hall without a word.

The house was soundless. The girl opened the door of a room off the hall; a single gas jet burned lowly within; she motioned for him to go in.

“Please sit down,” she said. “You will not be kept waiting long.”

Even in the uncertain flicker of the low-turned light, her way of carrying herself pleased him. She was tall and straight, her outlines were soft and womanly; and then there was the proud lift of the head which he had noticed before. There was a suppleness in her movements that one could not help observing; but her air of youthful distinction was what impressed Kenyon most of all.

But there was no lessening of the scorn in her manner; and as she made a movement as though to leave the room, a sort of quick regret flashed over him.

"Somehow," he murmured, after she had gone, "I wish she had stayed. I'd like to be better acquainted with her; I'd like to have a chance to convince her that I don't deserve such treatment as she's been giving me."

He sat down and stared at the door which had closed upon her a moment before.

"An armor of ice, that's what it is," he thought. "And it doesn't belong to her. I could see a charm beneath it that she could not hide. It showed itself when she spoke of the person who is ill. And she's beautiful. Heavens, yes! She's beautiful."

He sat broodingly for a moment or two; then his thoughts reverted to the comedy in which he was playing so odd a part, and his humorous brown eyes twinkled.

"They will ring in the second act before long, I suppose," he muttered, with a little yawn. "And I have no doubt but what it will bring the denouement as well."

Some little time passed and Kenyon sat patiently awaiting the outcome of his adventure. But nothing occurred. The house remained soundless.

In his thirty years of life he had gone through many strange experiences, but for sheer uniqueness this present adventure surpassed them all. As he sat there in the semi-darkness he began to marshal the facts together.

After Nunez had been killed in that last desperate stand in Montevideo, Kenyon had fled north through Uruguay with Balmacenso, and crossed the frontier into Rio Grande du Sol. Then they made their way to Rio.

“And Balmacenso,” silently argued Kenyon, “was the only man in Rio who knew my identity; and Balmacenso died of a fever a good two weeks before the *Blenheim* entered port. He could not have sent word north that I was going to sail in her; for at the time of his death I had no intention of doing so—in fact I had never heard of the ship before she steamed up the harbor.

“And yet here is this girl, and some others whom I’m perhaps shortly to see, expecting me, on that very ship. And apparently they know of my connection with the revolt in Uruguay; of my being flat broke in that God-deserted hole, Rio; of my—but what’s the use of rehearsing all their surprising knowledge. I must go deeper into the affair before I can understand any of it.”

He waited patiently. The flickering point of almost blue flame of the gas jet threw an uncertain light in a confined radius about where he sat; the remainder of the room was shadowy and obscure. But his eyes gradually became accustomed to the dimness of the far corners; and little by little the consciousness stole upon him that he was not alone.

Directly opposite, at a point where the struggling light rays failed entirely to dispel the shadows, he began to discern the outlines of two human figures, indistinct, vague, but constantly assuming more definite form as his eyes searched them out.

Kenyon’s steady courage had been proven a thousand times in the campaigns of Nunez in South America; no matter what the stress of the moment, or the unexpected nature of the danger his brain always worked coolly and smoothly. And now, though he began to fear that he had been led into a trap, he remained perfectly still. The two shapes in the shadow sat with their backs to the wall their faces turned toward him; he could now and then catch the shifting glint of their eyes, but they made no other movement.

For some little time Kenyon silently and coolly observed them. The house was as soundless as before; nothing occurred that gave him the least idea as to what to expect.

But, as no movement of any sort was made, the thing became tiresome. As the girl did not return, and as the two silent men in the shadow made no sign, Kenyon resolved to take the initiative himself.

The gas jet was within easy arm's length; rising suddenly he turned it on, full head.

"Gentlemen," he remarked, bowing with a graceful and easy politeness that was natural to him, "a trifle more light, I think, would make us better acquainted."

III

In the face of strange dangers

“When the method of attack is not fully understood, go slowly and warily.”

—Kenyon’s “Art of the Sabre.”

In spite of Kenyon’s nonchalant ease and smiling face, his muscles were flexed for a swift rush. But this never came; both men arose and silently saluted him; then they resumed their seats once more.

The puzzled expression that had come into Kenyon’s eyes in the cab, returned. But in that way only did he show it. His manner was as easy as before; he leaned negligently against a heavy table and smiled engagingly. All the time, however, his keen glances and rapid brain were gauging the quality of the men with whom he had to deal.

With mild surprise he noted that the elder of the two was a Chinaman, a tall, emaciated man, with sunken, slanting eyes, hollowed temples, and shaven crown. The straight, thin, bloodless lips were drawn back, showing the teeth; the wasted hands rested, claw-like, upon the arms of his chair. As Kenyon looked, the man coughed hollowly and raised a handkerchief furtively to his lips.

“Phthisis,” was Kenyon’s mental judgment. “And about the most advanced stage I should say.”

The second was a huge, boyish, fresh-looking youth, with an eager, smiling look, and attired much after the fashion affected by collegians of the younger sort.

“If he is a college man, he’s a guard on the eleven, throws weights or does some other equally hefty stunt,” Kenyon decided. “He’s put

together like a horse."

For a moment the two retained their silence; they bent forward in their chairs and carefully examined the graceful, immaculate figure by the table. Then the Chinaman spoke.

"Be seated, Mr. Kenyon," he said in a husky, unpleasant voice. "Do not disturb yourself in the least. We are quite delighted to see you."

Once more Kenyon bowed, laughingly.

"If it is all the same to you, I prefer to stand," said he. "And I think, gentlemen, you may trust me to keep myself in a fairly calm state of mind. As to your pleasure at sight of me," and his eyes twinkled humorously, "permit me to say that you did not appear in any great hurry to display it."

The Celestial's lips drew back from his prominent teeth in what was meant for a smile; Kenyon, in spite of his self-control, could not help a slight shudder. The almost fleshless face, the shaven crown, and sunken eyes made the man look like a death's-head.

"I trust you will pardon our silence," said he, in slowly spoken, perfect English.

"Pray don't speak of it," returned Kenyon. "Strangers sometimes find it extremely difficult to pick material for conversation; and I never take offence at any man's shrinking from the conversational idiocies of such occasions."

Again the yellow man smiled his ghastly smile; but his companion laughed outright.

"I say," said he, in the big-boyish way that his looks had made Kenyon expect, "you've got it right, Kenyon. I hate all that sort of rot myself. When I talk, I like it straight from the shoulder—I want it to mean something, you know."

There was a hearty, engaging sort of candor in his voice and manner common to the big-bodied, out-door man. But still there was an undercurrent of some inexplicable sort that focussed Kenyon's attention instantly upon him. The frank smile was there, the genial look that one would expect was in his eye; the eager, boyish spirit seemed to fill him.

"But he's off-shade somewhere," Kenyon told himself. "I don't know just where; but if I talk to him long enough I'll get him located and classed."

The Chinaman leaned forward, motioning his companion to be silent. Instantly the young man seemed to withdraw into himself.

"The yellow one is the intellect," was Kenyon's thought as his alert glance took this in. "And I shouldn't wonder but what we were now coming to business."

The eyes of the Chinaman fixed themselves upon Kenyon's face. Sunken and slanted as they were usually, they presented a strange, uncanny appearance; but now their lids were puckered over them; and through each slit a burning, rat-like eye looked forth.

"In this Western world, Mr. Kenyon," said he, "it is the conventional thing for strangers, I understand, to discuss the weather." He bent forward and the burning slits of eyes seemed to be boring the young man through. "This being so," he continued, "might I ask what sort of weather you were having in Butte when you left there?"

The question was quietly asked; but Kenyon instantly felt the weight of their intense expectancy as though by telepathic messages. Both the faces before him were now as expressionless as plaster masks; with semi-fascinated eyes he watched the twitching of one claw-like, yellow hand as it lay upon the Chinaman's knee. Nevertheless he did not lose his poise for a moment.

"It was raining heavily when I left Butte," said he.

Instantly the claw glided into the breast of the yellow man's coat; the boyish giant half arose from his chair.

"But," continued Kenyon, with never a trace of haste in his voice, "that was several years ago, and I'm sure is of no interest now."

Slowly the claw crept into view once more and lay empty upon the arm of the chair; slowly the big form of the younger man sank back. Everything was as still as death. The single gas jet threw quavering shadows about the three. Kenyon still leaned easily against the table, watching the others with speculative eye.

Quick footsteps were heard to ring upon the flags without. The room was at the front of the house and street noises could be plainly heard. The footsteps suddenly paused, then ascended the stone steps. The hand of the Chinaman instantly went up; a glance of intelligence passed between him and his companion; then both turned and nodded apologetically to Kenyon.

“That,” and the Celestial jerked a thumb toward the street, “is the person from Butte. Listen!”

As he spoke there came a swift rush of feet from without, a sharp, quick cry and the dull beat of blows. Kenyon sprang toward the door leading to the hall; but he found the hands of the young white man against his chest, and saw the fresh, good-humored face looking into his own.

“Steady, old fellow. Wait for the word.” The speaker forced a smile. “There is no cause for you to go off like this. Take my word for it, whatever little matter is going on outside there is for the good of everybody concerned.”

While he spoke the sounds of the struggle had ceased; the patter of softly running feet was heard, then all was still again.

Kenyon stepped back and carefully arranged his tie and the hang of his coat; for the young giant had stopped him rather suddenly.

“Whoever you are,” remarked he, gently, as he fastidiously smoothed off the traces of their contact, “you appear to have a way with you.” Then with a sudden sharpness in his voice and an altered look in his face, he went on, addressing both. “It seems to be taken for granted that *I* am concerned in what is happening here. Now, let me disabuse your minds upon that point. I’ve seen my share of the broken points of life and have known what it is to fight hard for small profits; but my interests have never yet reached the stage where I deemed it expedient to garrotte a man in the darkness to serve them. Don’t forget that fact, as we go along!”

It was the Chinaman who replied.

“We will try not to,” said he in his husky tones. He coughed hollowly and the handkerchief went to his lips; that he had difficulty in breathing was evident, but for all that, a look of marked satisfaction was upon his face. “We have made no mistake, my son,” addressing his companion, “in selecting Mr. Kenyon, it seems. He pleases me. It is not often that one meets with a person quite so much to one’s liking.”

The other man smiled cheerfully. “I never saw the time, Hong, that you were not right,” said he. “It takes you to pick the winners.” There was unquestioned admiration in his eyes as he turned to Kenyon.

“You are the man for the job. You seem to have a real talent for this sort of thing. Good stuff! I like your work.”

“Thank you,” returned Kenyon, dryly. “You are very good.”

“Now that I’m sure it’s you, I’m glad to know you,” said the big young man. He shook hands with Kenyon in a hearty, whole-souled fashion; there was honesty and good intent in every line of his face. Kenyon’s searching eyes were bent upon him; but if ever there was candid, wide-open geniality it was before him.

“This fellow,” he mentally admitted, “has me winging. He seems right, but—”

The Chinaman began to speak.

“It is well, I think,” said he to Kenyon, “for you and Forrester to become well acquainted.”

“Forrester?” Kenyon turned a questioning look upon him.

“Of course—Forrester,” said the young giant, rather impatiently. He looked the ex-lieutenant of Nunez over very carefully for a moment and then added: “Do you know, I think that if you have any fault at all, Kenyon, it is that you play the game too strong. I am Forrester. You must have known that.”

Kenyon gestured gracefully.

“My dear sir,” said he, “there are a great many things that I should know; nevertheless a dense darkness seems to hedge them around. If any light is to be thrown upon this matter, I beg of you to turn it on now.”

“You are right,” said the Chinaman, approvingly. “There is nothing in the world like being positive—of knowing just with what you have to do. But as things rest we can tell you nothing. We know nothing, save that I am Hong Yo, and that this,” pointing to the other, “is Forrester.”

Kenyon acknowledged this latter information easily.

“I am delighted,” he said, “and I have no doubt but what our acquaintance will lead to some small matter of considerable interest.”

“Oh,” said the Chinaman, with another of his hideous smiles, “it is sure to do that. But we must be patient; we must wait. The next step is yours to take; whatever the result, it will be of your making.”

He coughed once more, with ominous hollowness; then he seemed to settle down into his chair and fall into a deep train of thought. Kenyon felt Forrester quietly touch his sleeve and turning found the young man at his elbow.

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Forrester, nodding toward Hong Yo. "He gets into those moods now and then. And, do you know, it doesn't pay to break into them. He has rather a nasty temper; and then, too he can think up the damnedest things you ever heard of when he gets deep into it, that way. You see," guardedly, "he doesn't stand very well, and that sort of tells on him. He's the kind of a chap that likes to run things all by himself. He didn't care about letting me into this, at all. But when it came to you, he acted real nasty." There was speculation in his eye as he regarded the brooding Hong Yo, and he continued: "It wouldn't surprise me a bit if he hasn't been a sudden sort of a customer in his day. He certainly has the look of it."

"I shouldn't wonder," said Kenyon. "Then," without a change of tone, "you have not known him long?"

"Not very," with noticeable briefness.

There came a rustling of a gown outside the door; then it opened and the girl re-entered. For a moment as she looked at the three occupants of the room there was appeal in her eyes, a piteousness that made Kenyon's heart melt in his breast. And there were red rims about the beautiful eyes.

"She's been crying," thought the young man, and a fury seized him that anyone or anything should cause her to do so.

"Mr. Forrester," she said, "will you come with me?"

Her voice was sweet and soft with that tremulous gentleness that so stirs a man. But when she turned to Kenyon all this vanished; the old hostile look returned.

"And you, also, sir," she said.

IV

Kenyon is drawn deeper into the maze

"A man should always strive to be at his best. He should never permit a girl to think meanly of him."

—A Remark of Garry Webster.

As the ex-lieutenant of Nunez followed the girl and Forrester from the room, he was both pleased and resentful. The pleasure came from the fact that he had judged correctly as to the charming reality under the icy veneer.

"It's all assumed," he told himself. "The rôle of the haughty, suspicious woman is but a rôle. Beneath it is a nature as sweet as one could desire; I had a glimpse of it as she came in; it was only a glimpse but it was enough."

But why she wore this mask, and apparently for his special benefit, he could not understand. It was this that caused the resentment.

"I haven't done anything to merit it," muttered he. "It's the first time she ever saw me, and it's not quite the right sort of thing to take snap judgments that way."

Hong Yo was left in the room below, still seated in the chair by the wall and still deep in thought. Indeed, he had scarcely raised his head upon the girl's entrance; however, as Kenyon was closing the door behind him, he fancied that he caught a glimpse of the sunken, slanting eyes.

"Pah!" muttered the young adventurer, shudderingly. "He's more like a death's-head than ever! I don't want to do anyone an injustice, for I really *do* dislike snap judgments, but if there is anything wrong

here, which there decidedly seems to be, why, our friend Hong Yo is most intimately concerned in it."

Both young men followed the girl up the staircase and into a dimly lighted room upon the second floor. An aged, white-bearded man lay upon a bed; in a chair beside him sat a tall girl with a great crown of golden hair; she was pale-faced and anxious; her attitude was watchful.

As they entered, the sick man struggled up; the girl bent and whispered something to him, and a look of joy came into his face.

"You are welcome, my friends," he said, weakly. "And I thank you."

Both men bowed gravely, and then the old man turned peeringly to Kenyon.

"And so, you have come at last! Welcome. But pardon; I cannot see you very well. My eyes are growing dim."

He held out a shaking hand, and Kenyon took it in his strong clasp.

"It's a sort of obsession," Kenyon told himself, as he alternately looked at the sick man and those at his bedside. "I don't know these people. I've never seen any of them before to-night, and they can't possibly know me."

And yet the supreme confidence of them all seemed to assure him that he was wrong. It was as though, in some odd way, a page had been torn from the book of his life—a page in which these characters had played a part, and which he had completely forgotten.

The weak old man exercised the same effect upon him as the check. He felt that he could not undertake another step in the matter until all had been made clear to him. To go groping forward in this way was distasteful, dishonest, criminal! Turning an irresolute look upon the others, he caught the dark, steadfast eyes of the girl of the hansom cab. His face flushed hotly.

"What a hesitating idiot she must think me," he muttered, angrily. "She expects me to go ahead. So go ahead I will!"

The touch of his hand seemed somehow to give the old man strength.

"What a pity," he said, waveringly, "that Nunez should not have lived. Ah, his was the brain to plan; his was the daring spirit to lead." Then, eagerly, "Tell me of his end."

“He died like a soldier,” answered Kenyon, gravely. “He held Montevideo as long as courage and skill could hold it; and when he went down, it was in the center of the plaza, with his face to the enemy.”

With difficulty the old man struggled to an upright position.

“In an hour,” said he, whisperingly, “I too, shall be dead.”

With a sharp cry the golden-haired girl sank upon her knees beside the bed; the other bent over the old man, whispering soothingly, her eyes full of unshed tears.

“It is true,” continued the sick man, gently. “Dear hearts, you might as well know it now as later.” He placed a hand upon each of their heads, a world of tenderness in the caress. “And the bitterest thing about it all is that I may leave you both unprotected—perhaps in as great danger as *he* will be.”

Kenyon noted the emphasis and wondered who it was that was referred to. No one spoke for a moment; a small clock in another room ticked high and sharply; the noises from the street seemed strangely muffled. It was Forrester who spoke first; hesitatingly he moved nearer to the bed; there was the subdued, boyish eagerness in his manner that Kenyon had observed before.

“Anna at least shall not be left unprotected,” said he. “All here know my love for her. I want her for my wife.”

The golden-haired girl raised her face and her eyes spoke eloquently to him. Kenyon drew in a great, satisfied breath and felt a glow of interest flush him from head to foot.

Then they were lovers, these two! That was excellent! He was pleased. Indeed, he doubted if he had ever seen a better matched couple before. The strongest desire in his mind was to reach over, take Forrester by the hand, and wish him success—heartily, earnestly, fully. For, somehow, the gentle greeting which the other girl had given Forrester in the room below, had excited a sort of disapproval in Kenyon’s mind; and it was something strikingly like relief that now went shocking and beating in his blood.

“Yes,” said the sick man to Forrester. “You love her; but whether she shall ever be your wife depends upon yourself.”

“I am ready to prove myself worthy of her—ready to do anything that a man may do,” said Forrester.

“Anything?”

A shadow settled upon the young man’s eager face.

“I said anything that a man may do,” said he, and there was a catch of indecision in his voice.

“This matter needs a man that is not only strong and brave, but one that has a ready wit. For the service that I desire, rendered fully and unquestioningly, a man may command anything that is in my power to give.”

The shadow upon Forrester’s face grew deeper; the eyes that he turned upon Anna were dumbly piteous, like those of a dog. Then he spoke.

“You require violence,” said he, “and to me that is a thing of fear; it seems to draw a red curtain before my eyes; the very thought of it brings to me the thick scent of blood. It is a horror that I have had from birth. But outside all this, I am opposed to force. I could not lift my hand against the life of a fellow man.”

“No matter what the cause?”

“No matter what the cause. The sacred law says: ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ And the law of my physical nature tells me that I must obey.”

Silence followed this, save only for Anna’s sobbing. Kenyon looked at the speaker in keen surprise. He was thinking of the sharp cry and muffled blows of a half hour before and of Forrester’s preventing him from leaping to the rescue of the person attacked.

“And unless my recollection is badly at fault,” thought Kenyon, “this same young gentleman was settling himself to do for me when our friend Hong Yo asked me the question about Butte, and the first half of my answer led them to think that I was lately from there. His present highly moral attitude hardly agrees with all that, I fancy.”

After a long silence, during which the sick man labored painfully for breath, he spoke again.

“I feel convinced,” he murmured, “that you are sincere. But that is not the point. To win this girl for your wife you must stand a friend to *him*. His designs must be your designs. You must stand or fall with him.”

Forrester’s face was one of agony, but he shook his head; there was no sign of wavering in his manner. The dark-eyed girl was

regarding him with wondering, puzzled eyes; but it was Anna who spoke.

"Griscom," she said, and the piteous little tremble in her voice would have shaken a man of granite, "you are breaking my heart. Will you not surrender one mite of principle for my sake?"

But Forrester was proof even against this; and though he turned away his face, apparently unable to look into her eyes, his voice was still decided.

"No; not even for you."

And then the girl's head sank once more and the great sobs shook her young body like a storm. Forrester's determination seemed to have its effect upon the old man also. It was clear that he had staked much upon the young giant, and had not expected this tenacious grip upon an idea that he, more than likely, did not altogether understand. And the disappointment told heavily upon the dregs of vitality left him; his chest seemed to sink, his face grew grayer. When he spoke his voice was lower than before.

"You, Mr. Kenyon, have seen stern work, and have no such childish prejudices against force."

Kenyon felt the dark eyes upon him, though he did not turn to see, and he answered promptly:

"I have not. Indeed, I have seen much good result from it—at times."

"Excellent! If you are half the man Nunez told me you were, long ago, you will serve me well. I thank you."

Then turning to the girls he said, weakly:

"My children, arise!"

Both girls arose to their feet obediently and the old man continued.

"I have always loved you both. That you know well. But many times I have regretted that you were not young men, that you might take upon yourselves the struggle that is to come. But I see now that it is all for the best. I am glad that you are what you are; for in you I see the triumph of my desire."

In the faces of Forrester and Anna, Kenyon read amazement at these words. But the face of the other girl did not change.

"Here is a man," and the old man indicated Forrester, "who knows every step I would have taken to safeguard him of whom you all

know. And here," indicating Kenyon, "is one of unquestioned courage, of ready resource, of coolness in the face of danger. Combined they will form a defence which even the most secret and deadly machinations would find difficult in breaking down. You, Griscom, have asked Anna of me in marriage; and you," to Kenyon, "have asked for her."

His hand, as he spoke, rested upon that of the girl of the hansom cab. Kenyon gasped and stood staring in wonder. This was the most astonishing of a series of astonishing things; and his amazement was so great that he could not have protested had his desire to do so been ever so great.

And, to speak the plain truth, the desire to do so did not even exist. There was a magic for him in that brilliant, proud face and imperiously uplifted head. Why, if he could—but he halted the idea instantly, crushing it down without ruth. No, no. That sort of thing would not do. He must not allow such fancies to get possession of him. Soldiering in South America is not very profitable employment, but it, at least, teaches a man to avoid ways that are perilous; and in the way to this beautiful unknown's love lay pain and heart-burning. He could read that in each glance of her eye and each movement of her supple, exquisite figure.

These thoughts occupied but a few seconds' time, and Kenyon was about following where they led when he was arrested by a gesture which the old man made to the two girls. They seemed to understand, and each raised her right hand; the fair-haired one was choked with sobs; the other proud and cold-eyed and looking unflinchingly into Kenyon's face. Then the sick man spoke in the panting, broken way of a man who had run a long race; and the girls repeated the words after him without hesitation.

"I solemnly swear that I will willingly become the wife of," here one spoke Forrester's name and the other Kenyon's, "but not until he has performed the service of which he knows."

As they finished the old man reached the end of his strength. A deep purple ring showed about his mouth, his head hung limply to one side. His iron will was still unbroken, for he managed to gasp out:

"My friends, it is for you to—"

But death killed the speech in his mouth. And as the two girls sank sobbing beside him, Forrester took two quick strides to Kenyon's side.

"Quick, now," he whispered. "Everything is ready. Your share of this work will stand no delay."

And with that he all but forced the adventurer from the room and down the stairs. In another moment Kenyon found himself upon the outer steps with the door closed behind him, and all about him the clustering shadows of the night.

V
Garry webster, of chicago

“It’s always best to have a pal; you can frame things up with him, you know.”

—*The Advice of Big Slim.*

Steele Kenyon placed his stick under his arm, and proceeded to draw on his gloves.

“Quite an interesting night,” he said, coolly. “I had no idea that there was so much gratis entertainment in New York. It is really hospitable. Here a lonely stranger arrives in town; and immediately he is taken in hand and provided with diversion of an absolutely unique character. The thing is an inspiration.”

He walked down the steps, and stood by the railing that ran along the front, gazing up at the building.

“At some future time,” he murmured, “I might have a desire to know just where to find this abode of marvels. The number is ninety-eight, and the street,” looking across the way at a corner light, “is Selden’s Square.”

He made a note of both. The arc lamps hissed and clicked in the silence; from away to the west came the throb of Broadway; the badly blended voices of some belated roisterers rose in quavering dissonance; the strip of sky that showed between the roof tops was black and starless.

“It was just about the top step, I fancy,” said Kenyon, “that the man from Butte was received so warmly.”

As he spoke a man appeared, apparently, from the shadows at his feet. With a sharp side-drive of the elbow Kenyon landed him heavily

against the railing; then he stood calmly posed before him ready for the next move.

The man pulled himself together and chuckled.

"You've got the punch with you, all right, pal," remarked he. "But don't cut it loose on my account. I'm not dealing with you on those lines."

"Then you should change your style of dawning on the scene," observed Kenyon, dryly. "It's the sort of thing that's calculated to get you into several varieties of trouble; for from a short distance it has rather a rugged look. But now that you are here, what *do* you want?"

"I want to make my get-away in a hurry," returned the man. "But first I'd like to say that it's the 'Far East' for a guy like you. Do you get me?"

And with that he turned and made softly away, clinging to the shadows, and at last disappearing around a corner.

"The motions of a panther and the manners of a yeggman," spoke Kenyon. "A most undesirable person to come upon, unprepared, I should say."

He turned and made his way westward, deep in thought. He walked with bent head, and did not notice a patrolman well along in the block who looked at him searchingly and suspiciously; but he was allowed to pass without interference.

A bell from a neighboring tower solemnly boomed two as he turned into Fifth Avenue and made his way down town. The night had turned chill and damp; he turned up the collar of his overcoat with a shiver and plunged his hands into the wide pockets. As he strode along he drew deeply at the cigar which he had lighted, until the end glowed redly.

When Kenyon smoked hard it was a positive indication of mental unrest. Against the high-colored background of surprise, suspicion and possible crime with which the night had daubed his thoughts, was thrown a brilliant face and a pair of flashing, scornful eyes.

Who was she? Who were they? And what was the mysterious thing which so held and so moved them all? But more than anything else, how, in the name of all that was bizarre and astonishing, did he come to be mixed up in it? No matter what side of the matter he set

himself to consider, he always came back to this particular one. It was a thing absolutely beyond his comprehension.

For a good two hours he tramped the streets smoking and thinking. If the girl had not figured in the affair it would have had but little effect upon him; he was quite well accustomed to startling occurrences, but her participation troubled him. Otherwise he could have gone comfortably to bed and forgotten it all.

"There is something decidedly wrong in Selden's Square," muttered he, "something that's off color and underhand. But what is it? And how does a girl like that—but she can have nothing to do with anything that's not correct. I am positive of that. There is something fine and high about her."

Just how he ever came to be walking along the North River front he never knew. He was so deep in conjecture that he had given no heed to where his steps had been leading him, and about four o'clock he found himself in the neighborhood of the Twenty-third Street ferry. Even this he would not have known had he not suddenly collided with a stoutly built young man, with fiery red hair, who was just about entering a railroad cab.

"Hello," cried this person, sharply. "Have the goodness to look where you are going, will you? It's all right and proper, my friend, to carry as much excess as you can comfortably handle. But don't try to shoulder any of it upon a man who has traveled much and is very tired."

"I beg your pardon," said Kenyon, stiffly.

The countenance of the other, in the ruddy flare of the cab lamps, suddenly expanded into a delighted grin.

"Why, dog-bust it, it's Kenyon!" he almost shouted. "Shake!"

"Garry Webster!" Kenyon gripped the extended hand, equally delighted. "Why, old boy, this *is* a surprise."

Webster shook Kenyon's hand with the utmost vigor.

"Well, who would ever have thought to meet you here," cried he. "It's been all of ten years since I saw you last, Ken, and a good five since I heard from you; and here you all but knock the breath out of me before I'm in New York ten minutes. But I thought you were doing stunts in South America with a machine gun and a backing of barefooted patriots."

“So I was, until a few weeks ago, but—”

“Hold on, tell me about it later. Pile in here,” drawing him toward the cab door; “kick those bags and things out of the way. I’m for the Waldorf, and the biggest breakfast they’ve got in the place.”

A feeling of faintness in the stomach told Kenyon that breakfast was a thing that he stood rather in need of himself. So he got into the cab with Webster and they bore down upon the hotel.

“I’m just in from Chicago,” the red-haired young man told Kenyon, “going to look into the windings of the hardware business here, and see if we can’t corral some of the trade that has been lately taken from us.”

“Still traveling for Webster & Seybold, eh?”

“Bless you, no!” laughed Garry. “The governor took me into the firm three years ago. This is my first business trip since, and I wouldn’t be making it, only it’s something special. You see, a rival concern has been cutting into our eastern trade like sixty, and something had to be done about it. And as I am the only one in the shop that is sufficiently acquainted with this market, why, it was me to get busy with my trunks. Back there somewhere, in a freight shed, I’ve got about a dozen sample cases filled with the finest steel implements and sundries ever seen east of Pittsburg. They are the limit, and no mistake. Webster & Seybold are out after the business of this section; and, as I block things out, when I’ve covered the ground, the entire harvest will be reaped and bound. I don’t intend to leave those other fellows opening enough to put in a pound of wire nails.”

Webster so laughed and choked and shook over this ideal if exaggerated prospect, that Kenyon, also laughing, was forced to pound him upon the back.

“You haven’t changed much, Garry,” remarked Kenyon. “You still like to slap your own choice of color on the future.”

“Well, there is no use in letting them put up some other shade for me, you know. They’d only turn out a job that wouldn’t suit. Paint the future in a good, cheerful hue, Ken, and she’ll never come to you in mourning. I made that discovery years ago, and have always stuck to the bright shades. No browns or grays for me.”

“But sometimes they get on of themselves.”

“Go ’long! It couldn’t happen, no matter how you take it. A man is always master of his future.”

“Not always. Sometimes things happen over which he has no control—for example the things which happened to me last night.”

“I can see a story in your eye. You have had an adventure.” Webster laughed and cocked up his feet. “Let’s have it, Ken, for your stories are always sure to have lots of go in them. But, hold on. Wait till we get to the hotel and start in on the breakfast. I’ll enjoy it better.”

At the Waldorf-Astoria, Garry engaged a magnificent suite.

“Webster & Seybold are going to do the thing right,” remarked he, as he walked about and approvingly surveyed the very evident elegance of the apartments. “Hardware men like to eat costly food and absorb colored drinks. Here is where they can do both; they can dine and sup and luncheon and breakfast to slow music and rapid propositions. And always will your humble servant be directly in the focus of the spot-light, reaching them the talk. Right off the dining-room is the sample-room. Do you get the effect? When they are feeling pleasant and comfortable and ‘old chappy,’ I’ll pilot them in there and they will buy as they never bought before. A man in good humor cannot possibly resist the line I will show him. And it will be instant delivery and ninety days’ time.”

“*You* have no thought of failure in your campaign, Garry,” remarked Kenyon, rather soberly.

“Failure! No! No man with the goods ever fails. It’s only the poor devils who try to win out with high prices, hard terms, and empty hands. Proper equipment is the thing that gains commercial battles as well as military ones.”

“I suppose that’s true. And other sorts as well, don’t you think?”

“Without a doubt.” Garry gazed at his friend curiously for a moment; then he said: “Somehow, Ken, you give me the impression of being in deep water. Has it anything to do with the night’s adventure?”

“It has all to do with it.”

“Oh! The experiences of these modern Babylons! I have had my own share of them; but as a rule I sort of slough them off before many hours have passed. It’s quite the best way. But here’s the breakfast.”

They ate in a small room, overlooking Fifth Avenue; and during the progress of the meal, Kenyon related his experiences of the preceding night. Webster listened with the utmost attention and many exclamations. When Kenyon had finished he lay back in his chair and fairly rocked with delight.

"Adventures to the adventurous!" cried he. "Why, old chap, it's like a night of our ancient friend, Haroun Al Raschid." He bent forward and continued with great interest, "And so the dark-eyed girl was beautiful, was she?"

"Charming! Superb! I never saw anything just like her before."

"And the indications are," said Webster, carefully inspecting his friend, "that you never will again. It's the sort of thing that only hits one once in a lifetime."

"Oh, pshaw!"

"By all means. But that's not going to alter anything. And you say she was cold, scornful, imperious, and all that?"

"Yes, but only to me. To everyone else she spoke gently; and it was at such moments that I got a glimpse of her true charm. Why, even this fellow Forrester came in for a share of it."

"Why not? According to your account of him, he must be rather an attractive kind of a chap, just the sort that is apt to be strong with women."

Garry witnessed with unholy joy the resentment that flushed Kenyon's face.

"But don't I tell you that he's in love with this other girl, and she with him. And then he's not at all the sort of fellow that such a girl would admire."

Webster shrugged his shoulders.

"You never can tell," said he. He lit a cigarette and lay back in his chair, smoking thoughtfully. At last he said: "But, aside from her, this is a peculiar experience. It's a great deal like a dream. There is something so absolutely lawless about it."

"I can make neither head nor tail of it," said Kenyon. "However, to tell the candid truth, I have examined but one side of the matter."

"I understand," said Webster, with a nod. "You're confiding in an old pal, Ken, so don't be backward. It's the girl." Kenyon was silent, so the young man from Chicago proceeded. "Of course it is. You

have been kept so busy trying to free her of any possible blame that you have been unable to see anything else."

"I think you are right," replied the other, quietly. "She impressed me as being strangely out of place in such an atmosphere. There was courage and goodness and high purpose in her every look and movement."

"Exactly." Webster instantly dropped his bantering manner at Kenyon's quiet, unembarrassed tone. His experience with the other told him that anything which his friend took seriously was not to be treated lightly. Throwing away his cigarette end, he lighted a fresh one. "I can't think properly unless I'm continually firing up," explained he.

He drew quickly and deeply, and the thick blue smoke formed a veil between him and Kenyon. Then, waving it away with his hand, he proceeded:

"Now let us take this little affair from the very start. I suppose you have been doing that ever since it happened; but if we are to get at anything tangible in the way of a solution we must do it once more. Let me play the grand inquisitor; I probably see the entire adventure from a different angle than you, and will, perhaps, set your mind to working upon points that all but escaped you."

"All right," said Kenyon, lighting a cigarette also. "Go ahead, Garry; and I hope you make a better fist of it than I have."

"Now, to start with: Did you get no whisper, in any way, of the name of the old man that died last night in Selden's Square?"

"Not the faintest. Nor that of the girl I have specially spoken of. The other's name was Anna. Then, of course, there was Forrester and Hong Yo."

"But the old man knew Nunez, your old commander in Uruguay. There is a possible clue. Did you never hear Nunez speak of any friends who lived here in the North?"

"Never."

"Humph!" Webster pursed up his lips and blew a long, thin stream of smoke toward the ceiling. "That seems conclusive enough. We'll never get at anything from that direction, that's sure. But let us come to yourself now. You'll know more about that subject."

Kenyon smiled.

“I’ll be sure to,” said he.

“Who were your intimates while in Montevideo?”

“I knew no one intimately save Nunez and his secretary, Balmacenso.”

“And Nunez was killed at the taking of the town by the forces of the dictator.”

“He was.”

“And Balmacenso? What sort of a fellow was he?”

“Not a bad sort of a chap. I think he was a Spaniard. He saved my life after the fight, packed me on a mule, I being unable to walk because of a wrenched leg. If you fancy he had anything to do with this thing you are on the wrong scent. These people expected me on the *Blenheim*. Balmacenso died weeks before the *Blenheim* entered port and at a time when I had no notion of coming North in her. I’ve gone over all that, but there is no explanation of the mystery in it.”

Webster looked baffled.

“Now, look here,” complained he, “don’t throw cold water upon my investigation like this. It’s discouraging. Here I’m sweating like a sheep, trying to get to the bottom of this thing, and you take a sort of delight in stumping me. It’s not friendly and it’s not right.”

“I beg your pardon,” laughed Kenyon. “I’m only tickled to see how similar your own point of view is to my own, that’s all.”

“They don’t seem as widely separated as I expected them to be, that’s a fact,” admitted Garry. “It proves to me that it is possible for a man, newly impressed by a most beautiful woman, to see as clearly as the most cold-blooded of his friends. And that is a thing worth knowing.”

He smiled genially across the table at Kenyon and smoked his cigarette contentedly.

“There remains only one other thing which I can think of,” said he. “And that is the possibility of there being persons who knew you in New York.”

“There is no one,” said Kenyon, positively. “I never knew but a few people here, and them only slightly—so slightly as not even to recall their names. And no one in the North knew of my movements in recent years—not even you. And that I was coming to New York was not known to myself more than two hours before I started.”

“It is deeply and blackly mysterious,” conceded Webster. “It would require an acute intellect of the highest type to do anything with it. One thing I can see very plainly, and that is that hardware is my line, and not conundrums.”

“I fancied that you would give it up,” said Kenyon, smilingly.

“Only temporarily. I’ll grapple with it again.”

“Apart from the oddness of the matter where I am personally concerned,” said Kenyon, seriously, “is the matter where it concerns others. What are these people, and what object have they in view?”

“Hong Yo, now, did not impress you?”

“He was like a bloodless snake. I chilled at the very sight of him.”

“But the other—the hammer-throwing chap—sort of puzzled you?”

“Candidly, yes. He was boyish frankness personified, but still—”

“You have your doubts. Exactly. We are all more or less strong believers in the adage that birds of a feather flock together. But the old man? What of him?”

“I cannot make up my mind. He spoke of a mysterious purpose of which I was supposed to be acquainted, as I told you, and of a mysterious person who was to be safeguarded. And he was intensely and passionately in earnest. Whatever it is, it was of tremendous moment to him.”

“Then there is Forrester’s whispered injunction to you at the end; also the garrotting of the stranger from Butte outside the door. I tell you, Ken, you have had a night of it, and no mistake.”

For a moment both were silent. They smoked thoughtfully and the corners of their eyes were gathered in tight little lines. Suddenly the cigarette dropped from Kenyon’s hand, and he uttered a cry.

“What is it?” asked Webster, in surprise.

“Only the check,” answered the other, ironically. “What confounded stupidity! I never thought to look whose signature was attached to it.”

“Holy Smoke!” ejaculated Webster. And he sat regarding his friend with bulging eyes.

Kenyon drew the check from his pocket and opened it; he gave it a single glance, and then sank back in his chair, disappointment in every line of his face.

“It is signed by Hong Yo,” he said.

VI

Kenyon has another odd experience

"And when darkness fell, he stopped at a caravansary
where there were other travelers also."
—*The Amazing Adventures of Mansour Bi.*

The two young men sat regarding one another, vexedly.

"Now was there ever such an aggravating thing before," cried Webster, at last. "I felt sure that it would contain the old man's name, and that our guessing was at an end."

He took the check from Kenyon's hand and inspected it closely.

"Whew!" he whistled. "Your services are placed at a pretty high figure, Kenyon. This calls for as many as ten thousand dollars. Apparently the parties whom you visited last night are not at all stinted for money."

"It looks that way, to be sure," answered Kenyon, dryly. "And upon second thought we may glean some information from the check, after all. The bank will surely know something of Hong Yo."

"Unquestionably. But will they tell it to you?"

"Very likely not. Banks are rather disposed to be noncommittal, I have found. But I can call there and inquire, at any rate."

"Moritze & Co.," read Webster thoughtfully, still examining the check. "Somehow it seems to me that I've heard of that house before." He pondered awhile, then suddenly said:

"Ah, I have it. It's a Seattle concern, and is much favored by the Pacific trade—steamship companies, exporters, and the like. Webster & Seybold have done business through them; they have branches in Hong Kong and Tokio, and the Orientals seem to rely

greatly upon them." He handed the slip of paper back to Kenyon and inquired: "But what are you going to do with this!"

"It's a puzzle," returned Kenyon. "Of course the thing's not mine. Perhaps the best thing for me to do would be to pay another visit to 98 Selden's Square, make a brief, vigorous statement of facts, and wash my hands of the whole affair."

"Do you really want to do that last?" asked Webster, with a shrewd look.

Kenyon colored; but his embarrassment was only of a moment's duration.

"I'm not quite sure that I do," he answered, quietly. "The adventure is not without its interest. And then there is the girl. I rather fancy that the desire to see her once more will begin to grow upon me shortly; and I'm also of the opinion that I shall not put up much of a fight against it."

"Spoken like a courageous and candid soul," laughed Webster. "Stick to it; don't be beaten. If she's anything like your limning of her, she's worth some sort of an effort."

In a little while Kenyon arose.

"I must get some sleep," said he. "I begin to feel a bit tired."

"Where are you stopping? Why not make a shift here, where we can keep in touch with each other."

"I'm putting up at a clean little German place down town; in fact it's very much down town. I can see the trees of Battery Park from my window."

"You're broke," stated Webster, firmly.

Kenyon gestured his admission of the charge.

"Otherwise, why the job in the stoke-hole of the *Blenheim* on my way up?" said he.

Webster assumed the countenance of delight.

"Now, by all that's providential," he cried, "I've got you, at last. When we were at college and I'd go down the line, scattering my change, you'd lend me yours in a fatherly, patronizing way that was peculiarly aggravating. And this is my first chance to get back; I've never caught you broke before."

He lit a third cigarette and grinned widely.

"How much do you want?" asked he.

“How strong a jolt can you stand?”

“Since I entered the firm of Webster & Seybold, I’ve planted something like fifty thousand dollars. What part of it do you want, Ken? I’ll cut it anywhere you say.”

“Good boy, Garry!” Kenyon looked at his friend with smiling eyes; but the corners of his mouth, usually so firm, twitched a little. “A couple of hundred will do.”

Webster regarded him disgustedly.

“Oh, behave,” said he. “This isn’t a dime-saving fund. If you want to hit the institution at all, you must do it big.”

“No, no.”

“He’s down and out,” thought the young man from Chicago, “and a man in that shape needs a fair-sized dose if it’s to do him any good at all.” Then he said aloud. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do in the way of a compromise. We’ll make it two thousand, and not a damned cent less.”

Kenyon protested, but the other was firm. “It’s just like this,” continued the latter, “I’ve got a reputation to uphold; and I can’t afford, for business reasons, to have my friends live over German beer saloons in the neighborhood of the Battery. Webster & Seybold are above such things.”

Kenyon slept deeply all that day. Darkness was already thickening above the city when he climbed out of bed and began to douse himself with a huge sponge dipped in a pail of cold water.

“A dollar a day hotel doesn’t offer many conveniences,” said he, trying to keep his teeth from chattering. “But, then, I’ve seen more limited accommodations for the morning—or evening—bath, in more pretentious places. It was always a dreadful question with me whether my fellow strugglers for liberty in Uruguay ever bathed or no.”

He donned his dress clothes and took a cab to the Waldorf, where he had engaged to dine with Webster.

“We’ll do the thing with all proper ceremony to-night,” said the latter, “for it is probably our last chance. I’ve made arrangements for the first hardware dinner; it’s to come off to-morrow night and is to be followed by a long succession of others. They all fall for it, Ken; there

is something about free food and champagne that men past middle age just can't resist."

"Are the samples all ready?" asked Kenyon, as they made their way among the tables in the glittering restaurant.

"They came this afternoon; and I've had two men unpacking at top speed ever since. You never saw such a brave display of useful goods in your life. There will be a riot when the trade gets its first look."

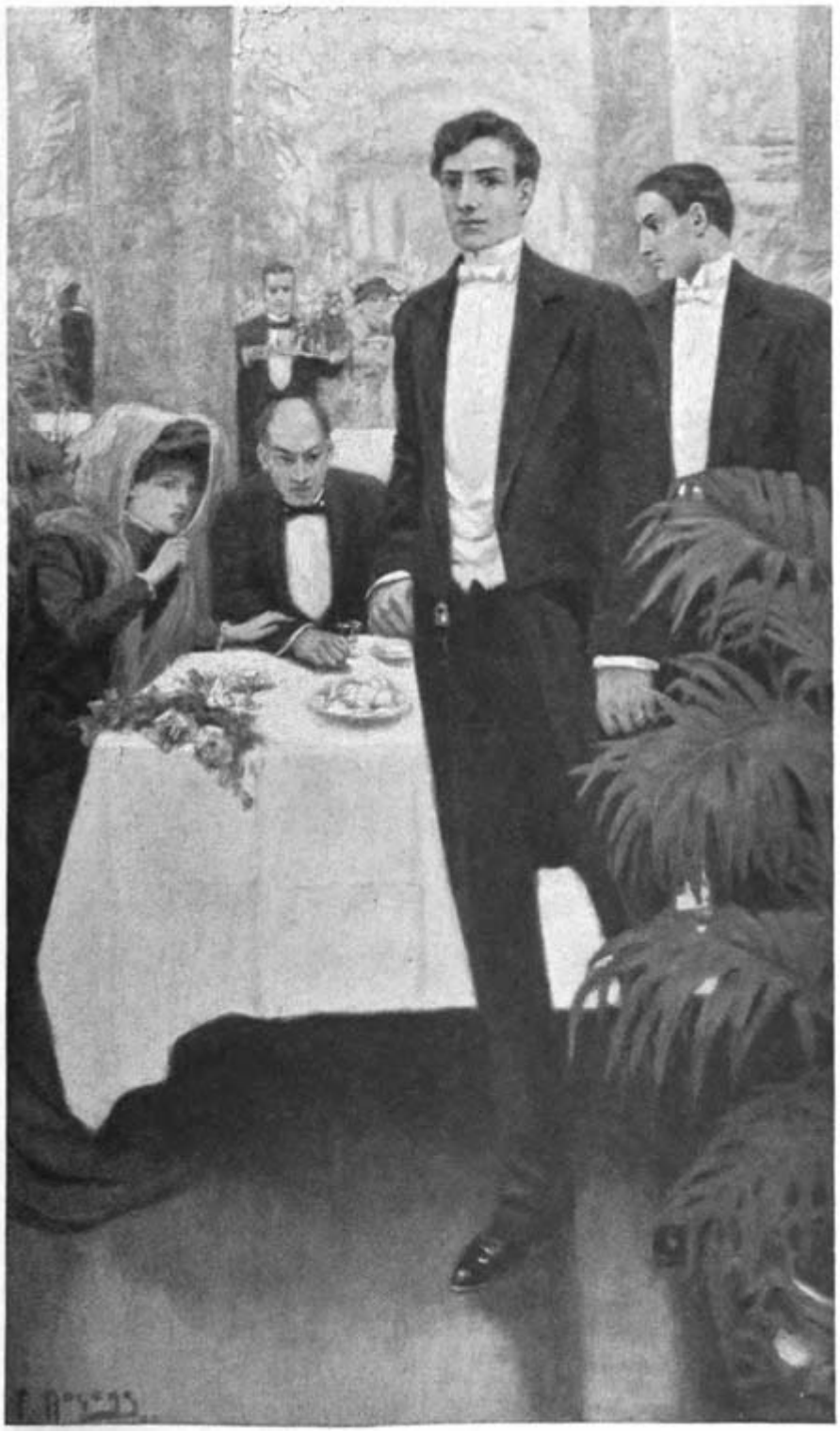
The restaurant was fairly well filled; and as the two passed along on their way to a secluded nook, Kenyon's air of elegant distinction as usual attracted much attention.

"A short fellow with red hair could never do it," mused Webster, as he became aware of this. "How Providence does dump its gifts at the feet of some people."

A low exclamation drew his attention swiftly to a table quite near the one they had selected; he saw a woman in a sombre motoring dress draw a thick, dark veil about her face; a man who sat at the table with her was regarding her with obvious surprise.

"What is it?" asked the man as Webster passed.

But the woman placed her hand upon his arm in a gesture that asked for silence; and all the time her gaze was fixed upon the two, who were by this time some yards away.



ALL THE TIME HER GAZE WAS FIXED UPON THE TWO

"You can order for me, too," said Webster. "I have the utmost confidence in your taste. Meantime, I'll watch a small comedy which is going on behind you. No, no," hastily, "don't look around, because

it has struck me as being just a little queer, and I want to see the finish."

Kenyon laughed and said, "Well, if it's a matter of interest, I depend upon you to keep me posted."

With that he gave his attention to the selection of the dinner, while Webster, with a great assumption of carelessness, watched the couple to whom his attention had been drawn a few moments before.

They had the appearance of having stopped during a motoring journey, for dinner; for the man, too, wore the costume affected by that cult. But they, apparently, had lost all interest in the meal; they bent toward each other and conversed in low, eager tones.

"She's telling him something, and it's about us," thought Garry. "And, by George, doesn't he seem pleased to hear it, though. I never saw a man's face light up so much before."

He continued to give the couple his attention while Kenyon gave his orders to the waiter; after the man had gone he said:

"I say, Kenyon, do you know that we seemed to startle that young woman as we came in. Now, don't look around, I tell you," sharply. "They are not yet aware that I've noticed them, and I'd rather they wouldn't be."

"Startled her, did you say?" Kenyon leaned toward the other, and his eyes narrowed expectantly. "What does she look like?"

"I did not have a chance to see. She drew her veil instantly upon sight of us; and it's really the most competent veil I ever saw. It hides her completely."

"And the man!"

"He is elderly. His head is half bald and he has craggy, prominent features. I wouldn't like to be positive, but from this distance he seems to have the coldest and most vulture-like eye I ever saw."

"A most interesting person, indeed," smiled Kenyon.

"Interested, you mean. If you don't feel his eyes boring through your back, you are absolutely without that sense. He seems upon the point of devouring you. I can't make out just how the girl is taking it, not being able to see her face; but it's what she is saying that's exciting her companion and causing him to radiate so. They must be people who know you."

“I told you this morning, that I knew no one in New York.”

“You made some acquaintances last night,” said Webster, meaningly.

“The man is not one of them.”

“How about the woman.”

Again Kenyon’s eyes narrowed; there were little puckers about their corners.

“About her I cannot say.” He paused for a moment, and then asked, eagerly: “What is the color of her hair. Is she light or dark?”

“The veil conceals everything, and she holds it in place in a way that plainly shows that she intends it to go on doing so.”

When their dinner began to arrive Webster took his eyes from the pair for a few moments; and when he looked up again they had gone.

“Why, I really thought they were good for an hour,” said the young Chicagoan. “It does not seem possible that their interest could slacken enough in that time to permit of their going away.”

Kenyon did not reply, but sat staring moodily before him. He had maintained this attitude for some time before Webster noticed it; and then the latter grew suddenly silent.

“It’s the girl,” he told himself. “Poor chap! She’s got him, whoever she is. He’ll never see a woman in the distance again without thinking it’s she; nor he’ll never see another sun arise without thinking that it’s going to witness his meeting with her. That is, not for a while. It’s comforting to think that such things don’t last long.”

He had reached this stage in his reflection when a boy approached.

“Mr. Kenyon?” inquired he.

“Yes,” replied Webster. “Here, wake up, old chap; there’s a message for you.”

“From a man who just left in an automobile,” the boy informed Kenyon, as he handed him the message. “He said there was no answer.”

Kenyon tore open the envelope. The note was written upon a sheet of hotel stationery, and contained but two lines of writing. A glance took this in, and with a laugh he tossed it over to Webster. The message read:

“Your progress is wonderful! But don’t forget that boldness can be carried too far.”

And underneath this was the signature: “Farbush.”

VII
The bellevue hospital puzzle

“Do you know, old chap, there are many features in this case that I do not understand.”

—A Frequent Remark of Garry Webster.

“Mr. Farbush,” remarked Garry Webster, speculatively, “is more than likely the gentleman with the half-bald head and the vulture eyes. But just where does he enter in this thing, I wonder?”

“There is no telling,” answered Kenyon. “It is not well to introduce all one’s characters in the first act, as every practical dramatist knows. Farbush has been held in reserve for the opening of act second, apparently; which reservation shows the hand of a craftsman of more or less skill.”

There was something in the speaker’s voice that caught Webster’s attention, and he gave him a quick, inquiring glance. It seemed to hold a certain resolution that was not altogether clear.

“If the appearance of Mr. Farbush has any connection with your adventure of last night, it is more like the climax of an old, rather than the opening of a new, act,” said Garry, slowly. “Where is your dramatist going to get his material to go on with his work? Surely not from the actions of a man eating his dinner.”

“I do not intend to continue eating indefinitely,” smiled Kenyon. He looked at his watch and continued: “An hour from now will find me in Selden’s Square and ringing the bell at 98.”

“Oh,” said Webster, “I see. You intend to return the check.”

“Not only that, but I intend to put a stop to the whole matter. Why, the thing has grown absurd. I’m not accustomed to this sort of

dealing; and the quicker it's over and done the more comfortable I shall feel."

When they had finished, Webster said: "A cab will take us there in less than a half hour."

"Us?" repeated Kenyon.

"*Us.* Why, to be sure. You don't suppose I intend to let you go alone, do you? Well, hardly! Another thing. Come up to my rooms for a moment before we start."

An elevator whirled them upward; and in a few moments the young man from Chicago was opening a revolver case in his sample room.

"It's a Colt," said he, calmly, holding the weapon up for his friend's inspection. "Dull metal, forty-five calibre; has a barrel that assures accuracy and a grip that is a real grip. It'll make quite a bulge in your pocket, but then it will also shoot a hole through a safe."

"For a humdrum man of trade, Garry, you have lots of romance left in you," said Kenyon. He took the revolver and spun it around, a forefinger through the trigger guard. "You intend that an armed force shall move on Selden's Square, I see. But where is your ammunition?"

"Here," and Webster handed him a dozen or more long cartridges.

Two revolvers were loaded and shoved deep into overcoat pockets; then the two descended to the street, got into a cab and were driven to Selden's Square.

"Not a very live street, for so early an hour," remarked Webster, as they alighted at the corner and walked slowly along.

"I noticed that last night," returned Kenyon, somewhat grimly. "The thugs who attacked the man outside of 98 did not seem to have any fear of interruption."

"By the way, you did not see anything of the attacked one when you came out, did you!"

"No; those who committed the assault either carried him away, or the police found him before I came out."

They had reached 98 by this time and halted. It was gloomy and deserted looking; not a glimmer of light was to be seen at any of the windows. They ascended the steps and Kenyon pulled the old-fashioned bell-handle.

“Speaking of policemen,” remarked Webster, in a low tone, “that looks like one across the way.”

The gleam of the helmet plate and shield were unmistakable; but their owner made no move toward them, though he seemed to be watching them narrowly. Just then there came a sound at the basement door and a shuffling of feet up the steps. In a moment a sharp, wrinkled old face appeared above the rail and a quavering, high-pitched voice demanded:

“What is it, please? What is it?”

Kenyon looked down at the bent old woman who was peering up at him in a dim-eyed, uncertain sort of way.

“I desire to speak to”—he hesitated a moment, then proceeded —“to the master or mistress of the house.”

“Have I not told you a dozen times that the house is empty? Are the police paid to annoy people? I know nothing of those who were here; I know nothing of the dead man who was carried out in the night; I know nothing except that the agent placed me in charge this afternoon, and that the rent is fifty dollars a week, furnished. For anything else you must not ask me; I am old, and I must have my sleep.”

And with that she went slowly and complainingly down the steps, and they heard the door close abruptly behind her.

“They have gone,” said Kenyon.

“And apparently the attention of the police has been called to some features of the case.” Webster looked at his friend for a moment and then added. “What are you going to do now?”

“Perhaps to see Moritze & Co.’s local representative, in the morning, would do some good. But, first, I think we may get a little information from our friend across the way.”

They descended the steps and crossed the street toward the policeman. The man regarded them with attention, his thumbs in his belt and his legs very wide apart.

“How do you do?” spoke Kenyon, in a fraternal tone.

“How are you?” answered the man.

“Is this street part of your beat?”

“It is all of it, just now.”

“Ah, indeed.”

By this time the policeman seemed to have made up his mind about them.

"Reporters?" asked he.

"Something like that. I understand that you had quite an exciting time of it hereabouts last night."

"Yes; but say, how did the papers get it? The captain said the matter was to be kept quiet."

Kenyon laughed carelessly.

"Oh, the papers have many surprising little ways of getting information. Now, the body that was carried out of 98, for instance. Nothing has been heard of it?"

"No; and it has a nasty look. It's the kind of thing that we police don't like. The detective department has it now."

"Nothing is known of the people who occupied the house, then?"

"Not a thing. They rented it furnished for a term and paid the money down. They gave the name of Farbush."

The two young men exchanged swift glances; the policeman noticed the looks:

"Do you know anyone of that name?"

"I fancy I have heard it before," replied Kenyon.

"Well, I suppose you are not giving anything away," grumbled the man. "The afternoon papers will be driving the police out of business for good if they keep on the way they are going."

"Don't be discouraged," said Kenyon, with a laugh. "You see, they don't know so much after all. They only appear to. For example now, we don't know where the man was sent who was knocked out just about here last night."

The policeman laughed, shortly.

"The *man*?" repeated he.

Kenyon caught the inflection.

"Why, it wasn't a woman, surely," said he.

"I guess you're right about the papers not being on to so much," grinned the policeman. "But you'll have to call up Bellevue if you want any information. As I said to start with, this thing is supposed to be kept rather quiet; and I think I've done too much talking as it is."

As they walked down the street Webster said thoughtfully:

"The complications seem to pile up, don't they?"

“Amazingly. And with every lap the track gets heavier. I think the best thing that we can do is to pay a visit to Bellevue and have a talk with someone there who can give us definite information.”

There was something in the speaker’s tone that made his friend look at him quickly.

“Don’t let the matter get on your nerves, old boy,” warned Webster. “You’ll only put yourself in a daze; and then you’ll never get to the bottom of it.”

“I know it; but then there is—”

He paused abruptly and gestured the rest.

“You mean the girl?” Webster frowned. All along he had feared this phase of the affair; the girl had struck him from the very first as looming altogether too large in Kenyon’s account of it.

“If it wasn’t for her,” said Kenyon, “the entire matter would be a sort of joke to me. But she changes the face of everything. I can’t stop thinking of her.”

“Well, you had better get into the habit of trying,” growled Garry Webster. “You know it doesn’t do to go about falling in love with girls like this. Now don’t try to shut me off! You *are* in love with her; if you don’t know it, I do. I’m experienced. I’ve been in love a half-dozen times myself.”

He paused for a moment; and his tone changed, as he continued:

“You see, Ken, you don’t know anything about her. As the thing stands it doesn’t look even near right. It’s a police matter, and she is unquestionably mixed up in it.”

Kenyon winced at this and his face seemed to lose a little of its color. But he said nothing.

“I know that my remarks hurt some,” proceeded Garry. “But it’s a fact, and fact is a thing that I’m strong on—it’s a thing that a man doesn’t do well to brush carelessly by. If he does he’s making a mistake.”

Kenyon put his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“Don’t think me an ass, old fellow; I see all these things you speak of—and perhaps more, for I’m deeper in the maze than you think. But in spite of it all, I can’t drive the image of that unknown girl from my mind; and I cannot help believing that no matter what manner of things the others may be guilty of, she is innocent.”

“All right,” returned Webster, with a sigh. “Look at it as you see fit. I only hope you prove to be right. There is a great deal in a person’s characteristics, I know; and of course I haven’t seen the girl. Perhaps, if I had, I might feel just as confident of her as you do.”

“I’m sure you would,” said Kenyon, fervently. “No one to look at her could feel otherwise. I know that I’m talking like a moonstruck sophomore, Garry, but just the same I mean every word of it.”

At that moment Webster sighted a cab and signaled it. In a very short space of time they had been set down at Bellevue Hospital, and a nurse had summoned a white-clad, pleasant-faced young surgeon. When he heard their errand he looked interested.

“Oh, yes,” said he. “The rather queer matter of last night. Sit down.”

The two young men sat down and the surgeon occupied the corner of a desk. Apparently he made the same mistake as the policeman had, for his opening words were:

“You are the first reporters that have called in reference to this thing; and there is, I think, a most interesting story in it.” He touched a bell, and a pretty girl in a nurse’s uniform made her appearance. “Miss Dickson, get me histories 906-7-8.” When the girl had gone, the man of medicine resumed. “It’s not often that we meet with such a remarkable series of coincidences; but the night has strange kinks in a big city, and the accident ward of a hospital is the best place to see them that I know of.”

The girl re-appeared, handed the speaker three sheets of paper, and vanished.

“I’ll read you these in regular order,” promised the surgeon. “Then you’ll get about the same effect that I did. And before I begin I’d like to say that these are not the regular histories demanded by the institution, but private ones of my own. You see,” with a smile, “these cases were so odd that I did not mind going to a little extra trouble.”

Selecting one of the sheets he began to read:

“Thursday night, November 12th. About 9.30 the patrol of the 40th Precinct brought in a case of assault. It was a man of about thirty years of age and weighing about one hundred and sixty pounds. He was of dark complexion. He had been picked up by the police upon the sidewalk in front of 98 Selden’s Square. The injuries are three

incised wounds in the back, probably made by a knife, and two contused wounds of the head. The skull is most likely fractured."

"Since that was written we have discovered that there is no fracture. The man recovered consciousness and told how he came in his present predicament. Afterwards, during the absence of the nurse, he left the hospital. Just why I don't know, for he was badly hurt and required attention and nursing."

Turning to the second sheet he read as follows:

"Thursday night, November 12th. At 10.18 the ambulance was called out. It brought a second man, suffering the same injuries, and who had been picked up in exactly the same place as the first. This man, however, was conscious and able to make a statement immediately."

"Selden's Square is a much more abrupt place than I would have thought," remarked Webster.

"So it would seem. But listen to this other." The doctor read as follows from the third sheet:

"Same night. About 12.05 I was called down to receive a new case. It was brought in by a cab-driver and a mail-carrier. The latter, while on his last round of collection, found the man lying in the middle of the street in front of 98 Selden's Square, and at the next corner summoned the cab-driver to his assistance. In this case, as in the other two, the bludgeon and knife had played their parts. This man was smeared with blood and his clothing was torn into shreds. Apparently he had given his assailants a desperate battle."

The physician laid down the last of the sheets and looked at his visitors with a smile.

"Well, what do you think of that?" asked he.

"Remarkable!" answered Kenyon, briefly.

"Astonishing!" said Webster.

"I think so, too. But this is only the mildest and most conventional side of the thing. What I have yet to tell will make you despair of finding adjectives to express yourselves. But I can only give you the outline, as that is all that I have as yet. The first of these men is from Butte, Montana. He is an engineer in the employ of the Anaconda mine, and apparently a thoroughgoing fellow, indeed. The second is from the town of West Point, and is a sort of private coach for

backward students at the Academy there. He is a rather frail young man, with near-sighted eyes and an impediment in his speech. The third is from Saginaw, Michigan. He is a small, compactly-built fellow, of about twenty-three, and with the constitution of a young bull. By profession he is a pugilist. His first words when he recovered consciousness were to inquire about the persons who assaulted him. And when he learned that none of them were in the ward, as badly used up as himself, he was the most crestfallen person I ever saw."

"Quite a variety of types and temperaments," remarked Kenyon. "But what had they to say for themselves?" eagerly.

"I don't know that I am altogether at liberty to tell you that," answered the young surgeon, slowly; "It's a sort of police matter, you see. But if you'll agree not to publish until the authorities release us, I'll give it to you."

"We'll keep it to ourselves," promised Kenyon.

"Very well then. But as I said before, I can only give you the outline of their statements, at that. Each of these three men is an absolute stranger to the others; yet each was summoned to New York upon the same errand, by the same man, and at the same time. Upon the night of November 12th each arrived in town, one from Butte, one from West Point, and the other from South Bend, Ind.; and each of them immediately made his way to the place of appointment—98 Selden's Square. And as they arrived there, they were attacked murderously and left for dead. All this is strange; it only requires one more touch to complete the mystery. And we have that in the fact that the three men's names are alike."

"And what is the name?" asked Webster.

"Kenyon," answered the young surgeon; "and a rather unusual one it is, don't you think?"

VIII
The night grows thick with wonder

Dom Migual: Hush! Walk softly. This night is filled with astonishments.

—*From an Unacted Melodrama.*

At the surgeon's words Webster fairly gasped his astonishment. But Kenyon's face was unreadable.

"A remarkable state of affairs, indeed," said the young adventurer. "And without a doubt it has some equally surprising meaning if we could learn all the facts. But you said that you do not feel at liberty to tell us more, did you not?"

"I do not know a very great deal more," answered the surgeon.

"These men are not yet able to be seen, I suppose—that is, the remaining two?"

"No; and will not be for some days to come."

"That is too bad. I should have liked to ask them a few questions." Kenyon arose and said: "Is it permissible for you to tell me the name of the person who summoned them to New York?"

"It is not. That is a point upon which the police left special instructions."

"Ah, pardon me! And thank you for what you have already told us. Good-night."

Once again they were upon the street, walking along in silence, hands stuffed into overcoat pockets and heads bent in deep thought. After a space Kenyon said:

"Well, Garry, my son, we don't seem to have come at anything of value, as yet, eh?"

“Rather, we have gone deeper into the tangle,” answered Webster. Then he laughed in a sudden fit of boyish glee and continued: “But, I say, it’s more fun than going a-fishing, isn’t it? I’d like to work at a thing like this as a regular job. It’s got it all over hardware for real interest.”

“It seems to me that it’s going to be my occupation, for a time, at least,” said Kenyon, a certain grimness in his tone. “The matter concerns me, and if it’s possible to get to the bottom of it, I’m going to do it.”

“Right,” agreed Webster. “It’s your place to do that very thing.”

They walked back to Webster’s hotel, in silence for the most part; when they arrived Kenyon immediately took up a telephone directory and began fluttering over its leaves.

“It’s just possible that the manager of Moritze & Co.’s New York branch may have a ’phone connection at his home and I may catch him there,” explained he to Webster. “Oh, yes, here it is. His name is Leventhal. I trust he is a snugly married man and is at home just now.”

After a few moments waiting he got the number asked for.

“I want to speak to Mr. Leventhal,” said Kenyon.

“This is Mr. Leventhal.”

“Manager for Moritze & Co.?”

“The same.”

“I have just received a check upon your house for a considerable sum, and I’d like to make some inquiries about the person who drew it.”

“I never transact business after business hours,” said Leventhal, decidedly.

“But this is a matter of importance. I’d like you to tell me what you can about Hong Yo, who I think is known to you.”

There was a sharp exclamation at the other end of the wire; after a short pause there came the answer in the same cold tone.

“We never discuss our depositors with strangers—or anyone else, for that matter. If you have a check signed by Hong Yo it will be honored instantly, no matter what the sum. Good-night.”

“One moment,” cried Kenyon, hastily. But it was too late; the other had already rung off.

“I expected that,” remarked Webster. “Bank people are rather close mouthed as a rule. I don’t think you’ll learn much from that source.”

“It would seem not.”

Kenyon sat down and lit a cigarette. Under the light bulbs his face had a drawn, harassed look and the usually good-humored eyes had a baffled, eager glow in them. But in spite of this very evident mental unrest, the elegant distinction of his manner was unimpaired; and he brushed a speck of dust from his sleeve with solicitude.

“Your two thousand dollars is going to come in rather handy,” remarked he thoughtfully. “It looks like a long hunt, and that sort of thing takes money.”

“There is more where the two came from,” said Webster. “Don’t hesitate to call again.”

“Thanks.” Kenyon puffed at the cigarette frowningly for a moment. “It means a waste of both money and time,” grumbled he, “and I suppose I’m next door to a fool for bothering with it. But it’s got on my nerves and I can’t drop it.”

“The girl again,” mused Webster, regarding his friend with brooding glance. “He doesn’t know it himself, half the time; but it’s that confounded girl that’s doing it all.”

They discussed the different phases of the case for some hours, and then Kenyon took his departure. It was a long way to his little hotel near the Battery, but he was in no humor for riding, and turning into Broadway he swung rapidly along down town. Lower Broadway is almost deserted after business hours, and when a man loomed up alongside of him at Canal Street and fell into step, Kenyon turned sharply.

“Forrester!” he exclaimed in surprise.

“I say, Kenyon, do you know you are a great fellow to set the pace,” complained the bulky youth. “I’ve been trying to overtake you ever since you crossed Fourteenth Street.”

“I’m very sorry,” replied Kenyon, recovering his presence of mind instantly. “But I did not expect to see you.”

The other looked at him in frank astonishment.

“Why, what did you suppose had happened?” asked he, wonderingly.

Kenyon laughed.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised at anything happening," said he. "But I had specified nothing."

The other regarded him curiously.

"Well," he said, "I suppose everyone has his own way of doing things; but do you know, you rather puzzle me sometimes?"

"I have no doubt of it," Kenyon smiled.

"You see it's not just the way to which I'm accustomed. I go at things in a more direct fashion."

"As a rule I do myself. But this matter is different from most—so you must expect altered methods."

"No doubt you are right. But you do so keep me on the jump. And you don't keep me posted. You leave me to discover things for myself. Now I had not the faintest notion that you had succeeded in the big matter until Farbush told me, about an hour ago."

"Things should work in their natural course," replied the adventurer, coolly; "I don't believe much in pæans of victory until the thing is thoroughly clinched."

Again the curious look came into Forrester's eyes. Kenyon noticed it, and for a moment feared that he had blundered. He had come to the conclusion, finally, that to get at the true inwardness of the matter in hand he must float with the current, that he must assume to be what they supposed him to be—and so he did not desire to excite the other's suspicions. But the youth's next words reassured him.

"There is truth in what you say," said Forrester, slowly. "Somehow you keep showing me that, right along; and," with a quick heave of his great shoulders, "I don't mind saying that I sometimes find it aggravating."

"Personal feelings should never tinge matters of business. That's a useful rule."

"I realize its value. But, then, human nature is human nature. A man is bound to grouch more or less when he finds himself displaced. However, you've done more in twenty-four hours than all the rest of us combined."

"Thanks. You are very good."

"I must say that I don't quite understand it all; but the results are what counts and are what I want to see. Farbush is quite carried

away by your success; but your, as he calls it, boldness, has about taken his breath. He would prefer less spectacular effects. You see, these old money-squeezing fellows are like moles; they get their victories by digging underground; and to do things as openly as you have done, frightens them."

"He'll have to steady his nerves. There is no telling what sort of moves are on their way, you know."

"You can't frighten me," replied Forrester. "As the matter stands it can't progress too rapidly to please me. I'm in a hurry to get it over."

They had stopped upon the corner of Canal Street; it was late and a haze clung about the roof tops. From the North River came the constant shriek of fog-whistles and now and then the boom of a bell; the numerous night sounds from the river front came faintly to them, for already the farm wagons were coming in, and the great markets on the lower west side were beginning to make ready for the coming dawn.

Kenyon was silent. He cautiously determined to follow the other's lead. But Forrester did not hesitate; he went steadily on.

"We waited for you at the 'Far East,'" continued he. "The Stalker reported that he had given you Farbush's instructions."

"The Stalker?" Kenyon looked at the other inquiringly.

"Of course. Didn't he meet you as you left Selden's Square last night?"

Kenyon's mind went quickly back to the night before, and immediately the stealthy figure that had arisen out of the shadows recurred to him.

"Ah, yes, I remember. But his words did not impress themselves upon my memory, for he sort of mumbled them over quickly and vanished. He seemed to be rather in a hurry." Kenyon paused a moment and then added: "Was there any urgent reason for his haste, I wonder."

Forrester made a gesture that showed distaste.

"Perhaps there was," said he shortly.

"He formed, I think, a committee of one, to receive the man from Butte."

"You are not lacking in observation."

“It is part of my stock in trade. And it’s a faculty the possession of which depends upon one’s constant exercise of it.”

“No doubt. But when we found that you did not keep the supposed appointment, Yo suggested that I meet you at Union Square, according to the general understanding, as there might be reasons why you would not want to be seen at the ‘East.’ I had waited more than an hour when you came along; and when you did not stop, I thought you might be followed.”

“Would there be any use in our going to the Far East now?” asked Kenyon.

“Of course,” eagerly. “They are anxious to see you, for there are many points that they desire to make clear.”

“That is just what I’m after,” replied Kenyon. And for an instant he feared the result of his words; for he had allowed, unconsciously, a great deal of significance to creep into them. But Forrester did not catch this; apparently he was too much engaged with his own purposes.

“It’s no great distance from here,” he said, “and we might as well walk.”

“That suits me,” returned Kenyon, promptly.

And so they struck eastward along Canal and turned down an ill-lit street which was strange to the ex-lieutenant of Nunez. A maze of alleys and narrow ways were traversed, Forrester leading the way. And as they hurried on, Kenyon gradually became obsessed with the notion that a dark figure was lurking in their track. Several times he was upon the point of mentioning the matter to Forrester; but each time he thought better of it.

“It might be a little private arrangement of his own,” reasoned Kenyon, silently. “This would be a most excellent neighborhood for an artistic piece of assassination, and I shouldn’t wonder if that was his friend the Stalker back there. But,” and he gave a quick, puzzled look over his shoulder, “somehow I can’t get quite rid of the impression that it’s a woman.”

At any rate he quietly drew off his right-hand glove; and there was much comfort in the feel of the long, heavy Colt buried so deeply in his overcoat pocket.

IX
Kenyon goes blindly on

"Mott Street is as safe as Fifth Avenue—but you must keep your eyes open."

—*The Lieutenant in Chinatown.*

Through the dim, chasm-like streets Kenyon followed Forrester; and always there clung to him the feeling that there was lurking along, in the thicker shadows behind them, a soft-footed someone whose intentions were as unknown as him- or her-self.

The section was strange to Kenyon. Overhead the mist seemed to cling stickily to a wilderness of fire-escapes, and by degrees the air became impregnated with a peculiar odor.

"It's decidedly Asiatic," commented Kenyon, as he sniffed this. "Unless I am very much mistaken we are approaching New York's Chinatown."

"You are right," answered Forrester. "We'll be in the midst of it in a moment."

True to his word they suddenly turned a corner, and a little way ahead saw the glare of incandescent lights, the strange, oriental-looking shops and filthy doorways of the Yellow Quarter. The slant-eyed Celestials thronged the streets, some lank and wolf-like, others fat and placid, but all members of murderous Tongs, and for the most part carrying deadly weapons concealed in their loose blouses. Here and there was a blue-coated policeman; now and then a white woman with painted cheeks and sunken eyes could be seen staring through the dirty panes of an upper window. Suddenly a great,

illuminated sign flared into view which bore the name in letters formed of hideous green light:

THE FAR EAST

"This, I suppose, is the place you spoke of," said Kenyon.

Forrester nodded.

"This way," he directed. They did not enter by the wide, glaring door of the place, in which stood some drunken marines, a Chinaman or two, and a clump of women of the street. Instead they used a small, dark, side door, and after descending a narrow passage found themselves in a room in which a fat old Chinese woman sat crouched upon a mat before what looked like an iron pot full of red coals. Immediately upon their entrance she began a muttering in her own sing-song tongue, but never once lifted her eyes. Before going to South America to join Nunez in his expedition against Uruguay, Kenyon had served the Chinese Government in the brief war with Japan. So he was more or less familiar with the language.

"Curse-laden beast of a white devil!" crooned the hag. "And have you come back, once more? May there be no dawn in your days, forever; and may the gates of sorrow close you in!"

"A very gentle-dispositioned old lady," was Kenyon's amused thought. "Apparently Forrester is not very popular with her."

But Forrester did not understand the old woman's words, nor did he pay the slightest attention to her.

"I'll have to ask you to remain here for a few moments," said he to Kenyon, in an apologetic tone. "You see, it's necessary for me to locate the people we want; and these places are regular rabbit warrens when you get into them right."

He left the room by another door. Kenyon sat upon the edge of a table and listened to the mutterings of the hag, for she had continued in her reviling, still keeping her eyes bent downward.

"Fatherless worm!" she proclaimed. "Your pale eyes are like the fish, and your soul is as narrow as my thumb-nail."

From somewhere in the distance came a fit of coughing, weak, ominous, rattling.

"Yo has the mind of an infant to trust to the white devils. The more he coughs the more he trusts." She held her fat, lumpy hands over

the coals and spat contemptuously upon the floor. “He should keep his eyes and his knife sharp. The ghosts of his holy ancestors watch from the past and expect much.”

“One of the unassimilated,” thought Kenyon.

As the woman paid no heed to him he approached a curtained space from beyond which came the sound of many voices. Drawing the curtain he saw a huge, low-ceilinged room with walls painted with gaudy dragons, scenes from the Chinese mythology, and glaring with electric lights. It was crowded with people, gathered about small tables, drinking tea from tiny cups, and eating of the many and curious Chinese dishes which the place supplied. The hard-faced youth from the lower east side was there, in plenty, with his “girl”; a slumming party of scared-looking women and embarrassed young men occupied a far corner; meek, hollow-chested celestials of the cooley class smoked cheap cigarettes over their pots of tea, while those of the dominant type, attired in loud American dress, discussed their many trades and filthy incomes in the unknowable slang of their kind.

“The regular thing, as far as I can see,” thought Kenyon. “I suppose Mr. Hong Yo is the head of the company and a thrifty man of business. But I’ll do well not to be taken in by appearances, however. These yellow fellows have the ingenuity of the devil for blinds of different sorts. While the ‘Far East,’ as they call it, may be a very pretty business proposition, still it may serve to cloak a less conventional trade than restaurant keeping.”

He still stood with the curtain in his hand, peering through into the main room of the place, when the door from the street swung open and a man and woman entered the restaurant. At sight of the latter Kenyon grew suddenly rigid and his breath hissed through his teeth. Not that he could see her face, for a heavy veil concealed that, nor her form, for she was wrapped in a long, loose cloak. But there was something about her, in her way of holding herself, in her supple walk, in the proud uplift of her head, that brought back to him the girl of the hansom cab.

“It’s she,” he whispered. “It is she. But what under heaven is she doing here, and in the company of a man like that?”

Her escort was indeed a most remarkable-looking person. He was a well-built, determined-looking man; but his face was death-like in its pallor and his head was swathed in bandages. As he walked toward a corner table, he swayed weakly and the girl kept him upon his feet. But the frequenters of the “Far East” were accustomed to strange night sights and the newcomers got scarcely a glance save from the slumming party.

They had barely got seated when Kenyon heard a step behind him, and, turning, found Forrester just closing the door.

“Ah, you’ve been surveying the outer circle,” smiled the giant, good-naturedly. “You have nothing quite like it in South America, I think.”

“Not exactly. But there are strange sights there, also. The low coffee houses at Rio are as picturesque; and even the Chinese have little the advantage of the Latin when it comes to vice.”

“No doubt you are right. But Hong Yo and Farbush are awaiting you in Hong’s place.” He looked inquiringly at Kenyon, and after a pause of some length asked: “I say, what is your candid opinion of Farbush?”

Kenyon shrugged his shoulders.

“How can I form an opinion of a person of whom I know so very little,” he replied, cautiously.

“Well, you have heard how he has conducted his share of the game. Surely you must have arrived at some sort of a conclusion, from that.”

Kenyon shook his head slowly; his assumption of calm neutrality was perfect.

“You will pardon me, I know,” he said, suavely. “But I’d rather not express myself upon so, to me, vague a point.”

“I would like to know, and Hong would like to know, just how you stand, right there.” There was a serious note in the young man’s voice that at once caught Kenyon’s attention. “I don’t want to give you the notion, though, that we have split into factions, or are even inclined to do so,” he added, hastily.

“I should hope not,” added Kenyon, gravely.

“But we should like some sort of an expression from you, just the same,” persisted Forrester.

“At a later time I shall be only too glad to express myself fully and completely.” There was a finality in Kenyon’s tone that was unmistakable. “Until that time comes, I prefer not to go upon record.”

“Very well, then,” replied Forrester, sulkily. “Of course it is no great matter either way. But I, for one, prefer to have a good clear light upon my path and not to leave anything to the future.” Then he crossed to the old hag, and bending over her began whispering.

“Not leave anything to the future!” was Kenyon’s mental exclamation. “Great Cæsar! What would he do in my shoes, I wonder? I am banking upon the future, entirely, for my light; the present seems only to intensify the darkness.”

Forrester continued his whispering to the woman; so Kenyon once more drew aside the curtain and looked into the large room where sat the people of the night. His first rapid glance was directed toward the corner where he had last seen the girl and the man with the bandaged head; but they were not there, and his keen eyes ran over the room eagerly.

“They have gone!” he breathed. “And where?” But he had little time to think about it, for Forrester spoke to him, and he had to give him his attention.

“Faing Sen, here, will lead you to those whom you are to meet,” said Forrester, indicating the hag. “Follow her, and don’t wonder at the road or anything you might see. As I remarked before, this is a regular rabbit warren.”

The fat old woman arose.

“May seven times seven hundred evils beset your path,” she wished, in her confidence that she was not understood. “And may the gods look darkly upon your children’s birth.”

That he understood what the old woman said Kenyon kept to himself. But he remarked to Forrester, with a laugh, “Faing Sen does not seem to be in a good temper to-night.”

“No. But then that is her normal condition. She hates the white devil, I understand. I know nothing of her lingo, and she pretends to know scarcely any English. But I succeed in getting along, somehow, when I’m here.”

“Will the tall devil follow Faing Sen?” inquired the old woman, beckoning Kenyon. She had lighted a candle and stood awaiting him

in the doorway which Forrester had used. “Has he no manners that he should keep her waiting. Much fine-smelling wood shall she burn to the four-handed joss to-morrow, that the white devil’s eyes turn to water in his head.”

She passed through the doorway and Kenyon followed; as he turned, about to close the door after him, he caught a glimpse of Forrester as he stealthily drew aside the curtains and looked into the public room. Then Kenyon saw the curtains fall back in place, and saw Forrester turn with an anxious look; hurry through the other door, and disappear.

X
Hong yo strikes a blow

“Let the knife be sharp. Then strike swiftly, and linger not.”

—*The Creed of the Tongman.*

Kenyon, following Faing Sen, found himself in a long passage similar to the one which led from the street, only more dim and evil-smelling. At the end of this, with much groaning and panting and showering of evil wishes upon the young man, the hag raised a trap-door and bid him go down. But he shook his head and motioned for her to go first. Her little eyes gleamed wickedly in the candle-light; but she went down into the cellar obediently, Kenyon following close behind.

The place was damp and foul; the yellow flame flickered dimly upon the slimy walls and threw grotesque dancing shadows before them.

“Beautiful!” muttered Kenyon, as he peered through the darkness. “A perfectly lovely place to meet a man with a grudge against one.”

But Faing Sen waddled stumpily along, with never a look to the right or the left. Once the light was extinguished suddenly, and the long Colt came out like a flash, while Kenyon pressed with tight-shut lips against the wall. But in a moment a match scratched crackingly, and he saw Faing Sen calmly rekindling the wick.

Then they moved forward once more. Kenyon counted four times that they passed through openings cut in the foundation walls; then they came to a low, heavy door, upon which the hag knocked.

After some whispering, this was opened and they found themselves in a small, square chamber with plastered walls, some

mats upon a cemented floor, and a large oil lamp which hung from the ceiling. It was a shriveled old man who had admitted them. His face was small, bony, and wrinkled like an ape's; he wore a pair of huge, horn-rimmed Chinese spectacles, and his toothless jaws were in constant motion. He and the hag consulted.

"Who, O daughter of Faing Lo, is this whom you have brought to the place of quietness?"

"A strange white devil whom Hong Yo much wants to see. And he is sharp like the wolf and does not trust women."

She cackled with laughter and stole a quick look at the young American. The old man bared his purple gums in a horrid grin and nodded his shaven head many times.

"Sometimes men are that way," mumbled he. "It is wisdom to be so. When a youth I had seven wives."

They chuckled and grinned like a couple of gleeful ghouls; then the old woman took up the candle and made her way back by the way she had come. The old man turned to Kenyon and motioned for him to be seated upon a mat under the lamp. He bowed and smiled in what was meant for an affable manner, while he said in his native tongue:

"Dog of an unbeliever, thou who art too mean to excite the anger of even the least of the gods, sit there." Then in English he added: "Velly nice 'Melican' young man! Hong Yo will come in glate hully up. Me Sing Wang; velly old and velly nice."

He tottered out of the room through a curtained doorway, leaving Kenyon looking after him, a smile upon his face.

"You old rat," muttered the American amusedly. "Yes, you are very nice, indeed; I'll venture to say that that shrunken arm of yours has in its day driven many a knife home into some poor devil's back." He looked curiously about, his keen eyes missing nothing. "Hong Yo takes many precautions when he receives visitors. I wonder why?"

He waited for some time, but Sing Wang did not return. Then he became aware of the murmur of voices engaged in altercation, some deep toned and angry; others shrill and wickedly pitched. Then in the midst of it came a woman's scream. His heart, for a second or two, stopped beating; he recalled the girl who had entered the "Far East," and the impressions that she had awakened came back to him like a

flash. Without an instant's hesitation he tore aside the curtains and leaped with long, soft-footed, pantherish bounds up a narrow stairway in the direction of the sounds.

At the head of the stairs was a door which stood partly open; thrusting this wide, Kenyon found himself in a sort of square hall from which opened many other doors. They were all closed, but from over one a bright light shone through an open transom. It was from behind this door that the voices came; Kenyon softly grasped the knob and gave it a turn; but the door was fastened. Pausing a moment, wondering what he had better do, he heard a single high-pitched, but wavering, voice, demanding.

"Forrester! I want Forrester! He is the man that brought me here first. I don't know the rest of you in this matter. He wrote to me at Butte to come to New York; I had a good thing there, but he said that he had a better one. And when he got me into that damned hole, Selden's Square, he done me up."

"By heaven, it's the man from Butte!" was Kenyon's mental exclamation.

"If you want this person, Forrester, why do you come here?" came the voice of Hong Yo. There was no mistaking the hollow tone, and the slow, precise English. "We have told you that there is no such man here, and that we know nothing of him."

"Don't take me for a fool," spoke the voice of the man from the mines, "I know what he wrote me. I know the game and the players. You say you don't know Forrester, eh? Well, let the girl speak; her eyes tell me that she knows different."

There was a broken-backed chair in the hall; Kenyon placed it at the door; when he stood upon it his eyes were on a level with the transom.

In a large chair directly opposite sat Hong Yo. His emaciated figure was almost lost in the folds of a flowing, flowered robe; his yellow claws were clasped before him; more than ever his fleshless face and shaven crown made him look like a death's-head; his rat-like eyes still shone from their narrowed, puckered slits. Near the Chinaman sat the man whom Kenyon at once recognized as the one Webster had described to him at the Waldorf. Before them, leaning weakly against the edge of a table, stood the one whom the ex-

lieutenant of Nunez had seen in the public room of the Far East; despite his bandaged head and the evident pain he was suffering, his front was a bold one. But what riveted Kenyon's attention was the girl who was being held in a chair at one side. Sing Wang and two hard-faced coolies guarded her; and a handkerchief was tied about her mouth.

And it was *the* girl! The girl of the hansom cab! The young man's heart leaped. Then a fierce anger swept over him, and his hand went swiftly to the long, smooth-barreled revolver.

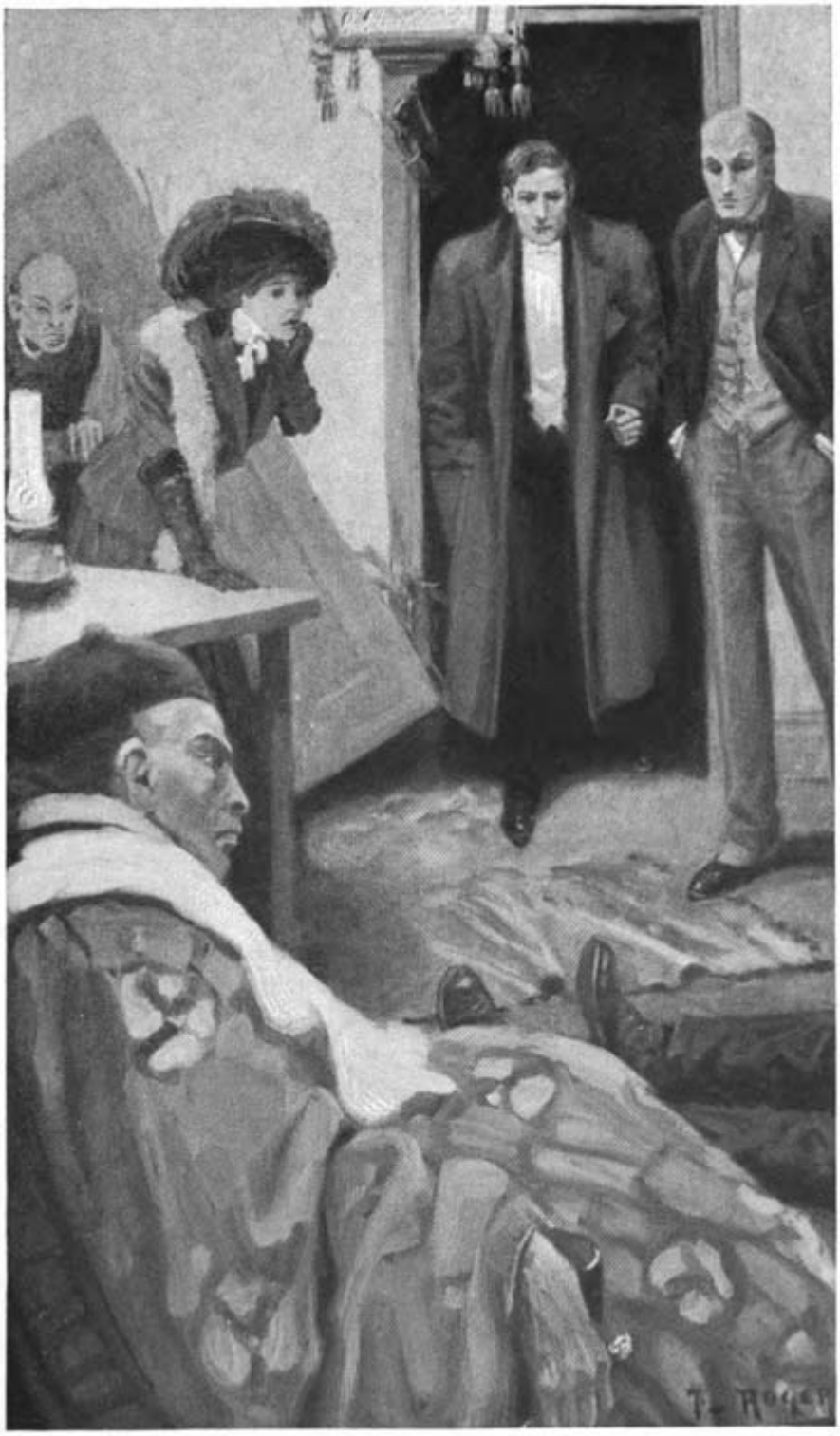
"You don't dare to let her speak," proceeded the man from Butte, defiantly. "Because you know you lie. You've double crossed me for some reason, and I'm going to get square. I'll fix you all; you, you dying devil," pointing to Hong Yo, "and you, my respectable Mr. Farbush; for all your pull and high pretensions, I'm on to your game, and I'll open it wide for this whole town of New York to see."

Kenyon saw Hong Yo rise. It cost him a great effort, but he stood straight up. A fit of coughing racked him; then he drew a handkerchief from his blouse and touched his lips, while he took several steps toward the Westerner.

"You must not do this," spoke he. He returned the handkerchief to the bosom of his blouse; and the hand lingered there.

"Must not," cried the other. "It's easy to see that you don't know me. I'm going to get all your hides for this, and there is nothing that you can say or do that will stop me."

As the last words were spoken Kenyon saw the yellow, skeleton-like hand flash out, and caught the light as it played for a second upon the side of a knife-blade. Then he leaped down and threw himself like a catapult against the door. As luck would have it, it opened inward, and his weight and power told at the very first plunge. The door fell in with a splintering crash, just as a wild scream broke from the lips of the girl.



HE STOOD FOR A MOMENT IN THE DOORWAY

At moments like these Steele Kenyon was like ice. Small things might shake or annoy him, but sudden perils seemed to steady his nerves and clarify his thoughts. With one hand plunged into his

pocket grasping the Colt, he stood for a moment in the doorway. Upon the floor before him lay the man with the bandaged head; Hong Yo had fallen back into his chair, his breath whistling in his throat, the knife, now dripping with blood, still held in his hand. Farbush was upon his feet, while the girl had broken away from those who held her and was gazing with horror at the stricken man.

"Oh, you cowards," she whispered, "you have murdered him. He was helpless and in your power, and you have murdered him."

Her eyes accusingly sought the face of Hong Yo, then that of Farbush and lastly Kenyon's. And the burning scorn that was in them was a thing to see.

"I did not see you, at first, of course," she said to Kenyon, and there was a bitterness in her tone that made him wince. "But I might have known that you would be present when such work was going forward."

She gave way a step or two, her eyes filled with horror as he reached out one hand impulsively toward her. He drew in a sharp breath, like a man who is suddenly drenched with cold water; but it steadied him and brought the fact suddenly before him that he was not there to set himself right in her eyes, but to have an accounting with the others.

From the instant of his entrance the eyes of Hong Yo and Farbush had never left his face; the three other Chinaman stood stolidly to one side, apparently awaiting orders. Now Hong Yo spoke, breathlessly, but his frail body seemed to sway with fury:

"You did not wait then, Mr. Kenyon?"

"How could you expect it?" asked the latter coolly. "So much of interest was being transacted here that I could not contain myself. You cannot expect to monopolize all the thrills in this affair while I am concerned in it."

At this there came a short, harsh laugh from Farbush; the man had reseated himself and was gazing at Kenyon with evident admiration.

"I think Mr. Kenyon is right," said he. "As he is partly in for any consequences that might have to be borne, it is only just that he should have a voice in directing things."

"Just so," said Kenyon, evenly. "And let me remark that I don't altogether approve of such work as I see. It is coarse." He looked

down at the body with distaste, and then lifted his eyes to the men, once more. “Not that Hong Yo does not do a neat and effectual job,” continued he, in his even tone. “His present performance speaks for itself and plainly shows past experience. But I dislike this smeary sort of business. It is not,” and his white, well-kept hand gestured fastidiously, “a desirable method at all.”

There was a slight movement behind him in the hall; the impulse was still forming in his mind to wheel and face what might be a grave danger, when a voice—the voice of Forrester—whispered:

“Stand as you are! Don’t move.”

Then Kenyon felt the girl brush by him through the doorway. Farbush sprang up, as he caught the movement, shouting:

“Stop her!”

Hong Yo came weakly to his feet, his fleshless hands clawing the air; Farbush and the coolies leaped forward, but Kenyon’s stalwart form blocked their way.

“I think,” said the young adventurer, quietly, “that it is best that she should go. I have something to say to you, gentlemen, that it would be as well to go over in private.”

They halted, glaring at him, as he stood leaning nonchalantly against the door-frame. His top-coat had fallen open, showing his immaculate evening dress, his level eyes were fixed steadfastly upon them; his right hand secretly caressed the grip of the long revolver. And from somewhere in the building came the sound of racing feet which constantly grew fainter and fainter.

XI
The second night ends

“Keep cool, and always hold your guard high.”

—Kenyon’s “Art of the Sabre.”

At last the receding footsteps of the girl and Forrester died away altogether; Kenyon, in spite of his icy exterior, had been filled with a nameless dread, but now experienced a quick sense of relief. Hong Yo and Farbush stood looking at him, mingled wonder and rage in their faces.

“Now,” spoke Kenyon, in a business-like tone, “if you will get rid of the worthy Sing Wang and his friends, I will come to the matter in hand.”

“One moment.” It was Hong Yo that spoke and his slit-like eyes seemed even more narrow than ever. “There is but one way of explaining this,” indicating the gaping doorway in a way that showed that he referred to the part Kenyon had just played in the girl’s departure. “Only one way!”

Kenyon smiled enigmatically.

“And is that one way not sufficient?” he demanded.

For a moment Hong Yo stood looking at him in silence, and Kenyon noticed that the grim mouth of Farbush grew straighter and harder. Then the Chinaman motioned to Sing Wang and the two coolies, and pointed silently toward the body. Then he led Kenyon and Farbush into another room.

“Sit down,” said Hong Yo, huskily.

All three seated themselves at a table. Kenyon was careful to select a chair facing the door, for he had not forgotten the creepy

feeling that Forrester had given him when that personage had crept up behind him a few moments before. Then Hong Yo seemed to recollect something.

"Pardon me," said he, "I had forgotten that you two had not met before. Mr. Kenyon—Mr. Farbush."

The two nodded an acknowledgment, examining each other closely.

"And so you found it necessary to tell him," then said Hong Yo, incredulously.

Kenyon nodded. He had not the faintest notion what was meant, but followed the plan of indirection in his answers which had so far served him so well. When he broke into the room a short time before he had had but two objects in his mind, to rescue the girl and force a "show down" from the murderers at the point of his revolver.

But, somehow, he now felt that the girl was, for the time being, safe under the care of Forrester; and the temptation to let the adventure take its own course was once again irresistible. There was a peculiar fascination in his position; these men, for some reason, regarded him as being of vast importance in a mysterious and far-reaching game. That they would halt at nothing was amply proven; but Kenyon had always felt a certain zest for danger; and then there was the girl, whose brilliant face had so attracted him. She was concerned in some strange way; she stood in peril, perhaps, of her life.

So he resolved once more to stick, no matter where the current took him, and until the end of it all was reached.

"I did not think it possible that he even knew of her existence," remarked Farbush, after a long silence, during which he and Hong Yo had been exchanging looks.

"This must be the mysterious 'he' of whom the old man spoke last night in Selden's Square," thought Kenyon. "It's delicate ground, and I must be careful."

He rested his chin in the palm of one hand and his elbow upon the table.

"He knows a great deal more than you'd think," he replied.

"Handle him carefully," implored Farbush. "Don't let him suspect you. Above all, don't tell him more than you must."

“There is no great danger of that,” smiled Kenyon. “You forget that I don’t know any too much, myself.”

There came a sudden grin upon the gaunt face of Hong Yo; his wasted fingers pattered upon the table’s edge as though in applause. He bent toward Kenyon.

“If there is one thing that I like more than another about you,” he said in his slow, distinct English, “it is that continual guard which you hold up. In my experience I have found that the man who consistently denies having special knowledge never betrays himself.”

Kenyon was suddenly called upon to struggle against an almost irresistible desire to laugh; it was a difficult task, but he succeeded in retaining his gravity. The thing was really absurd!

“Has he said anything about what his plans are, now that the old man is dead?” inquired Farbush, eagerly.

Kenyon never quite understood what prompted him to do it, but under a sudden impulse, he answered:

“He does not know that the old man is dead.”

Had a thunderbolt split the roof and dashed everything in the room into splinters it could not have had a more startling effect upon the two men who sat facing him. Instantly they were upon their feet, their hands wildly gesticulating, their lips babbling in amazement.

“Why,” almost shouted Farbush, beating the table, “I never dreamed of such luck. It’s like a miracle.”

Their sudden outbreak had dismayed Kenyon; for a moment he feared that he had somehow betrayed himself. But at the words of Farbush, he drew a breath of relief.

“Luck’s with me!” he thought. “But in the future I’ll refrain from taking chances.”

“I would have thought that your very appearance would have told him all,” spoke Hong Yo.

“But as it happens it didn’t. He is a practical sort of a person, and takes very little for granted.”

“And the old man thought him a dreamer!” cried Farbush, opening his eyes.

“Did the old man really know him very well?” asked Kenyon, meaningly.

Farbush seemed struck by this.

“Well, no, perhaps not. But outside all else, yours is a splendid piece of news. It gives us so much more time; and time was the one thing which we sadly lacked.”

“What did you and he talk about?” asked Hong Yo.

“About many things, but nothing of much importance. I was satisfied to hold him safe.”

“Did he ask questions?”

“At the beginning he did little else. But I told him nothing.”

A hollow chuckle came from the Chinaman.

“I can well believe that,” he said, grimly.

Kenyon was silent for a space, and the two watched him with interest; there could be no question but that, whatever their enterprise, it was expected of Kenyon to make the move that would bring things to a crisis. So far he had been kept dodging their questions; Forrester had told him that they had tidings of importance for him, and he was anxious to hear what it was. So he asked, carelessly:

“What have you been doing in the meantime?” looking from one to the other. “Anything that might interest me?”

“The girl, as you see, suspects something,” said Hong Yo. “There is no telling how deeply she was in the old man’s confidence. He loved her as he loved no one else; and trusted her in many things, as we now find.”

“That,” put in Farbush, “has always been an uncertain point to me. If he trusted her so, how much did he tell her?”

Kenyon found the eyes of both fixed steadily upon him; and the expectancy in their gaze gave him his cue.

“I’m supposed to have inside information right here,” he thought. “But then the sphinx-like attitude, I think, is the safest: and it seems to tickle Hong Yo. So I had better maintain it.”

So he smiled enigmatically and shook his head.

“She knows less than you think,” said he.

There was a deep frown upon Farbush’s face, and he rapped out sharply:

“Perhaps of the things you mean—yes. But what of the others?”

Kenyon gestured indifferently; he drew a case from his pocket and lighted a cigarette.

“Do I understand that you are blaming me for this state of affairs?” he asked, evenly.

“He is right,” said Hong Yo, quickly interrupting Farbush, as he was about to reply to this. “Mr. Kenyon has had nothing to do with the side of the matter to which you refer. That is, and has been, entirely in our own hands from the beginning.”

Kenyon was delighted to hear this; but he concealed any facial manifestation of it by throwing up a dense cloud of smoke between them. But Farbush seemed impatient.

“I am not trying to fix responsibility, but merely making a statement of facts,” declared he. “We are all together in this, and each, I hope, is eager for success. So it is well, if anything slips, to make it known.”

“I quite approve of that,” said Kenyon, with candor. “But just what is it that the girl has discovered, or been told?”

Farbush nodded toward the room which they had left a short time before.

“She came here with him, for one thing; and she knows that my private safe contains matter of consequence.”

“Oh!”

“I cannot imagine how she ever became acquainted with that man.” He hesitated and then darted a quick look at Hong Yo; a new idea seeming to have entered his mind. “Can it be possible that Forrester has told her?”

“He is not a fool,” replied the Chinaman.

The other laughed.

“There are times when I am not altogether sure of that,” returned he. “Witness his work,” with a gesture. “It is not the sort of thing to be proud of.”

That there was a decided feeling between Farbush and Forrester seemed certain. From what the latter had said in the rear room of the “Far East,” Kenyon had begun to suspect this state of affairs; now he felt sure of it.

“It’s a situation that may prove exceedingly useful in the future;” he told himself. “And I think I’ll do well to make a note of it.”

“I warned you not to trust too much to him in the first place,” said Hong Yo. He coughed weakly, and applied his handkerchief to his lips. “He is young and without experience.”

“The first of these I will grant you. But the last I must question. Was it not his manipulations that brought matters to a state where we could take hold? Is not that experience? Did it not apparently show talent?”

There was a trace of anger in the man’s voice. But as the direction of the talk did not please Kenyon, he interposed, quietly:

“Don’t forget that I have not a great deal of time. We were speaking of the girl, and of some information that she had gained. I’d like to be fully informed upon this point.”

“Oh, yes. After all, that is the real kernel at the moment. You see, she came to me this morning and without any preamble asked me to turn over everything having to do with the case to her for examination.”

“Humph! And did she state why?”

“She volunteered nothing, save that it was her duty and her right to have a complete understanding of the affair. It is possible that she only suspected that I was possessed of what she desired to know, and assumed her air of positiveness to deceive me. When I refused she said that she would see Hong Yo—and, if she must—yourself!”

Kenyon went on smoking quietly; if there was any surprise in this statement for him he did not show it.

“She must be most anxious to obtain facts if she would go the length of asking Kenyon for them.” And Hong Yo laughed, his teeth showing hideously, as he did so.

Farbush echoed the laugh.

“That’s so,” said he. “She would be most anxious, indeed. For somehow, Kenyon, she doesn’t seem to have taken a fancy to you—that is, not the sort of fancy a girl should take to the man whom her friends have selected as her husband.”

“It is not news to me,” replied Kenyon, without a trace of feeling in his voice or manner. “She dislikes me, in fact, and is at no pains to conceal it.”

Hong Yo bent forward across the table, his narrow eyes fixed upon the young adventurer.

“I thought last night that you seemed struck by her appearance,” spoke he.

“Perhaps so.” Kenyon’s voice was cold and repellent; the Chinaman noticed it and drew slightly back.

“I merely wished to warn you, that is all. This is a matter of business. It will not do to introduce any entanglements or impediments. We have had enough of them.”

Kenyon nodded.

“I understand,” replied he. “But there is no need to warn me, as you call it. My eyes are clear enough to see what I must avoid.”

Farbush smiled grimly and nodded his head.

“I think we may safely trust you for that,” remarked he.

Kenyon looked at his watch.

“Is there anything else?” he asked, in a bored sort of way. “I really have very little time.”

“Nothing,” and Farbush laughed a little, “except that the girl threatened to proceed on her own account and in her own way, if she were not dealt with considerately.”

Kenyon fancied that he detected a shade of anxiety in the man’s laughing words; but he said nothing, allowing him to proceed.

“And her coming here to-night shows that she might have some notion of keeping her word. She came to see Hong Yo, as she said she would—and with her came an astounding companion. I had laughed at her up to that point; but now,” with a shrug, “I don’t know what to think.”

“It has a queer look,” admitted Kenyon. “But perhaps it is not as serious as it seems. At the worst, she can know but little of consequence. And that little she cannot use.”

“Let her attempt it,” cried Hong Yo, with that deadly creeping gesture of the hand toward his breast, “and I’ll—”

“I think,” interrupted Kenyon, “that you left that plaything of yours inside there. So there is no use in your feeling for it.” He arose to his feet, and slowly began drawing on his gloves. His face was cold and hard, and the look in his eyes was unmistakable. “And I think it as well,” he continued, “to warn you against anything of that sort. My short acquaintance with you, Hong Yo, has shown me that you have the temper of a half-dozen devils; and, also, that you are not given to controlling it. But this girl must not be harmed! Do you understand? No matter what she does or says, she must not be harmed. She can

injure us but little, if she does her worst. But, as I have told you, *he* knows about her, and from that you must draw your line of policy."

"I understand," answered Hong Yo, sullenly.

"Good. And now if you will have the worthy Sing Wang or someone else show me the way, I'll be going."

XII
And the third night begins

“Men go quietly upon the missions which they think will bring them much.”

—A Maxim of Hong Yo.

The next day Kenyon had his belongings, which he had now generously added to, removed to a hotel some distance up town.

“It has not the flare of the Waldorf,” he told himself, as he sat down to dinner, “and it’s not nearly so expensive. But it will do.”

He was still pondering over the menu when who should enter the café but Webster.

“Oh, I say, but this is luck,” exclaimed that young person, dumping himself into a chair at the opposite side of the table. “I got your notice of removal about an hour ago, while I was deep in the selecting of a menu for a tight old wax that I hoped to land for a good order. But right on top of your message came a ’phone call from him saying that he couldn’t keep the dinner appointment after all. So I dressed and hurried over here for a bite.”

“It couldn’t have happened better,” said Kenyon. “Because I want to discuss a few things with you, rather badly.”

He gave the man, who stood at his side, a carefully selected and rather elaborate list of dishes; then he turned to his friend once more.

“Last night,” said he, slowly, “I was a witness to what Captain Marryat once fascinatingly called ‘a most desperate and bloody murder.’”

“Heavens!” ejaculated Webster, staring at him. “Where?”

“In a Chinese den on the lower East Side.”

“After you left me?”

“Of course.”

Webster leaned back in his chair and wagged his head from side to side.

“What you need,” stated he, impressively, “is to have someone legally appointed to look after you. The first thing you know, you’ll be given an acting part in one of these little dramas that you appear to have grown so fond of; and then we’ll have to gather you up carefully with a rake.”

Kenyon nodded, humorously.

“Do you know,” said he, “I’d been thinking along that line. It’s one of the logical resultants, I suppose; but then we all must take our chances, you see.”

“Is there another story?” asked Webster.

“Not exactly. Rather, a continuation of the same one.”

“All the better. If there are no restrictions such as the surgeon labored under last night, I’d like to hear it.”

In a low voice and in as few words as possible Kenyon related his experiences of the preceding night, while Garry listened in silence. When he had finished, the young man from Chicago murmured, helplessly.

“Well, this is a wonderful world, to be sure! And there are astonishing things happening in it. It would have been a great deal better for the unknown from Butte if he had remained comfortably in his cot at Bellevue and allowed them to doctor at him. Do you know,” after a pause, “I should like to get a peep at your friend Hong Yo. He must be an exceedingly interesting person.”

“He is,” replied Kenyon. “But he is nothing like as interesting as some of the others.”

“The girl, for example.” Webster pursed up his lips disapprovingly. “Well,” reluctantly, “I must admit that later information seems to indicate that she is not sitting in this game as a partner.”

“She’s more likely to be a victim of some sort. And they are afraid of her.”

“A nasty state of affairs. For people like those to be in fear of anyone is for that person to make a quick exit. But the supposed

knowledge of the great unknown as to her existence seems to be a most effectual barrier in this case. I wonder why?”

“I wonder.” By this time the dinner was well under way and both young men were doing justice to it. “But,” continued Kenyon, “I can’t for the life of me make out Forrester’s position. He talked of me supplanting him. He seems to have been, at one time, in almost complete control of the game they are engaged in. And yet, as I told you, he is one of the most frankly honest men in appearance that I have ever set eyes on. I can’t help classing him with the others; but still—”

“His coming to the rescue of the girl, so to speak,” said Webster, “is a point in his favor. And her going with him so readily is another. I think it is also to his credit that this man Farbush does not approve of him.”

“But Hong Yo does; what do you make of that?”

“I’m stumped. The whole thing is as puzzling as it was at the first.”

“There is one small matter that has a peculiar fascination for me,” stated Kenyon, as he trifled with his dessert. “And that is the private safe of Farbush.”

“That’s so!” exclaimed Webster. “That little point slipped me. But what do you suppose is in it?”

“I haven’t the faintest idea. But Farbush seemed startled at the girl’s having any knowledge of it. I’m inclined to think that if we had the contents of that safe on this table between us for a half hour we would have little guessing to do afterwards.”

“By Jove, Ken,” laughed Webster, “do you know I’d almost expect you to venture a burglary if you knew exactly where to head the enterprise. You’ve got it in your eye.”

Kenyon looked at his friend with a sudden smile.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” he said. “But, now that you mention it, I’ll give it consideration.”

“Well, if you take on the job,” said Webster, tickled with the conceit, “let me know, will you, I’d like to go with you.”

Webster had a theatre party on for the night, and as the time drew near for his departure he urged Kenyon to go along. But the latter refused.

“I’ve got some thinking to do,” said he, “and I’m going to take a half-dozen cigars out with me for a walk. So trot along, old fellow; I’ll see you to-morrow night, perhaps.”

Madison Square is not much frequented during the chilly nights of late November, so Kenyon, muffled up in his overcoat, tramped up and down, drawing hard at a strong cigar and thinking deeply. At the end of the cigar he suddenly paused as though his mind had been made up to something.

“Perhaps they’ll know at the hotel,” he muttered. “It will do no harm to inquire, at any rate.”

He strode along up Fifth Avenue and turned into the Waldorf-Astoria. One of the hotel’s private policemen saluted him in the lobby, and Kenyon called him aside.

“I’m looking for information,” said he. “There is a man I know slightly who comes here, I think, at times. His name is Farbush.” Here Kenyon described the man. “Can you tell me where he lives?”

“Farbush? I don’t know the name, but there is a man that comes here occasionally, and who answers to that description. Is your man a ship-owner?”

“I couldn’t say. As I mentioned, my acquaintance with him is slight.”

“I’ll see the head-waiter. If he’s a regular customer, he’ll know something about him, sure. Waiters always do.”

The man was gone but a very few minutes.

“Yes,” said he upon his return. “I think it’s the same party. He is interested in shipping. Head-waiter knows him well. Lives on Fifth Avenue, up near the park. Initials are J. F. Don’t know his number, but you’ll find it in the directory.”

Kenyon acted upon this suggestion and secured the desired address. Then he caught an uptown bus, and in a little while was standing before the house named, but upon the opposite side of the avenue.

“Mr. Farbush appears to be a person of some consequence,” he muttered. “And that only makes him a more dangerous man to contend with. But before I take any steps I’ll have to be sure that this is the same man. It would hardly do to disturb a disinterested party,” dryly.

As luck would have it, a cab drew up at that moment before the house, and a man and woman alighted. The woman Kenyon could not make out; but the man he recognized at once as he turned in the glare of the cab lamp to pay the driver. It was Farbush. Kenyon watched both up the steps and saw the door close behind them. Then he hailed the same cab.

"The Bowery and Houston Street," directed he, as he slammed the door. Down Fifth Avenue rolled the cab, over the smooth asphalt, then into Broadway and finally Houston Street. When they pulled up at the Bowery, Kenyon got out. Handing the cabby his fare, he said:

"You look like an old New York boy."

"Born and raised in the Sixth Ward," answered the man, proudly.

"Good! Maybe you can tell me what I want to know. There used to be a place somewhere on the Bowery near here kept by a man named Brady—Gypsy Brady."

"Oh, the cops put Brady out of business long ago. You see, New York grew out of those places where they had bad whiskey and bad music. Either one of them must be good now," with a grin. "But if you want the Gypsy, he's easy found. Lives over Schmelzer's place in Pell Street. It's a pool-room. Anybody will tell you where it is."

A little later found Kenyon making his way among the human drift that thickens such slack water as Pell Street. The stench of the low Chinese dens was almost unbearable; now and then he met the large-pupiled gaze of a gray-faced wretch begging money with which to purchase his dearly loved drug. But Kenyon paid little attention to anything save his hunt for Schmelzer's place. At the corner of a foul-looking alley he encountered a short, large-bodied youth in a striped sweater and a cap.

"I'm looking for a pool-room kept by a man named Schmelzer," said Kenyon. "Can you tell me where to find it?"

The short youth looked him over carefully and then said:

"I'll spot you three, and take you on at a dollar a game."

Kenyon shook his head and smiled.

"I'm not playing to-night," said he. "I'm looking for a friend of mine who I've been told lives over Schmelzer's."

The other looked disappointed; but he pointed down the street, and said:

“See the big blue blaze at the second story. That’s the hut. There is a Chink bean foundry on the first floor, and Schmelzer is on the next. On top of that you’ll find the hay-piles. Break in by the side door.”

“Thanks,” said Kenyon.

The place indicated was but a short distance away. Passing the entrance to a strong-smelling Chinese restaurant, Kenyon found a narrow, dirty-looking doorway. He passed up a flight of stairs, and at the first landing came upon Schmelzer’s in full blast. Men in pronounced clothes and with hats slanted at different angles played expert cues at the tables; about the ends of the room groups were formed discussing subjects of professional interest.

“Pickpockets, second-story operators and pikers,” commented Kenyon, as he went on up the next flight. “It looks like a cosey corner of Chicago when that good old town was a howling wilderness.”

On the next landing he found himself confronted by a small, dirty-faced girl, with tangled yellow hair.

“Who do you want?” demanded she.

“Mr. Brady,” answered Kenyon. “Does he live here?”

“What do you want with him?” inquired the child.

The adventurer looked down into the sharp little face, so smutted and old looking.

“He’s an old friend of mine, kidsy,” answered he. “Here’s a dime.”

A grimy little hand shot out for the coin. Then she said:

“He lives back there, in the last room. Knock hard on the door. Maybe he’s drunk.”

Kenyon picked his way along the dirty hall, and rapped at the door at the end.

“Who’s there?” growled a rough voice.

“How are you, Brady?” responded Kenyon. “Can I come in?”

XIII

Kenyon meets an old acquaintance

“The deeds of one’s youth are long remembered.”

—*The Strategy of Nunez.*

The voice growled something in an undertone that Kenyon could not understand. But he promptly took it as an invitation to enter, and so pushed open the door. A thick-shouldered man with a dark, bloated face was stretched upon a broken-springed sofa; and as Kenyon entered he lifted himself to a sitting position.

“Who the hell are you?” he growled.

Kenyon smiled.

“There was a time, Gypsy, when you prided yourself upon your memory. It must have gone back on you of late years, if you don’t recognize old friends.”

“Old friends!” The man glowered at the speaker. “I haven’t got any old friends. No man that is down and out has. When me coin run out, it was the side street and the far-away look for mine.”

Kenyon drew a stool toward him and sat down, first throwing his top-coat and crush-hat aside. The man regarded his immaculateness with frowning wonder.

“How long has it been, Brady,” inquired the caller, “since you saw my old acquaintance the ‘Steamhammer’?”

Brady stared for a moment, then a grin gradually stole over his face.

“Say,” said he. “I’ve got you now. You are that young guy from West Point.” He arose and shook hands with Kenyon. “I’m glad to see you. You were once the handy boy, all right,” admiringly. “You

had a shot in either hand that would have made you champion of America if you had been in that line."

"Thanks."

"Just wait a minute," continued the Gypsy, with a wink. "I've got a friend here that's sort of backward-like, when people call." He went to a closet at one side, pulled back the catch and threw open the door.

"All right, Slim," said he. "You can come out. It's a friend of mine."

A tall, angular, huge-boned fellow stepped silently out of the closet. He had a hawk-like face and a pair of small, shifty green eyes.

"I'm glad to know the gent," said he. He sat coolly down upon a trunk and began to roll a cigarette. His fingers were supple and discolored. "You see," by way of explanation, "when a guy is in demand, why it's him for the deep, dense shade. Do you get me? There is no sense in lingering around in places where you might get sunburned."

"I think I understand," said Kenyon.

The Gypsy waved the subject away, as being without special interest. He seemed in a reminiscent mood.

"The night that you came into the 'Paradise Garden' is one that will always stick to me," said he, with a chuckle. "Ah, that was a time when I could rope up the yellowbacks in bundles thick enough to keep back the cops. But New York's changed since then. It's full of Chinks, Yiddishers, Guinnies, and people with money."

"I've heard of that old place of yours, often," spoke the shady one, lighting his cigarette. "But I never saw it."

"You see," said the Gypsy to Kenyon. "Big Slim here is from St. Louis. He only struck New York a few years back. They'd never mugged him here, and he was looking for a new field."

"It should have been 'Frisco or old K. C. for me," complained Big Slim. "The guns have gone all over this island and there's not a thing on it, except in Wall Street, that's not chained short."

"Well, if you'd drifted in in the old days you'd have found it different. A guy could accumulate a pull then, if he had the change," stated Brady. "And he could go as far as he liked."

He paused a moment, then resumed:

“Now the ‘Paradise Garden’ was a mint; money came in by the ton, and I only had to stop this side of murder. And it was the place to go,” with great pride. “Anybody that blew into New York had to take a flyer at my place to be in the running. It cost them something; but it was worth the money. The show I gave them was the real goods; and the drinks were fine—if the buyer was sober. What’s the use of wasting good liquor on a guy that’s stewed to the eyes. He can’t appreciate it.”

“Your reasoning is highly modern,” said Kenyon, dryly.

“You managed mit-pushers then, didn’t you?” asked Big Slim, rolling a second cigarette.

“I did. Local champs, you know, with followings of friends. The friends were always good shots over a bar. They could hit the cash register with a silver dollar every time they’d try. It was a pleasing performance.”

The Gypsy had lost his scowl, and his eyes glistened at the thought of his more prosperous days.

“But,” he resumed, “of all the chamois artists I ever managed, the ‘Steamhammer’ was the biggest winner. You see, he worked in Washington Market, and all the marketmen and longshore people would be on hand whenever he’d engage. And they were a thirsty lot. I’d have to sit on the safe all night with a gun after they’d been on the job.

“I had the Hammer for almost a year. Twice a week I’d advertise him as open to meet all comers at the middleweight limit; and he’d gone right along the line putting them away without missing once. At last the bugs began to whisper to me that I had the wonder of the age; and that it was my correct move to put him in front of the big mixer himself. But our friend here,” indicating Kenyon, “saved me the trouble.”

“Is that so?” inquired Big Slim, interestedly. “Tell us how.”

“He came into the Gardens one night with a lot of them West Point fellows. I think it had been a football day, and they were wild to pull something off. They had heard about the Hammer, and when I made the regular offer from the stage about him being willing to exchange wallops, one of them was on in a minute and the rest of them were howling with joy.”

“It’s that sort of thing that boys do,” apologized Kenyon. “And I was very young then, you know.”

“You were fifteen pounds lighter than the Hammer, I know that,” grinned Gypsy Brady. “And when you put up your guard I thought he had you sure.”

“But he didn’t?” interrogated Big Slim.

“He didn’t even come near doing it. You see the Hammer’s regular stunt was to rush his man up to the wall—I only had ropes on three sides—pin him against it with his left hand and pour it into him with his right. When he thought he’d handed over enough he’d pull out the pin, and the guy would generally drop. But this time the game didn’t work. The boy from the army school met the rush with a body stab that brought the Hammer up short; then he feinted him into a tangle and shot one over on his baggage truck that put him away.”

Big Slim nodded admiringly; he liked a neatly executed job.

“It was not nearly so difficult a proposition as you might think,” said Kenyon. “I’m not in good training for that sort of thing just now; but,” and he looked at the Gypsy attentively, “I’d rather tackle another job like it, than the one I have in mind.”

“I thought there was something that brought you here,” returned the ex-divekeeper. There was an eager look upon his dark, swollen face, at the prospect of profit of some sort. “Is it anything that you’d like to see me in private about?”

“I think not,” answered Kenyon. He turned and regarded Big Slim keenly. “I rather fancy that our friend here will be of assistance.”

“I’m only open for engagements of an indoor nature at the present time,” volunteered the man from St. Louis, seriously. “But if there is anything that I can do for a friend of the Gypsy’s, why, I’ll be glad to take it on.”

“I want a complete burglar’s outfit,” said Kenyon to Brady. “And I also want a full line of instructions as to how to break into a house, and how to force a safe when I get in.”

Big Slim cracked the joints of his huge fingers and only appeared mildly surprised.

“You’re not going to take up house-breaking, are you?” inquired the astonished Gypsy, when he had recovered his speech.

“Not as a regular thing,” answered Kenyon, easily. “But it happens that there is a house in town that I want to see the inside of, and don’t care to wait for an invitation. Now if you can put me in the way of getting what I want, I’ll pay you your own price.”

“As you have guessed,” said the Gypsy, “Slim is a cracksman; and if he has a mind he can fix you up.” He turned to the other, inquiringly, “What do you say?”

“I’ll do it,” answered Big Slim promptly. “But the stuff comes high,” to Kenyon. “I’ve got the finest kit in New York; it took me years to get it together. Every tool will do its work, and is strictly up to date.” He looked at the adventurer with calculating eye. “You could carry enough in your pockets to let you into anything but a money-fort. And I’ll hand it on to you, together with a full day’s instructions in the use of the stuff, at five hundred dollars.”

“Wrap them up,” replied Kenyon, quietly. “And if it’s all the same to you, I’ll have the lessons begin right now.”

XIV
The uninvited guest

"'Twas in the garden of Beaucaire;
I met her on a secret stair.
The night was centuries ago."
—*Old Ballad*

The thick, sticky mist that sometimes blows uptown from the bay veiled Fifth Avenue; and a thin rain fell steadily. The lamps shot their pale rays mysteriously through the fog; cabs and busses rolled drippingly by; and soggy pedestrians hurried along under streaming umbrellas.

The theatre crowds were on their way home, after their hour in the White Light restaurants; but in a little while their time had passed, and the avenue was silent and deserted save for a policeman who would now and then appear, and almost as quickly vanish.

Most of the houses were gloom-fronted; a few scattering windows in the section just below the park showed night lights; but one house was brilliantly illuminated, and a long line of carriages was drawn up at the curb.

It was past midnight when Kenyon came along, enveloped in a rain-coat and with an umbrella held over his head.

"By George!" muttered he, "it is really at Farbush's! What luck! To get inside now should be comparatively easy. What a fortunate thing it is that he should be giving this thing, whatever it is."

He stood in the drip of a roof across the street and watched the gaily lighted house. At length a party came out, protected by umbrellas held by footmen; these latter immediately returned and

several other parties came out at once and scurried for their vehicles.

"Now is my chance," said Kenyon. He swiftly crossed the street, passed behind a carriage into which several exclaiming women were being helped, then up the wide steps and into the hall.

"Shall I return your things to the coat-room, sir?" asked a servant.

"Thanks—yes," answered the adventurer, quietly.

He handed his coat, hat, and umbrella to the man, who received the latter surprisedly. Its folds streamed with water, and he was clearly wondering if the rain were not heavier than he had thought it. However, he took the things away without any comment, and Kenyon, with a light breath of relief, walked into a room in which he could see a number of men smoking.

His entrance being quiet and matter of fact, of course attracted no attention whatsoever. This was what he had calculated upon; he wore the conventional evening clothes; at a glance he looked exactly like the other males present, and no one could say that he was an intruder.

"That is, no one but Farbush," mused Kenyon, as he took a cigarette from a box upon a stand. "And if he should happen upon me, no doubt I can find a few things to say to him that would sufficiently account for my presence."

He was lounging calmly in a big chair when a voice at his side remarked:

"It's a fair cigarette that Farbush keeps, isn't it. If his champagne were as good I should have nothing to complain of."

Kenyon turned. A pale-eyed young man with a budding mustache had drawn a chair up close to him, and was in the act of lighting a cigarette. There was a friendly, inconsequential look upon his chubby face, and the adventurer's eyes snapped.

"Yes, they are rather a good sort," replied Kenyon, inspecting his cigarette critically. "But I haven't tried the champagne."

The other made a wry face.

"Then you may consider yourself lucky," said he. "These old fellows like Farbush should really leave their cellars for someone else to select. They do make a most dreadful mess of it sometimes. Now, Farbush possibly knows all about tea, and about ships and

Chinese stuff and all that, but he's a baby on the vintage subject. I had about fifteen dozen of that '93 some time ago which I tried to induce him to buy; but he actually scoffed at it. And then he springs a thing like this to-night upon his unsuspecting friends."

"Then you sell wines?" said Kenyon, with a show of interest.

"Not in the usual sense," returned the young man, hastily. "No, no! I sometimes have a small quantity of a few select brands to dispose of to my friends—more to give them the benefit of my experience than anything else. That is all."

Kenyon smiled. He had heard of the wine agent in society and had known the cigarette boomer at college.

"Our most philanthropic purposes are not always appreciated," said he. The other shook his head in a way expressive of a wide and early acquaintance with that particular fact. "Now Farbush is a friend of mine," proceeded Kenyon, "but I must admit that he's rather shaky upon a good many things. Did he build this house, do you know?"

"I think he did."

"That is what I thought. It's about the sort of thing he *would* have put up," criticised Kenyon, with a severe expression, which said as plainly as words that architectural sins would only be properly dealt with if placed among the deadly kind. "It's all out of reason, you know."

"I couldn't say, really," returned the pale-eyed young man, hesitatingly. "Architecture is a bit out of my line, you see."

Kenyon had been more or less confident of that; nevertheless he was pleased to hear the confession, and launched forth in a very caustic condemnation of Farbush's mansion.

"But it's the way the rooms are laid out that I particularly criticise," declared he. "The whole thing is a jumble. Now, I have no doubt but that a man so inoculated with the poison of commercial life as Farbush would have his home office in the most conspicuous room in the house."

"Oh, but he hasn't, I assure you," the other hastened to say. "His apartment for the transaction of his own private affairs is just at the head of the first flight of stairs—a large room, but quite out of the way."

“Well, I should have thought differently,” replied Kenyon, grudgingly.

After a little more talk, largely upon the part of the wine agent, that person arose.

“I see most of them are going,” said he. “I suppose the rain must have let up.”

Then Kenyon noticed that Farbush had entered the room, and stood by the door leading to the hall, shaking hands with his departing guests.

“It would be preferable were he not to see me,” he thought. So now that his new acquaintance had left him, he arose, and quietly passed through a curtained doorway. The room was almost deserted; however, in one near at hand he could hear the laughing chatter of a great number of women.

“I’ve got but a very few minutes, perhaps,” he muttered. “So I’d better get to work.” He looked out into the hall, from still another doorway. The street doors were wide open and the footmen were calling the carriages in the impatient tone of men who were wet and uncomfortable.

“I should think the excellent Mr. Farbush would have done well to have spread a canopy from his door,” thought Kenyon. His keen eyes took in the fact that no one was observing him; and in an instant he had gained the stairway and had begun to ascend. It was a solid, hard-wood staircase, very wide, with massive balustrades and newel posts. And there were many turns in it, and many landings. Kenyon had reached one of these and stood in the glare of a cluster of lights to look back. As he was so posed he heard the rustle of silken skirts above him; he turned swiftly. Around a bend in the stairway, leaning over the heavy rail and gazing down at him was a girl—a tall girl, with a great crown of blonde hair and delicately tinted face. It was Anna!

“Mr. Kenyon!” she whispered; and he saw the sudden fear in her blue eyes.

For a moment the adventurer was at loss. But as was usual with him the feeling was perfectly masked; to all appearances he was cool and entirely at his ease.

“Ah, how do you do?” smiled he. “I’m charmed, I’m sure.”

She looked at him fixedly; it was evident that she was struggling against her surprise; but her voice shook as she said:

"What—what are you doing here?"

"Social affairs always have an attraction for me," replied Kenyon. "I like to meet people and exchange ideas with them. The general effect is freshening, I think."

The girl had recovered somewhat from her first astonishment.

"How foolish of me to be surprised," she smiled; "of course you were among those asked. I recall it distinctly now."

Kenyon regarded her with fresh interest. There was the same appealing air about her that he had noticed in Selden's Square; a girlish sweetness and helplessness that drew one powerfully. But he had noticed another thing. The sweetness and innocence, if anything, increased when she spoke of her recollection of his being asked there that night.

"It might be a hallucination of hers, of course," thought Kenyon, as his keen eyes searched the girl's face. "But I'm not sure of it."

"Will you sit on the stairs with me?" asked Anna. Her teeth were of dazzling whiteness, and her manner full of sudden witchery. "I know it's very silly and school-girlish, but I've always liked it."

"A fascinating place," said Kenyon, as he sat at her feet. "Unnoticed we can speed the parting guests through the rails. It's one of the discoveries of college days that are really worth while."

She laughed a little at this. The light in her eyes danced softly and girlishly. But for all her smiles Kenyon thought he saw a tightening at the corners of her mouth. It was as though she were possessed of a nervous dread of some sort.

"I fancy," thought the ex-lieutenant of Nunez, "that I have been inopportune in some way."

"You are not going to-night, then?" said Anna, eagerly.

"Oh, yes," replied Kenyon. "In a very little while."

There was an expression of relief in the girl's eyes for an instant, and then she pouted.

"I fancied that uncle would have you with us while you are in town." She hesitated and then laid her hand upon his shoulder. "And I'm sure that Dallas would be pleased."

"Dallas?"

“Of course. You must not be guided altogether by appearances. Neither should you heed what others might say. She is an odd girl in some ways. And proud!” with a pretty gesture of dismay. “I never saw such pride before.”

It was *the* girl that she referred to! Kenyon drew a long breath and then said:

“I agree with you as to the pride. Her attitude toward me, so far, has been rather—ah—distant to say the least.”

“Then she has not treated you well to-night?”

“Is she here?” exclaimed Kenyon, caught by surprise.

“To be sure. Mr. Farbush always insists upon our being present at affairs like this. He is a widower, you know, and he depends entirely upon us to entertain his guests. But is it possible that you have not spoken with her?”

She gave him a curious glance. He saw that it would not do to make admissions of any sort; they were inclined to be dangerous.

“I only ventured out of the smoking room upon one or two occasions,” remarked he. “And then the rooms were so crowded.”

“Oh, yes; that is true.”

But he could see that she was far from being satisfied, for she immediately came back to the subject.

“You are not a very ardent lover, it would seem,” she laughed. “I should think that a man would be breathless in his search for his lady-love, anywhere in which he had occasion to think she would be.”

“It is just possible,” answered Kenyon, slowly, “that I did not dream of finding her here.”

She looked at him quickly, and he felt her small hand tighten upon his arm.

“You are thinking of the affair of a few nights ago at Hong Yo’s,” she cried. “Oh, how dreadful, how horrible it must have been. And before her very eyes.”

“You have heard about it, then?”

“Griscom informed me. And then Dallas also told me, afterwards. But she was compelled to return here. No matter what has been done we cannot leave here, now.”

“I suppose not,” answered Kenyon, in a thoughtful way. “There is much more than personal feeling to be considered.”

“That is what we both think. Otherwise we would not have remained an instant after the night in—in Selden’s Square.”

By this time the last carriage had departed, and they heard the front door slam. Then the harsh voice of Farbush was heard.

“Now, then, come in here, Shallcross; I’ll go over that matter with you in detail.”

They heard footsteps in the hall below; and a door opened and shut.

“There, now!” exclaimed Anna. “You’ll not have a chance to say good-bye to him as you go. That is Mr. Shallcross, the ship-builder from Seattle. They will be deep in tonnages and such stupid things for the next hour.”

“At least,” said Kenyon, as he arose. “You can say good-night for me—in the morning. I’ll get my coat and other things”—as though about to pass her on the stairway.

“But the coat-room is below,” she informed him, hastily. And it also seemed to him that she instinctively barred his way.

“Oh, how stupid of me,” he exclaimed. “I fancied it was on this floor. That is why I was coming up in the first place.”

“Good-night,” she said, holding out her hand, with an eagerness that was a trifle feverish.

“Good-night,” he replied.

There was no one below that he could see. The empty coat-room was only dimly lighted. He entered and drew on his long rain-coat and took up his hat.

“I suppose there is no hope for it,” he muttered, half angrily. “I’ll have to go after all. I had hoped that I wouldn’t be compelled to—”

A murmur of voices outside the partly-opened coat-room door caught his ears.

“Billings, get that rug in off the steps. Mr. Farbush will raise the devil if he hears about it being wet. Old Potter threw it out there because he thought that fat wife of his would slip.”

A moment later the street door opened and then shut heavily. A man passed on his way to the rear of the house. Kenyon opened the

coat-room door wide. All the lights, save one, in the lower hall were turned out; and that one only dimly illuminated the place.

"She'll think I've gone, if she's listening," muttered he.

With his hand upon the stair rail once more in the act of ascending, Kenyon caught a familiar sound. It was the rich rustle of silken draperies; and through the shadows he made out a figure in white, bending forward upon the last stretch of the staircase. He crouched close to the wall, and held his breath.

"He has gone," he heard the voice of Anna murmur. "Oh, how I fear that man!"

Then, softly, she stole up the staircase once more, and Kenyon was left alone. He cautiously made his way into one of the great rooms at the front of the house. It was dark, save for what light entered at the windows, from the street. Settling himself in as comfortable a chair as he could find he lay back and began to go over the situation.

"So Anna is afraid of me," he thought. "Well, that is not altogether a pleasant thing to hear. If I were younger I would be inclined to doubt my personal fascinations. And, while I think she meant it in a general way, I'm pretty sure that there is some reason to think that she had a special fear of me to-night."

He crossed one leg over the other and placed his clasped hands behind his head.

"If I could have a cigarette, just now," his thoughts went on, leaping from one thing to another, "I think it would help me. But I suppose it is too risky. Somehow that girl gave me an odd impression. I can't get rid of the notion that there is another enterprise beside my own afoot here to-night. Take her fright at sight of me. Her relief when she found that I had not been asked to stay over night. Her anxiety that I should go. Her placing herself before me when I made as though to pass her. Her stealing down the staircase to make sure that I had taken my departure.

"Another enterprise would mean what?" He smiled at this. "Heavens, how is it possible to form any sort of a judgment in this business. It gets more snarled every minute. I never did know just what my position was in it; and now I'm beginning to get tangled as to the relative positions and attitudes of the others concerned. But,

pshaw! What's the use. No amount of reasoning will do any good, when one hasn't anything to use as a base."

Patiently he waited. An hour went by; then he heard the sound of chairs being drawn back. The ship-builder, Shallcross, took his departure, saying good-night to Farbush, who let him out. Then Farbush closed the door and came back through the hall. From the position which he had now taken behind a portière, Kenyon saw the man stop under the single light for a moment, his head bent as though in deep thought. Then with a gesture and a muttered oath he turned off the light; and the intruder listened to his slow, careful steps down the hall and up the stairway. Then there was silence.

Once more Kenyon resumed the easy chair, leaning back with closed eyes, patiently waiting. Almost an hour went by. Then he arose to his feet and stretched himself, luxuriously.

"It seems to me," he mused, "as though I had been in this line of business for some time. Perhaps in a former state I was a famous cracksman. What an alarming idea! However, if it be true, I only hope that some of my one-time skill still lingers. I'll have use for it to-night."

From his pocket he took a square of black silk with two round holes cut into it. This he snapped about his head with a rubber band, and pulled it down over his face. Then he buttoned his overcoat up to his chin.

"The front of a dress shirt has a certain amount of sheen," he said. "And I'd better provide for meeting anyone in the halls."

Upon his feet he drew a pair of soft felt creepers; then he stole noiselessly to the door and listened. All was still. Apparently the servants at the back of the house had also gone to bed. From his vest pocket he drew a tiny electric torch and, pressing the button, it shot its narrow shaft of light along the hall. Almost instantly, however, he shut it off, and began to ascend the stairs.

"At the head of the first flight of stairs, said my friend the wine agent," thought Kenyon. "But I wonder upon which side."

At the head of the stairs all was black; he paused and listened once more. Then the tiny beam of light flashed here and there. At the left was a door partly ajar. The light died, and he took a noiseless step forward. He could not see the door, now, but trusted to his judgment of distance to place his hand upon the knob. But his hand

was yet reaching out, when the hinges of the door began to creak slowly in the silence. He grew as rigid as a statue, for every instinct told him that he was standing face to face with someone in the darkness.

XV
Kenyon in a new rôle

“Take plenty of time. Keep cool. Don’t make a sound.”

—*The Advice of Big Slim.*

For a moment Kenyon literally held his breath. There was no movement, though his ears were strained to catch any sound.

“Whoever it is,” he thought, “they are standing, listening, the same as I am.”

With the greatest possible caution he drew back a step; the soft felt creepers prevented any noise and he exercised the greatest care that there should be no rustling of his clothing. He had retreated three or four steps when he touched the opposite wall; and as he stood listening he caught the creaking of the door once more, as though the unknown had opened it wider. Then there came a faint fall of footsteps, gentle and guarded; and through the thick darkness came the trembling whisper:

“Who’s there?”

Kenyon made no sound. There was a silence; then he heard a deep, long-drawn sigh—the sigh of one who has been waiting and listening. Then the whisper came once more—a woman’s voice.

“I’m sure I saw a light—just for an instant.”

Then something passed Kenyon. It was within a foot of him as it went by; but he could not detect even its lineaments, so impenetrable was the darkness. The footsteps were slow, cautious, and soft. His skin prickled for a moment as the nervous dread of the unknown was communicated to himself. Then the sounds died away at the other end of the hall.

“It is Anna!” Kenyon told himself this positively. “And when I suspected a rival enterprise I was correct.”

He slipped quietly within the room from which the unseen woman had just emerged. The curtains had been tightly drawn and the apartment was as inky as the hall. He feared to flash the torch, thinking that it might throw a reflection through the doorway.

“It might not be the office after all,” thought Kenyon. “If it is not I’ll have gotten myself into a devil of a mess.”

In taking the next step his hand touched a hard, polished surface; moving farther it came upon a clutter of papers, an ink-stand, pen-rack and other clerical requisites.

“A desk,” muttered the adventurer. “And a good sized, flat-top desk, at that. This is the apartment I’m after.”

Suddenly from the doorway came a sharp, crackling sound. Instantly Kenyon sank down behind the desk. Someone had scratched a match, but it had missed fire. At the second attempt it flared redly, however; Kenyon could not see who held it, for he feared to raise his head above the level of the desk. Then the nature of the flame changed and it grew steadier; footsteps sounded upon the thickly carpeted floor. They were gentle footsteps.

“Anna once more!” thought Kenyon.

He changed his position soundlessly, his ears telling upon what side of the desk the girl was about to pass. His situation was a most fortunate one. He was between the desk and the wall farthest from the door. The entire room was before him. Cautiously he lifted his head, as he felt sure, judging from the direction in which she was going, that she would not see him.

Over the flat top of the desk he caught sight of the cloaked figure of a girl. Her back was turned toward him, and a hood was drawn over her head. And she was bending over the combination lock of a gleaming safe of formidable appearance.

She had lighted a candle and this she now stood upon the top while she knelt before the safe. Round and round she turned the knob, pausing now and then to think. But each effort was without result; and finally she leaned her head forward upon her hands.

“Crying,” thought Kenyon. “Well, my dear Anna, that will not do any good. And if you have no better trick to play than trying to guess

the combination, you might just as well go back to your little white bed."

For a moment the girl remained in this position; then she arose and moved toward the door. As she reached it, she blew the candle out, and once more blackness hung over the office.

Kenyon remained as he was for some time. When he felt assured that the girl had gone for good, he arose, crossed the room and softly closed the door. Again the tiny torch flashed. Then he found the switch and turned on the lights. The key was fortunately in the door and this he turned, leaving it in the lock to fill up the hole.

The whole appearance of Kenyon had changed; his movements were quick and pantherish, and not one of them was wasted; his eyes gleamed through the holes of his mask, as he swept the apartment. Then he laughed.

"How lucky! Farbush has been thoughtful enough to put in running water. Oh, after all, there is nothing like modern plumbing."

From his pocket he produced a small generator of shining brass; this he placed upon a table. Then he drew out several sections of a tube of the same metal, which he joined snugly together. From a breast pocket he took a rubber bag partly filled with calcium carbide, which he poured into the generator.

This having been done, he threw off his overcoat and approached the safe.

"Newest pattern, as far as my information goes," he said calmly. "But it's all the same to the acetylene flame."

He tried the knob in order to make sure that the safe was locked. He had once heard of the absurd oversight of a cracksman who had spent hours drilling into a safe that was open, and had no desire to repeat the performance.

"But this one is tight enough," he declared.

He took a rug from the floor, folded it neatly, and placed it before the safe door. Then he carried the generator to a small washstand at one side of the office, and ran a quantity of water into it. Almost instantly the choking flames of the acetylene gas assailed his nostrils.

"Whew!" he ejaculated, turning his head away; "if there is a more awful stench in the world than this, I've never encountered it."

Quickly he ignited the evil-smelling gas, and screwed the blowpipe to the generator. Then he knelt upon the rug, placed the pipe to his lips and blew through it steadily. A darting, intense flame leaped forth, like a finger of light; this Kenyon directed toward a point just above the combination knob. The varnish disappeared like magic, and the steel of the safe melted like solder before the fierce point of flame.

"It works well," said Kenyon, pausing in his blowing to inspect critically the small hole burned through the massive door. "At this rate I won't be long on the job."

Once more he placed his lips to the blowpipe, and once more the needle of light bored its way into the steel. Larger and larger grew the hole in the safe; and at last Kenyon found it wide enough to insert his hand and arm. Placing the generator upon the floor he reached in and began manipulating the tumblers of the lock. Then he threw the door wide, and sat back upon his heels with an exclamation of satisfaction.

"The inner door is easy enough," he said, as he extinguished the generator. "Big Slim's master-key should have no trouble in opening it—but what's this?" He bent forward. "Why, it's the key itself, ready to my hand."

He inserted the big key, turned it, and the inner door opened. Before him were a great number of pigeon-holes and small drawers, all filled with documents of various hues and sizes.

The adventurer gazed at these, appalled.

"And I don't know what I'm looking for!" he thought. "This really promises to be a worse job than opening the safe."

However, he resolutely set to work examining the contents. By good fortune, all the packets were labelled plainly, so that he was not forced to open any.

"It's a saving of time and my feelings," thought the cracksman. "I have no desire to investigate Mr. Farbush's affairs any farther than they concern me."

Paper after paper, packet after packet, passed through his hands, but still no sign of anything that had the slightest interest to him.

"And yet, how can I be sure of that?" he asked himself. "I never felt so helpless and incompetent to deal with a situation in my life. This,"

and he turned a heavy envelope over in his hands, “might be exactly the thing I’m searching for; but how am I to know one way or the other?”

The envelope was large, made of stout manila paper and sealed with two huge splotches of black wax. Across the face of it was written in a large, running hand:

ESTATE OF STEPHEN AUSTIN.

“This might be it,” thought Kenyon; and he shrugged his shoulders and laughed. “And when I come to think of it, somehow, it seems to me that this name is familiar to me. It is just as though—by George, yes! It is just as though I had heard it on the night of my adventure in Selden’s Square.”

He looked at the envelope, swift eagerness in his eyes.

“I’ll chance it,” he muttered. He was about to tear it open when suddenly a small white hand darted over his shoulder and snatched it from his grasp. He turned with a startled exclamation and caught a glimpse of a dark, cloaked figure; but at the same instant the lights were switched off. As he sprang up, he heard the door thrown open, and heedless of the darkness he darted toward it. Soft feet were running on the stairs.

Kenyon paused and leaned against the door frame.

“Gone,” said he, “and in another moment she’ll probably have the house in an uproar.”

The words had no sooner left his lips than there came a muffled scream from the hall below. Kenyon leaped to the stair rail and bent over, listening. Then the lights below were switched on, flooding the stairway and hall; to Kenyon’s amazement he saw Griscom Forrester and Anna standing pale-faced and startled at the foot of the stairs; while confronting them with blazing eyes and a revolver in his hand was Farbush.

XVI

Kenyon calls on the man from saginaw

“And the brief news comes in the darkest night,
That leads us on and on.”

—*Doggerels of Balmacenso.*

Garry Webster sat in his rooms, a high-ball before him, and a fat black cigar burning between his fingers, when Kenyon was announced early next evening. Webster demonstratively shook him by the hand.

“Sit down and drink something,” said he. “I’m about as glad to see you as I’ve ever been to seen anyone in my life. Why, it’s at least two nights since I dined with you.”

Kenyon waved away the Scotch, but lit a cigar.

“Why all the pleasure?” he inquired, calmly.

“Well, in view of your proceedings of late I think I was warranted in feeling slightly concerned about you. A fellow of your quality and disposition takes a fair chance of having someone run a knife into him. If I were you, Ken, I’d avoid dark and unfrequented spots, and I’d suspect people.”

“That would be an attractive arrangement for a maiden lady,” said Kenyon, dryly, “but I don’t think it quite fills the bill of requirements of a man engaged in a more or less desperate game.”

Webster looked at him observantly.

“It’s still going on, then?” said he.

Kenyon nodded.

“Well, just what phases have you lately passed through. I’m willing to admit that I am all of a-tremble; but at the same time I’m strong on

curiosity. Your use of the word desperate seems advised; so if you have anything to tell, tell it quickly."

"Last night," spoke Kenyon, knocking the ash from his cigar, and inspecting a loose spot in the wrapper, "I made an attempt to get at the bottom of this case at one blow."

"And did you?"

"Not quite."

"Now, look here, Ken," said Garry, and he looked aggrieved. "This is not the proper treatment for a friend. I would even be disposed to regard it as unnecessarily harsh to an enemy. It's not charitable, and it's not kind."

Kenyon laughed.

"Now don't rush me," protested he. "The whole matter has my ideas in such a tangle that it will not require much more to have me completely off my nanny. Since seeing you last, I have had manifold adventures, and have added to my experience in life to an unexpected degree."

"You go at it like a popular lecturer," remarked Webster, patiently. He lit another cigar and sipped at the high-ball. "If I don't do something to calm myself, I'll be coming over there and doing you a mischief, as they say in the Drury Lane melodramas."

For the third time within a week, Kenyon related his experiences to his attentive friend. He began with their talk at dinner some nights before and the idea that he had conceived from Webster's laughing remark. Then he went on to his hunt for Gypsy Brady, his meeting with the cracksman, Big Slim, then until he reached the scene in the lower hall of Farbush's mansion. Webster brought his fist down upon the table.

"That settles it!" exclaimed he. "This is the end of it. Never again will I permit you out of my sight. You are without mental poise or a shadow of forethought. And as for common sense, I don't believe you ever had a shred of it in your life. Don't sit there and laugh! I mean it. The other stuff that you have been meddling with was bad enough, Heaven knows; but this last business is the absolute limit. Think of it! Breaking and entering; masked burglary; safe cracking! Why, it's unbelievable."

“You’d better take another drink,” advised Kenyon, quietly. “Your nerves seem to be in a shocking bad way.”

Webster glared at him for a moment, and then burst into a perfect gale of laughter. His round face was scarlet and his eyes were filled with tears when he brought chokingly up and began to splutter and cough.

“Take it,” gasped he, waving his hands. “Take it.”

“Take what?”

“Anything that you see in the way of a reward. You are entitled to it. You win every prize in the show.”

“I have no doubt but that the affair is exceedingly humorous,” said Kenyon. He poured out some Scotch, added a little hot water and sugar, and stirred the mixture meditatively. “But, do you know, I can’t see it. I suppose our points of view are different.” He sipped the toddy, found it to his satisfaction, and then added: “However, I fancy that we have been over all that before.”

“Humorous!” exclaimed Webster. “Why, it’s riotous. Your matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation is really the funniest thing I ever saw. But,” and his manner changed to one of curiosity, “how did you get out of Farbush’s house without having the police called upon?”

“I hardly think there was any chance of that, at the worst. But, as it was, I simply laid low, as we used to say at school. Farbush stormed and raved and threatened down below, and waved his revolver for a time, while the others protested. I could not quite gather what it was about, for they all spoke at once. But it had something to do with the safe, for they all three came up the stairs, I lying snug behind an offset in the wall while they entered the office.”

“Then, when Farbush saw the result of your acetylene flame, I suppose there was a renewal of the tempest?”

“It had begun when I slipped down the stairs,” answered Kenyon. “But I was safely out at the front door, and on my way down Fifth Avenue, I suppose, before it reached its height.”

“The estate of Stephen Austin,” mused Webster. “That, apparently, is what all this trouble is about.”

“From the clever moves of the girl who plucked the envelope from my hands in Farbush’s office, and her anxiety to get safely away with it, I should think so myself.”

“I can hardly understand how she got into the office—unless there was more than one door.”

“There was not.”

“But you saw her leave the room, and you locked the door behind her.”

“I locked the door, yes. But I did *not* see her leave the room.”

Webster looked at his friend inquiringly.

“I distinctly remember you saying that she walked to the door and blew out the candle.”

“Precisely; but I said nothing about seeing her leave the room.”

“By George!” Webster slapped his knee suddenly. “It was a bluff. She did not go out, at all.”

“No; she was in the office all the time I worked upon the safe. I reasoned the matter out afterwards. While she was fumbling with the combination, she must have caught sight of me. It was a shadow, perhaps, or more likely my reflection in the polished door of the safe. When she covered her face with her hands, I thought she was crying of disappointment; but really she must have been stifling a scream, or shrewdly thinking up a plan of action.”

“I prefer the last,” stated Webster.

“So she arose, took up the candle, and walked toward the door. Every step plainly said that she had given up the fight, that she had no further hope. Almost in the doorway, she blew the candle out. I naturally supposed that she went on; instead, she darted behind something in the office,—there were lots of things that would screen her,—and so waited until I had found what she appeared to want so badly.”

“Clever!” exclaimed Webster, emphatically. “She has nerve, too. Not one girl in a thousand could think so clearly under such circumstances. Do you know, I’m almost sorry that she was caught.”

“It does seem rather provoking.”

“And this young man, Forrester, was on the premises all the time. I suppose he was a guest, and was hidden away much after your own style.”

“I shouldn’t wonder.”

“But old Farbush was the wise fox, eh? He suspected something and probably was lying in wait.”

“I suppose so.”

“And it’s more than likely that the coveted packet immediately passed back into his hands when he confronted the pair in front of the rifled safe.”

Kenyon muttered a reply that was not intelligible. He was drawing steadily at his cigar, holding it clinched between his teeth, and frowning thoughtfully. Webster had noticed his replies being rather brief and absent for the last few minutes, and said:

“What’s the new one, Ken; you might as well tell it all. You can’t surprise me any more than you have already done.”

“I was thinking that, on the whole, I would have done a great deal better if I had waited awhile before leaving Farbush’s house.”

“But why? You might have been caught.”

“Of course; I would have been taking a chance. But, then, what else had I been doing during the entire night.”

“Well, that’s true. But what do you suppose a little lingering on the scene would have brought you?”

“It might have confirmed a suspicion that I’ve had ever since. And that is, that Anna and Forrester met with the surprise of their lives when the office lights were turned on and they saw the safe broken open.”

“But, great Cæsar! Ken; how could that be. The girl, according to your own reasoning, saw you crack the safe.”

“Don’t go too fast, old chap; I didn’t say so. I didn’t mention any names; for I’m not altogether sure that it was Anna who was in the office with me. The girl who snatched the packet wore a heavy cloak and a hood; Anna was in white when I saw her a moment later as she stood beside Forrester in the lower hall.”

“But she might have thrown the cloak off.”

“Then it would have been upon the stairs, and I would have seen it. She had not time to dispose of it in any other way, even had there been a reason for it. From the time that the light was switched off in the office, until it was turned on in the hall below, was only a moment.”

“But you heard the footsteps on the stairs—and there was only one girl below.”

“There was only one girl *below*, yes. And I heard the footsteps on the stairs. But there was also a pair of stairs leading to the floor above. The girl who snatched the packet may have gone up; I’m not sure.”

Webster stared for a moment.

“That’s so,” said he, slowly. “I’m beginning to get hold. There were two girls in the house; and you are inclined to suspect that it was the girl called Dallas who was with you in the office.”

“Precisely.”

“Why, then,” wonderingly, “there must have been three different designs upon the safe going forward at the same time.”

Kenyon shrugged his shoulders and took another cigar.

“I don’t think it possible for any merely human mind to get at the true inwardness of this strange game. At one moment the people engaged seem entirely in cahoots; in the next they are apparently making off-side plays of a decided personal nature. We have discussed their attitudes toward each other before, and the thing is beyond reason. Forrester is a friend to Dallas. He wishes her well, at any rate, as far as I can see. And yet he is a firm friend and stands high in the favor of Hong Yo, who would, I have no doubt, murder her in cold blood.”

“I think I said some time since that the thing is a puzzle,” spoke Webster. “And I have had no reason to change my mind. But what do you propose to do next?”

“I think a visit to Bellevue might have some results. Either of the two of my remaining namesakes might be able to talk to visitors by this time.”

“Excellent.”

A short time later they were engaged with the same youthful surgeon whom they had spoken with before.

“I suppose you have heard of the fate of the man from Butte,” said he after he had greeted them.

“He’s dead, is he not?”

“Yes; fished out of the East River the other morning. And they found a new wound upon him—a knife thrust through the heart. It really is the most remarkable series of events that ever came under my notice. It would seem as though there was a conspiracy of some

sort on foot; and the people behind it do not value human life very highly."

"I should say not," answered Kenyon, dryly. "But how are the other patients?"

"Number two, as I call the one hailing from West Point, is still in rather a bad way, but is recovering. The one from Saginaw left the hospital this afternoon."

"But he is still in New York?" eagerly.

"Oh, yes; he can be found at the Hotel Suisse on Third Avenue."

They thanked the surgeon and departed.

"A cabman should know of the Hotel Suisse," suggested Webster.

So one was summoned, and it proved that he had the necessary information. A rapid drive landed them in front of a small, clean-looking hotel in the neighborhood of the Cooper Union. A stout German with a gleaming bald head was at the desk.

"Oh, dot Kenyon?" replied he, in answer to their inquiries. "*Ja*, I know him! He have der room dhirty-dhree got. He is a young kind of a fellar und has a pandage aroundt his head. *Nicht wahr?*"

"That's the man. Can he be seen?"

"I will findt me oud."

A colored boy was summoned.

"Mistah Kenyon is in de pool-room, sah," he informed the clerk.

"All ride. Jusdt show dese chentlemens pack dere, yet."

They found the person they sought perched upon a window-sill, intently watching a game of billiards. He was a compactly-built youth of about twenty-two or three, neatly dressed, and with the flattened nose and swollen ear of the prize-fighter. He slipped down from his perch, and at their invitation went with them to a quiet corner of the room. When he found that they were looking for information upon the subject of the attack made upon him, he at once manifested great interest.

"Police business?" inquired he.

"No; we have private reasons for seeking information in this matter," answered Kenyon. "Anything you can tell us will be appreciated in the proper way."

The little pugilist's eyes snapped.

“Now, that’s good talk!” exclaimed he. “You see, pal, I’m a stranger in a strange land, and my roll ain’t any too thick. New York is no place, just now, for a man in my line; and even if it was, I couldn’t take anyone on, the way I’m fixed here,” and he tapped his bandaged head significantly.

“Your name is Kenyon, isn’t it?”

“Well, neighbor, it is and it isn’t. I’ve used it ever since I broke into this mixing business, but my right name is Farral. You see, I was raised in Kenyon, Iowa, and when I found myself looking around for a name to put upon the fight cards in Chi. a few years ago, why, I just picked the name of my old town. Young Kenyon is a name the sporting editors know, and,” with some pride, “they also know that I work hard at me job.”

“Tell me about this errand of yours to New York,” invited Kenyon.

“Now, that’s where you stick me, bo; that’s a little passage that’s got me tied hand and foot! Ever since I got that letter I’ve been trying to dope it out, but it won’t work into shape, no matter how hard I try; I’m not strong on the think thing, anyhow, just at the present time. There’s something like bees gets to buzzing in my top whenever I overdo it.”

“But you can tell us just how the thing came about, can’t you? That will not require you to do much thinking.”

“Oh, sure, I can tell it to youse,” cheerfully. “But there ain’t a lot to tell, at that. You see, it’s this way: I’m sitting in my room one morning, fixing up a black eye that I got in a job the night before. Me landlady knocks on the door and chucks a letter over the transom. I opens it, see? Quick! for I think it might be more work, and work is the thing I’m looking for. The letter is from a guy named Forrester, and he tells me to move East as far as New York in a hurry. He allows that he’s got a good thing for me and encloses a check for expenses.

“I’m in South Bend. The time named is the next night; so I packs me bag and takes the cushions for the big town, right on the jump. I don’t know Forrester, you see, but money talks every time. I didn’t know how good the thing was that was waiting for me either, but figured it out as a soft proposition with plenty of backing that the guy wants me to clean up for.

“I’m cheerful and neighborly when they dump me into Jersey City; I cross the river the same way, and I whistle all the way uptown. Then when I duck into this Selden’s Square place I gets my bumps. That’s about all there is to it.”

“Did Forrester not mention the nature of the work he had for you to do?”

“He didn’t mention anything except his own name and the house in Selden’s Square.”

Kenyon glanced at Webster.

“This one seems to have been told less than the fellow from Butte,” remarked the latter. “I wonder why?”

“Perhaps the other one insisted upon knowing more before he made a move.”

The little pugilist looked interested.

“Say,” spoke he, “if youse can put me hep on the game, I’d be obliged. There is something coming to a couple of stick-up guys for trimming me that night, and I’d like to settle the bill when I’m fit.”

“I’m sorry to say that we can tell you little or nothing; we are vastly interested ourselves for certain reasons, but can learn nothing definite. However, this much I’m sure of. One of the men who had a hand in laying you out is a New York crook called the Stalker.”

“The Stalker, eh? I’ll remember that. In a little while my lid will be all right and I’ll hunt him up. And if I find him, he’ll get plenty. Make a note of it.”

Kenyon handed the youth a sum of money that caused a broad grin to spread itself across his face.

“Pal,” said he, “yous’er all fineo. It takes a sport to pass it along that way. And that’s no hop vision. Say,” warming up, “I’ll bet yous’er a friend of the young lady who was to see me at Bellevue yesterday.”

“I thought you were a stranger in New York.”

“That’s right So I am. Me, the perfect stranger, see? I haven’t a friend between here and Pittsburg. The girl is new to me. But she was there with the bells on, just the same. I know a real one when I see her, even if I don’t mix with the motor-car owners. I thinks she’s a friend of yours because she treated me right, and because she asked me about the same line of questions as you handed me.”

“It is possible that I know her. Did she tell you her name.”

“Sure. And her address.” He took a card from his pocket and read:

“Dallas Gilbert,
The Girls’ Club, Mulberry Street.”

He looked up and continued: “It’s one of these things that rich girls get up for poor ones. And she said she was there every Wednesday and Friday night; and she also hinted, if I ever found anything out about this Selden’s Square thing, to drop around there and tell her about it.”

“And I’ll ask you to do the same,” said Kenyon. He wrote the name of his hotel on one of his own cards and handed it to the pugilist. “It’ll be worth your while.”

“So her name is Gilbert, eh?” said Webster, when they reached the street. “And she’s a girl addicted to helping the poor. I say, Kenyon, that sounds rather good.”

Kenyon looked at his watch.

“I’ll be saying good-night,” remarked he.

“It’s not quite 9.30, and I’ll probably get there at a decent time.”

“Get where?” asked the astonished Webster.

“Why, to this Mulberry Street Club, of course. It is Friday night, you see. I have a few straightforward words to say to Miss Gilbert about a certain packet, and I’m going to say them at once.”

XVII

At the girls' club in Mulberry street

"If the instinct prompts you to mistrust—obey. For instincts are the whisperings of the gods."

—A Maxim of Hong Yo.

Steele Kenyon found the Girls' Club without a great deal of trouble. It was a new and solid-looking building and from top to bottom every window gleamed with lights. He made inquiries of a sergeant of police who happened along upon his round of inspection. The sergeant was a ruddy-faced, white-haired man with the hale look of that type of old New Yorker whose reminiscences never went above Canal Street.

"That club," said the silver-haired sergeant, "is one of the finest things in the city; and the women who carry it on deserve every kind of credit. You know how girls are brought up in some parts of the East Side; they don't get any kind of training; they are not taught to do any useful work in their homes. They get to know the inside of workshops pretty early, and what they hear there, sometimes, is not the best thing for them. Then come the dances, the drink and the street."

"And this is the class of girls that forms the membership of the club?"

"For the most part. And it helps them a lot. If they have a talent it is developed, if they have a liking it is encouraged. And there is nothing preachy or goody-goody about the place. That's the secret of its success. They will teach a girl to dance just as readily as they'll

teach one to spell. I think the secretary, Miss Gilbert, is responsible for most of the successful features. She's a wonderful young lady."

The sergeant was about to pass on; then paused and continued:

"If you are thinking of helping the club along with a contribution, why, do it. You'll make no mistake. It's the real goods."

"Quite an idea," mused Kenyon, after the policeman had gone. "By George, it's the very thing for me!"

He had been standing upon the opposite side; so now he crossed the street and entered the building. A group of girls were in the hall, muffling themselves up, for the night was cold for the time of year. At sight of the tall, elegantly attired young man, they set up a subdued whispering and giggling.

"I am inclined to suspect that male visitors are not very common, here," thought Kenyon, with a good-humored smile.

One of them, a dark-skinned, black-eyed girl, who plainly showed her Neapolitan blood, approached him.

"Did you want to see anyone, please?" she asked.

"The secretary, Miss Gilbert," answered he.

"You'll find her in the office," directed the black-eyed girl, pointing to an open door across the hall. "Walk right in."

"Thank you." He entered at the door indicated and found himself in an apartment lighted only by a shaded cluster of bulbs which hung low over a big desk in the centre of the floor. The shade threw the light downward upon a girl whose beautifully posed head and great mass of dark hair immediately told him who she was. She was bent over the desk, writing; and without looking up, she asked:

"What is it, please?"

Kenyon afterwards admitted that at that moment his heart was pounding as it had never pounded before; but when he answered, his voice was calm and assured.

"I have come to see the secretary," said he, "and was told I'd find her here."

At the first sound of his voice she started and lifted her head. The light showed him the color leave her face and then stream back, brilliantly. The surprise was a sharp one, but she did not lose the air of proud self-possession which seemed so natural to her. However,

when she spoke, there was a slight break in her voice, a fact which she noticed and which caused her evident annoyance.

"I am the secretary," she said.

"Ah!" He took a forward step. The light now fell upon him also, and showed a look of mild surprise. "Thank you."

"Will you state your business," she asked, coldly. "I have a great deal to do, and it is getting late."

"Pardon me," bowing. "I have recently heard good reports of this work, and had thought to send the treasurer a check if I found them verified."

"The hour is rather unconventional," she answered. And as he looked at her he could have sworn that he saw a quick flash of amusement in the dark eyes.

"It must be the light," he thought. "It sometimes plays tricks like that." Then he continued, aloud, "I fancy that unconventionality is as a rule the usual thing with me."

"Will you sit down?" She pointed to a chair beside the desk.

"Thank you."

He seated himself and she regarded him with serious attention. Not since the first surprise had she betrayed the slightest sign of ever having seen him before.

"We are always glad to have people investigate us," she said. "A great deal of money is paid out of our fund during the year, and, of course, it is necessary that more should come in if the work is to go on."

"Of course," replied he.

"There are people who contribute regularly," she proceeded. "These help us a very great deal. But what they give is not nearly enough; and we are pleased to have new interest aroused, even if it is only passing."

There was a curiously questioning look in her face as she spoke. Kenyon noticed, but did not understand it. At first he thought it might mean eagerness for the work in which she was engaged. But he dismissed that, instantly. The club and its welfare had no part in her thoughts at the present moment—he felt confident of that; it was other matters—the events of the night before, perhaps—that interested her.

“And she is speaking by rote,” he told himself. “All that she’s saying are the self-evident things that require no attention.”

While these things were passing through his mind she had continued on in the same strain, speaking rapidly and clearly, but wearing the same look of interest in something foreign to her subject. Suddenly this changed. His observant eyes saw it give place to a new eagerness that all but set her a-tremble. She opened a drawer in her desk and took out a book.

“It is customary,” she said, “for visitors to sign their names here,” placing the book before him. “Complying with this does not indicate their willingness to contribute,” quickly; “it merely enables us to keep track of those who have shown sufficient interest to make inquiries.” She dipped a pen in the ink and held it out to him. “Will you write your name and address, please?”

He took the pen, and a glimmer of humor appeared in his eyes.

“I wonder what happens after I sign?” he asked himself. “It appears to be a lucky thought of some sort.”

He spread his bold signature across the first blank line and placed the name of his hotel under it. Then she took the book and carefully blotted the page; watching her keenly he saw the fixed attention which she gave what he had written, and again saw the swift color sweep into her face. Then she placed the book carefully in the desk, once more, and leaning back in the office chair looked at him. He gasped in rapture; for she was smiling.

“Do you know, Mr. Kenyon,” she said, “I cannot altogether get rid of the notion that you had other things in your mind that you have not mentioned, when you came here to-night.”

“It is quite possible,” returned he, coolly. “Under certain circumstances one does not immediately plunge into the matters which interest one most.”

“You came to ask certain questions, did you not?” She placed her elbows upon the desk and her chin in her palms. For the first time Kenyon noticed the beauty of her hands. “Questions upon matters on which you think information might be of service to you.”

“Precisely.” His admiration blunted his observation; he did not notice that she was entertained by his even manner. “There is information which I fancy would relieve my mind to a greater or less

extent. There are facts which have been dancing on ahead of me, so to speak, too elusive to grasp, but interesting enough to make it worth while to try."

"I think I understand. And it might be some balm to you to know that you have not been alone in this."

"I do not think," said Kenyon, slowly, "that you refer to yourself. It is not possible."

She raised her brows inquiringly, but said nothing.

"A girl of your parts should find no difficulty in obtaining information. There is a bird, I believe, that always waits until some other bird has built a nest. Then it calmly takes possession. I have always thought this a serviceable talent."

"I do not think I understand."

"I will be more illuminative. A man runs a desperate risk and works very hard to achieve a certain thing. When the victory is in his hands, a woman snatches it from him."

She gave a gasp of wonder; her great, startled eyes searched his face.

"It was you!" she said. "It was you—last night!"

"And, I think," smiled he, "that it was also you."

"You were masked," she said. "A masked burglar!" There was terror in her manner and voice, and she shrank a little from him. "I did not recognize you; I was too frightened."

"You were not too frightened to remain and lay a little plan to beat me out," remarked he, and there was an admiration in his tone that caused her to flush rosily. "But, then," slowly, "it was, somehow, about the sort of thing I would have expected of you. Miss Anna did not seem at all the girl for such an undertaking, though of course I thought at first it was she."

"Why *of course*?" she asked, a little resentfully.

"Because of her manner last night, when I talked with her on the stairs."

"You talked with her—on the stairs!"

She half arose in her chair. But almost instantly she recovered her self-possession, though the wide-open eyes told plainly of the excitement that her words had betrayed.

“I—I had not heard of it,” she said, trying to smile. “It sounds interesting; pray tell me about it.”

“It’s no great story. Anna was frightened when she met me on the stairs leading to the second floor; she said some things that meant nothing, but her manner caused me to suspect much. Later I was convinced that I was right, by her stealing downstairs to assure herself that I was gone.”

“What did you suspect?”

“That there was another design upon the safe beside my own—that she had someone concealed in the house who was to help her.”

“No, no, that can’t be true. Anna knows nothing of the packet.”

He looked at her in surprise.

“Then you and she were not partners, so to speak; you knew nothing of her movements?”

“I don’t understand.”

“I was so impressed with the notion that she was about to attempt some secret design, that when you caught the glimmer of my torch in the dark hall and came to the office door, I felt sure that it was she.”

A startled look came upon the face of Dallas; her voice was low and frightened as she exclaimed:

“When was this?”

“Before I began operations upon the safe. Don’t you remember? You opened the office door and listened. You could see nothing, the darkness was so thick. You were frightened; and you whispered: ‘Who’s there?’ Then you went slowly down the hall.”

“You heard this?” she demanded, and her face was pale.

“I did.” He regarded her curiously; then a thought struck him. “By George, it was she after all. She must have stolen away to find Forrester.”

“Forrester!”

“Of course. He was there. I saw them together in the lower hall immediately after you snatched the packet and ran. And Farbush was standing before them wild with passion, and with a revolver in his hand.”

Without a word Dallas arose, went swiftly to a small bookcase at the farther side of the room, and opened a secret and cunningly

contrived drawer at its base. Then she turned and he saw that her face was as white as death.

“It’s gone!” she said.

“Not—not—?” he could not finish.

“Yes, the packet.”

He stood for a moment overwhelmed.

“You are sure that it is gone?” he cried. “Look again!”

She shook her head.

“No use. I am quite sure.”

“And you are positive that you placed it there?”

She nodded.

“It was the safest place I knew of,” she answered.

“But the drawer is a secret one! Who knew of it beside yourself?”

“Anna, only.”

“Ah!” and a look of intelligence came into his face. “And when was she here last?”

“Less than an hour ago.”

XVIII
Kenyon shows his metal

“He is a young man of quick observation and sure judgment.
And once he has made up his mind, he acts like lightning.”

—Extract from a letter of Nunez.

For a moment Dallas Gilbert and Steele Kenyon stood looking into each other’s face in silence; each was reading a suspicion akin to their own.

“I’m inclined to think that Anna has the packet,” stated Kenyon, slowly.

“I am sure of it,” cried the girl. “Oh, I have always hated myself for not believing in her! She seemed so child-like in some things, and she is so clinging and pretty.”

“Ah! Then there has always been a sort of distrust of her?”

“Yes. I could not make up my mind, at times, that she was quite sincere; I often thought that I detected a hidden purpose in her apparently artless questions. Once or twice I have noticed—” But she paused, hesitatingly, then broke out: “But I must not talk this way to you. You do not understand the situation.”

Kenyon bowed.

“There are a great many things, as I have had occasion to remark upon one or two previous occasions, that I do not understand in this case,” said he, smiling.

Again he saw hesitancy in her eyes; then she suddenly held out her hand.

“I ask your pardon,” she said, simply.

Quickly he took the hand; but his manner told her that he did not understand.

“For things that I have said, and things that I have done. I did not believe in you—then.”

“And now?” eagerly.

“I know you to be a brave man.”

A slight shadow came upon his face.

“There are many sorts of brave men,” he said. “Some of the greatest villains have been as courageous as lions.” She understood and hung her head. “Do you know,” he went on, “I think I have been much more generous than you in this matter. You have come upon some sort of evidence that has proven to you that I am not an out and out blackguard; and so, in part, you have repented your first opinion of me.”

She colored, but her beautiful eyes were lifted to meet his, inquiringly.

“I did not require any evidence to prove your worth to me,” Kenyon continued. “You suspected me because you were convinced that I was associated with Hong Yo and the others. I had every reason to believe the same of you—at first—but I did not.”

An impulsive answer seemed to tremble upon her lips; her eyes shone through the gathering tears. But she held herself in check.

“I can tell you nothing now,” she said, and her voice faltered a little. “Because it would seem so strange and unconvincing. I am but a girl, and for months have been circumstanced as a girl has never been before. When one is constantly surrounded by hidden dangers and secret foes, one fears to trust—anyone.”

“I wish I could do something to make you trust me,” he said. “It is not enough for a man to have a girl tell him that she thinks him brave. Mere courage is not an uncommon thing. I don’t know what this evidence is that you have discovered in my favor, but I do know that it must be incomplete. I do not ask to know the meaning of any of the strange things that I have encountered during the past week. All I know is that, somehow, and for some reason, you are engaged in a sort of warfare with a number of men. Let me complete the testimony. Let me fight upon your side and convince you that I am honest, as well as brave.”

For a long time—it seemed minutes to Kenyon—she searched his face. Then with sudden resolve she said:

"I will. I accept you as a recruit."

"And I," exclaimed Kenyon, "will serve you as I never served a leader before! Name the deeds that you desire done," laughing, "and I shall do them."

But her face was grave; indeed, discouragement was written heavily upon her.

"Oh, I am so helpless to deal with it all," she almost sobbed, suddenly breaking down. "It is more than a girl's work. At every turn I see things that appear beyond my strength to overcome. I cannot plan with these men; their cunning overmatches mine. Even at this moment everything seems black. If Anna took the packet from the secret drawer, she has turned it over to Griscom Forrester before this, and he—" She paused suddenly, drawing in her breath in short gasps, then she sprang toward Kenyon and grasped his arm. "Quick, quick!" she cried. "The *Wizard*."

He looked at her in astonishment.

"It is Griscom Forrester's yacht; she lies in the East River not far from Twenty-third Street. If she has given him the packet he will get up steam at once."

Like lightning his mind grasped the situation. He stepped to the desk, took up the 'phone that stood there, and asked for the Waldorf-Astoria. With the receiver to his ear awaiting a reply he turned to her, calmly.

"What sized yacht is the *Wizard*?"

"About seventy tons."

"And her crew?"

"I think, fifteen men."

"Thank you." Then he spoke into the 'phone: "Ah, is that the Waldorf? I'd like to speak to Mr. G. A. Webster, if you please."

While the connection was being made with Webster's apartments, Kenyon said to the girl, quietly:

"Take the 'phone book, and find me the name Schmelzer."

She nervously took up the book and began to flutter the pages. Just then Webster called:

"Hello."

“Hello, Garry. This is Kenyon.”

“Ah, still on the quest?”

“I want you to meet me at the foot of Twenty-third Street, East River, as soon as you can get there.”

There was a snort of astonishment at the Waldorf end of the wire. Then Webster demanded, excitedly:

“What’s doing, Ken?”

“There promises to be plenty.”

“All right,” exultantly. “I’m with you.”

“Good; ring off, and call an auto. You can’t get there too quick.”

Kenyon hung up and turned to Dallas.

“Well?” he inquired.

“Here they are.”

She laid the directory before him and indicated a list of names. He ran his finger along this, and then gave an exclamation of satisfaction. Schmelzer, who kept the pool-room in Pell Street, also possessed a telephone; so in a few moments he was talking to the ex-divekeeper, Gypsy Brady.

“What do you want the men for?” asked the latter, after some talk.

“A tough job, perhaps. And I want tough men. The pay will be large.”

“I’m your man,” answered Brady. “The large pay is the thing that counts. I’ll be at the place with the bunch as soon as you will.”

Calmly, and without the slightest indication of hurry, Kenyon called up a neighboring garage and ordered a motor-car; then he had himself connected with the information-desk of a popular newspaper, and received much concise information upon the subject of power-boats and where they were to be had. Person after person was summoned over the humming wire; then he hung up, finally, with a satisfied air.

“I think I have done about all I can do in the way of precaution,” said he, smiling. “If the matter stands as you think, I will be ready to offer some sort of opposition to Mr. Forrester’s departure.”

“You are wonderful!” she said. And then she threw back her head and laughed.

It was as though all her anxiety and fear had been dissolved before the sudden rush of his thorough personality. In an instant he

had assumed all her cares; she felt herself strangely at peace and weakly willing to allow him to bear the weight of everything. His masculine grasp and sharp military decisions had wonderfully comforted and soothed her.

Kenyon as he looked at her gathered some of this, and his heart beat swiftly. It was the sort of thing that tells heavily with a woman; and he had progressed.

"If I can succeed," was his thrilling thought, "there will be no one stand higher than I! And I *will* succeed!"

He heard the gruff grunting of the car's signal outside; and he turned to Dallas, catching up his hat.

"I must go; the men whom I have engaged will be waiting for me; and then Forrester must not be given too much time."

She pinned on her hat and took her long coat from a chair where it had been thrown.

"Good-bye," said he.

"I'm going with you," she told him, briefly.

"Impossible!" he cried.

"And why so?" She drew herself up in that proud fashion which he had come to know so well; the head lifted imperiously and the beautiful eyes flashed.

"There will be danger, perhaps."

She laughed, scornfully.

"Danger! Am I not accustomed to danger? The past week has been crowded with perils that I could not see. This, to-night, will be at least visible."

He looked at her with quick admiration. And at that moment he learned that it was her spirit and not her beauty alone that drew him to her.

"You are determined?" he asked, after a short pause.

"I am."

"Very well."

Without another word he led her out to the car which stood at the curb. The night had turned overcast, and a damp wind blew from the east.

"It will be a bad night upon the river," commented Kenyon.

He assisted her into the huge car.

“Foot of Twenty-third Street, East,” he said to the driver. “And make good time.”

They spoke hardly a word all the way uptown; when the foot of Twenty-third Street was reached Kenyon noticed another car.

“That must be Webster,” he exclaimed. Sure enough, in the tonneau he espied Garry, enveloped in a huge overcoat and holding a cigar between his teeth.

“Hello, Kenyon,” cried that young gentleman, removing the cigar and waving his hand. “Here I am, on deck and waiting!”

“I knew you would be!” Kenyon’s car drew up beside the other. “Mr. Webster—Miss Gilbert.”

The girl inclined her head, but Webster, so great was his astonishment, blundered woefully.

“Great Cæsar!” was his mental exclamation. “Kenyon’s coming along, sure enough. And she *is* a beauty. I never saw such eyes and such a great lot of dark hair.”

“Wait here for us,” said Kenyon to his driver. Then to Webster he added: “And you’d better have your fellow wait, also; we may need him.”

He helped Dallas out, and the three of them made their way to a pier close by. Webster never asked a question; he knew that something of great importance was expected to occur, or Kenyon would never have summoned him. And then the presence of Dallas Gilbert lent an air of suspense to the thing which he would not have broken for the world.

From a dusky spot along the pier a man arose and approached them.

“Mr. Kenyon?” he asked.

“That’s right. Are you the man I spoke to over the ’phone?”

Kenyon was brusque and direct; for in times of emergency the old military habit was difficult to shake off.

“Yes, sir. I keep the public boat-house down below here a piece.” Then he turned and pointed out into the stream. “I gave an eye to the yacht *Wizard* as you told me. That’s her out there with all the lights going. Some people boarded her about a half hour ago; I had a night glass on her, and I think they are trying to get up steam in a hurry.”

“Have you the glass with you?”

“Yes, sir. Here it is.”

The east wind had driven the murk in masses above the city; and along the waters of the river a sort of thickening was noticeable in the darkness. But Kenyon’s keen eyes and the night glass managed to gather the salient features of the proceedings aboard the *Wizard*. Steam was up and the anchor was being weighed.

“Can you get us out to her before she starts?” asked Kenyon.

The boatman looked at the yacht through the glass.

“It’s too late,” said he, positively. “She’ll be off before I could get you to the launch.”

Kenyon handed the man a bill, the size of which made him stare; then with Dallas and Webster he hurried back to the place where they had left the cars. A group of men stood upon a corner not far from them.

“Ah, there are my fellows, now,” said Kenyon, in a tone of satisfaction. “Everything is moving on schedule. Take my car with Miss Gilbert, Webster, while I speak to them.”

He strode over to the group. There were seven altogether, and Gypsy Brady and Big Slim were among them.

“How are you, pal?” saluted the latter. “I’m taking a chance, being out, but I need the money.”

“What’s the game?” inquired the Gypsy.

“Jump into that car, there, the lot of you,” directed Kenyon, shortly, pointing to the machine that Webster had arrived in. As they scrambled in, hurriedly, he continued to the driver: “Follow the other car; keep close behind, or you might lose us in the darkness.”

Then he leaped into the car with Dallas and Webster.

“Morris Heights,” he ordered. “And let us see you break a record.”

“We’ll be pinched if we try that,” protested the driver.

“We must take the risk. It is late, and there are not many people upon the streets, so there is little danger of an accident. Open her up!”

“All right,” said the man, as the big car swept around. “The chances are all yours. I’m used to it.”

And he followed his instructions to the letter. The machine was a powerful one, as was the one behind; and stray pedestrians were startled to see the two big vehicles flash by and vanish amid a cloud

of dust. Now and then a policeman waved a frantic club and shouted; but they never heeded him, burning the streets until they reached their destination.

"Now, then, all of you," cried Kenyon to Gypsy Brady and his followers.

The men tumbled out, as Kenyon paid the drivers of the ears. Then they all made their way along the river front, until Kenyon halted them at a covered pier, the small, private door to which stood open.

A man with a big ship's lantern stood there.

"Mr. Kenyon's party?" inquired he.

"Yes. Is the *Vixen* ready?"

"All but casting off."

"Then let us get aboard."

In a few minutes they were upon the tiny after-deck of a long, narrow power-boat of something less than fifteen tons. Brady and his men were gathered forward and upon the top of the low cabin. Kenyon saw the last one aboard; then he handed Dallas down into the cabin.

"Cast off," said he to the men in charge. "And let us see what time you can make between here and North Brother Island."

XIX
On board the vixen

“Through the scud and fog, and the flying spray
We drove all night till the break of the day.
Yo ho, my lads, yo ho.”

—An Improvisation of Garry Webster.

The lines were let go and the boat shoved off; then the gasoline engine was started, and after a moment’s hesitancy in getting under way, the fleet craft buried its nose in the water and shot down the Harlem toward East River.

“Now,” said Garry Webster, in a low tone to Kenyon; “now that there seems to be a moment in which we can take breath, what in the name of the fire-eyed gods does all this mean?”

Kenyon laughed.

“If you will come down into the cabin,” said he, “I’ll try and tell you about it.”

Dallas sat there, still enveloped in her long coat; and Kenyon noticed, with a quick shock, that she was very pale.

“You should not have come,” said he, and Webster nodded significantly, aside, at the gentleness of the tone. “It has been too much for you.”

“Do I look bad?” she asked. “But perhaps it is the lantern light,” and she smiled bravely.

“I have calculated to catch the *Wizard* about North Brother Island,” said Kenyon. “You see the stretch of water from the Twenty-third Street anchorage to the mouth of the Harlem is one of the most congested on earth. A craft is forced to proceed at low speed at any

time, and more especially upon a dark night like this. The cars brought us up like hurricanes, and we'll get into the big stream in good time, if nothing goes wrong."

"Good work!" applauded Webster. "I tell you what, Miss Gilbert, it takes Kenyon to do this sort of thing properly. At college now, he was especially excellent in planning things. Do you notice the blush?" with a chuckle at his friend's secret and impatient gestures. "I think modesty is so becoming in a man, don't you?"

"I do, indeed," smiled the girl.

"Now, Garry, before you relapse into a state of hopeless idiocy," remarked Kenyon, "pay attention, and I'll tell you what has happened."

So while Webster listened Kenyon told him what the reader already knows. When he had finished Webster arose.

"Miss Gilbert," said he, bowing as well as the swaying of the flying boat would permit, "I bend the knee before courage. Now, that little scene of yours with an apparently desperate cracksman," and his blue eyes snapped with admiration, "was one that required doing, and I tell you what, Ken," with a wise nod toward his friend, "you should be mighty glad that it happened. It has set you right, somehow."

After some further discussion Webster went upon deck.

"I suppose I shall only be able to approach our conspirators as an open enemy now," said Kenyon to the girl.

She looked at him inquiringly.

"If Forrester has the packet, he has learned what you learned, that I am not the sort of person I seemed to be. Though," and he looked puzzled, "Farbush must have known its contents all along, now that I think of it."

"There is nothing in the packet that would cause them to suspect you of being an honest man," she assured him. "That is, not unless," and her voice sank a little as she realized what she was saying, "they are inclined to believe it of you."

His heart bounded madly and his blood went tingling through his veins. But he only said:

"Thank you. That is kind of you."

Webster put his head into the cabin. “I say, Kenyon,” called he, “the captain would like to speak with you for a moment. It looks important.”

“Pardon me,” said the adventurer to the girl.

He went upon deck. The owner of the craft, a round-bodied, good-natured looking man, was at the wheel.

“Excuse me, Mr. Kenyon,” spoke he, “but your friend here tells me that it is the steam yacht *Wizard* that you want to meet.”

“That’s her name.” Kenyon saw that the man had something to impart, and added: “Well?”

“It just happens, sir, that I lay alongside of the power-boat *Piedmont* this evening. And just before I got your message to have my boat ready, a party comes on board of her; and from what I heard the engineer say before they started out, they, too, were going to meet a steam yacht. And it just happens that it, also, is the *Wizard*.”

Kenyon leaned back against the cabin and lit a cigarette; Webster shrugged his shoulders. The group of hard-faced men upon the top of the cabin listened intently, nodded to each other, and muttered their opinions of the cruise upon which they had volunteered. A clear voice spoke from the little companionway which caused them all to start and turn. It was Dallas who stood there, her long coat and the curling ends of her dark hair blowing in the wind.

“What sort of people were they who engaged this other boat?” she asked.

“A queer looking lot, miss,” and Kenyon smiled as he saw the speaker shoot a quick glance at the group forward. “About ten all told, I should think. One of them appeared to be pretty far gone; they had to carry him aboard. It was a Chinaman.”

She looked at Kenyon and he saw her face go whiter than ever.

“Hong Yo,” she whispered. “Oh, if we only knew what that means.”

“It means, I should think, that Forrester has summoned his friends,” said Webster. “From what Kenyon has told me, Forrester and Hong Yo seem to be particularly intimate.”

There was a curious expression upon the face of Dallas. Kenyon wondered when he had seen it before, and then suddenly remembered that it had stolen across her countenance that night in

Selden's Square, when she gazed at Anna at the old man's bedside. And he now recognized it as a species of doubt.

"But, surely," cried Kenyon, "you do not think that this move of Forrester's is upon his own hook—that he is playing the Chinaman false!"

"I do not know what to think," she replied, slowly; and though he could not see, because her head was turned from him, he felt sure that there were tears in her eyes. "I have seen so much treachery of late that my reason refuses to accept appearances. I have cause to thank Griscom Forrester, as you know; but I also have cause to fear him. He may be my friend, he may be a friend to Hong Yo, or he may be seeking to further his own personal ends. I cannot tell."

Shortly after this she went down into the cabin once more; and Kenyon and Webster talked in low tones.

"It would seem," remarked the young man from Chicago, "that she is not any more sure about Forrester than you were some days, or nights, ago. The fellow seems to be a puzzle."

"It will not take a great while now to solve him," answered Kenyon, grimly. "We are coming into the East River, and once on the *Wizard's* deck, I'll not waste words."

"Yes; I don't think a little straight talk will do any harm; the time seems about ripe for it. But, I say, Ken, doesn't she," with a nod toward the cabin, "do any talking of an enlightening nature?"

Kenyon frowned and looked down into the ghost-like billows which the craft was throwing up upon either side. They frothed for a moment in the lantern light and then disappeared in the darkness.

"To speak the plain truth," said he slowly, "I doubt if she knows a great deal more than I can guess."

"But what little she might know," persisted Webster, "she keeps pretty closely to herself."

"Yes," reluctantly.

"I wonder why. You are upon her side; you are helping her to win out."

"Yes. But how can she be sure of that. You heard what she just said about Forrester? Yes? Well, consider and weigh it carefully. Do you suppose that she referred to him only?"

Webster opened his eyes widely, and whistled.

“You mean to say that she does not altogether trust you. Why, I thought you had become pals.”

“I’m inclined to think,” said Kenyon, “that she, personally, would place confidence in me. But she has not, I know, herself, only, to think of. She seems to fear for others.”

“But whom?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps the mysterious ‘he’ whom I have heard referred to now and then. But whatever it is, the girl fears treachery. And I suppose she has good cause to fear it. You heard her say that her reason refuses to accept appearances. I have only the appearance of aiding her, as yet. Another man has befriended her, but she has cause to suspect him, for all that. What assurance has she that it will be different in my case? She even doubts the faith of the conspirators to each other—as we have been inclined to do. How does she know but what I, too, in spite of all that she has lately learned, may be one of them, and willing, now, to throw them all overboard for a personal advantage. She told me once to-night that she was circumstanced strangely, and without a friend who could help her. So you can’t blame her for withholding her confidence; suspicion is her only defence.”

“But she trusts herself in your hands.”

“Did she not trust herself in the hands of the others? The girl has courage and is not afraid to venture anything that promises results.”

Webster bit the end off a cigar and stooped into the shelter of the cabin to light it. He drew at it steadily for a moment after he arose, then said:

“I think you’ve got the right idea, old chap. You’ve got to work for her good opinion. But in spite of all that you might say to the contrary, I rather fancy you’ve got a fair sort of a start. In other words, she’d rather see you win than not.”

Kenyon made no reply. However, her words of a very little while before came back to him, and his blood thrilled with the renewed realization of the fact that what Webster said was true. She had told him that she wished to believe in him. She had put it into words; and her manner spoke so plainly. The way to set every lingering doubt that she might have regarding him, at rest, was to win; and he set his teeth and narrowed his eyes as he looked into the darkness ahead.

“It’s somewhere out there,” he muttered. “We are coming nearer to it with every moment that goes by. I do not know whom I have to fight, or why. But I don’t care, either. It’s for her; and I’m going to do it.”

XX
Baffled

“This sort of fox is sometimes more than usually cunning.”

—*The Long Island Huntsman.*

The November mist had settled heavily upon the East River; and when they ran out into it, they could hear the foghorns and bells being tooted and rung all about them.

“A bad night for making out any craft,” remarked the owner of the power-boat. “We can’t see more than a dozen feet on any side of us.”

The man who attended to the engine suddenly lifted his head.

“There goes the *Piedmont*,” said he.

“Well, if you can see her, you’ve got mighty good sight,” laughed Webster.

“I sure would,” returned the man. “But I don’t see her. I hear her. Listen!”

There was a continuous, snuffling, gasping sound ahead, and the steady thump of an engine.

“I could tell that exhaust of hers anywhere,” explained the engineer. “It’s the worst on the river.”

For some time they listened to the coughing of the *Piedmont*. The *Vixen* was barely creeping along, for it was impossible to make any speed; the danger of a collision was too great.

“She seems to be cruising up and down,” said Kenyon.

“Yes; her skipper knows that this is about the best place to meet any vessel making for the Sound. They come this way to avoid the currents around Hell Gate.”

Backward and forward cruised the *Vixen* passing and repassing the *Piedmont* in the darkness. Once those on board the latter seemed to become suspicious, and she crept forward, her port and starboard lights shining through the fog.

"Hello!" cried a voice. "Who is that?"

"Don't come any nearer," replied the skipper of the *Vixen*. "I know how that old box of yours steers, Morgan."

"Oh, is that you, Phylen? All right."

And then the *Piedmont* crept away again, resuming her cruising up and down. At this point Dallas re-appeared upon deck.

"I thought I heard someone calling," she said.

"You did," answered Kenyon. "We've come up with the other boat that the captain was telling us of."

She gave a little gasp and looked off in the direction of the now distant boat.

"Do you know," she whispered in a frightened sort of way, "that sound out there reminds me of the cough of Hong Yo." She had placed her hand upon his arm, and he could feel the shudder that ran through her. "Oh, how I fear that man."

"You have excellent cause. The man from Butte was close to the truth when he called him a dying devil."

She gave him a quick, surprised glance but said nothing.

"The murder of that man was one of the worst exhibitions of deadly ferocity that I ever saw—and my career in South America was not without its experiences."

"It was dreadful," said the girl, shudderingly, and she covered her face with her hands.

Now and then a steam vessel would pass them in the darkness, and the skipper of the *Vixen* would hail its deck and draw alongside. But they were mostly tugs and "truck" boats; as yet no yacht had split the murk.

"Do you feel quite sure that she has not yet gone by?" asked Webster at length.

"I'm positive of it," replied Kenyon. "She had not the time. But she should be due at almost any minute now."

"Hark, there!" cried the skipper; "do you hear that whistle?"

There came a low, mournful wailing from down river.

“It’s one of those toy sirens that some yachtsmen fit their crafts with,” the skipper informed them. “Like as not this is the vessel you want.”

“Yes; and there goes the *Piedmont* for her,” said Webster. The coughing exhaust of the unseen power-boat gurgled and volleyed from ahead; and they could see her port light streaming dimly through the fog.

At Kenyon’s order the *Vixen* swept around and followed the other boat like a beagle. Suddenly the lights of a large yacht stared down at them, from the distance of about twenty-five yards. Then they heard a shrill hail from the deck of the *Piedmont*.

“Ahoy! Is that the *Wizard*?”

No reply came from the yacht.

“Hello! is that the yacht *Wizard*?” came another voice.

“Farbush,” Kenyon told Webster.

Still there was no answer from the yacht.

“She’s increasing her speed,” spoke the skipper of the *Vixen*. “Her people don’t seem to want to be friendly.”

Bells could be heard jingling from the engine-room of the larger vessel; the rush of water around her bow grew greater; then she shot forward at a swifter rate. The *Piedmont’s* lights were seen to swing in pursuit; and almost at the same moment the *Vixen* performed a like manœuvre.

“She can’t outfoot us,” said Kenyon to Dallas, “but we may have some trouble stopping her, if they persist in going ahead.”

“We’ll have to do it before we pass City Island,” growled the *Vixen’s* skipper. “This craft can’t ride the seas that’s piling into the Sound to-night. She’d swamp if we tried to shove her through.”

They rushed along until they were almost overlapping the *Wizard’s* stern. However, they were some thirty or more yards to the starboard of her; the *Piedmont* was upon the port side and apparently directly in her wash.

“It seems as though they were going to try to lay alongside and board her,” cried Webster, suddenly, as he peered through a night glass.

“They’ll go to the bottom if they make the attempt,” prophesied the engineman of the *Vixen*. “They must be damned fools.”

“I’m not so sure about that,” said Kenyon, quietly. “They are out here to board that yacht, and it’s up to them to do the best they can in the matter. If the people on board the *Wizard* refuse to stop, they must take steps to accomplish their object, anyhow.”

“But it’s impossible to get to the deck of that vessel at her present speed,” protested the skipper.

“I’ll show you in a few minutes that it is not,” Kenyon assured him.

“What do you mean?” suspiciously.

“Just point her nose toward the yacht’s stern. I think I can get her rail in a jump from the cabin roof.”

“You could never do it. Another thing, I’m not going to give you a chance to try. If the *Vixen* once got so far into the wash of that craft, she’d be swamped.”

Just then a high-pitched voice was heard crying from the *Wizard’s* deck:

“Sheer off there, you fools, or I’ll run you down!”

There was silence for a moment, save for the beat of the engines and the dashing of the dark water; then a gunshot roared redly through the night, followed by a scream of pain.

“Head her over,” cried Kenyon, excitedly, to the skipper.

“I’m blessed if I do,” replied the man, stubbornly. “What the devil are you folks after, anyhow?”

“Head her over,” ordered Kenyon, sternly.

“I won’t,” replied the other. “And what’s more I’m going to run back to Morris Heights. There is something about this thing that don’t look right to me.”

“We will be responsible for any sort of damage,” Webster told him, encouragingly.

“I don’t care what you do,” returned Phylen, whose mind seemed to be made up. “Slow her down, Ned,” to the man at the engine, “we are going back.”

He was about to change the course of the boat when Kenyon’s powerful grip fell upon him, and he was dragged away from the wheel. At the same moment the long frame of Big Slim slid from the top of the cabin into the little companionway, blocking the entrance of the engineman.

“An engine was once my job,” he told Kenyon, coolly. “Say the word, pal, and I’m here to stay.”

“Take charge of these two men,” directed Kenyon. And Gypsy Brady and his followers had the skipper and engineer in their midst, forward, in a moment. Then, with Kenyon at the wheel and Slim at the engine, the *Vixen* headed toward the flying *Wizard*.

But the *Vixen* was a swift boat, and easily closed the gap between herself and the yacht; before long they were in the wash alongside and the spray was drenching them. The leap from the *Vixen’s* cabin top to the *Wizard’s* rail would be no great feat, if they could get near enough, for the yacht had a rather low freeboard.

“Take the wheel, Garry,” said Kenyon, at last. “I’m going to make the try.”

Webster looked aghast.

“I could no more steer this craft than I could build a bridge across the Sound,” confessed he.

Kenyon felt a firm hand laid upon the spokes, and shifting his gaze from Webster found Dallas at his side.

“I will take the wheel,” said she quietly. Then, noting his surprise, she added, “You need feel no fear. If the vessel will answer, I’ll bring her up.”

“Good girl!” exclaimed Webster.

But Kenyon said nothing. He leaped upon the cabin, and stood gathering himself for the spring. With the ease of an expert the girl drove the *Vixen* close under the starboard rail of the *Wizard*, and held her there for a moment.

“Now,” she cried, clearly.

And Kenyon leaped. A sea struck the bow at the same moment and destroyed his calculations; notwithstanding this, however, he grasped the yacht’s rail with one hand and drew himself quickly upon her deck. Then the Vixen fell off; but still he could hear her engine pulsing and see her lights glimmering through the mist. Then he turned his attention to the vessel upon whose deck he stood.

All her deck lanterns were lighted. In her waist a man, breathing heavily, lay stretched near the bulwarks; another stood at the wheel, a revolver in his hand, while a third was at the port rail, also armed with a like weapon. There came a snapping of firearms, apparently

from the, to Kenyon, invisible *Piedmont*. The man at the rail swore furiously and began firing downward; the other man left the wheel and joined him in the fusillade.

"They seem to be enjoying the pastime immensely," commented Kenyon, under his breath, "so it would be a pity to interrupt them."

He softly crossed the deck and made his way down the iron steps leading to the engine-room. This was also brilliantly lighted; the engine was throbbing swiftly, but there was no sign of anyone in charge.

"All the better for me," muttered the adventurer, as he dropped his Colt back into his pocket. "I suppose the matter upon deck has them all interested."

In an instant he had shut off steam, and the engine began to slow down; then he ascended the iron stairs once more and gained the deck. The revolver shots still continued from the *Piedmont*; but those upon the *Wizard* were not replying. From the shelter of the housing Kenyon looked aft. As before, only two unwounded men were visible, and these, all unconscious, in their excitement, that the engine had stopped, were crouched under the bulwarks reloading their weapons. The *Piedmont* had clung to the larger vessel; and now that she had all but lost her headway, the attacking party came alongside and leaped upon the deck of the *Wizard*.

While the two sailors were being seized, Kenyon slipped down into the cabin, a strong suspicion forming in his mind. So when, a little later, Farbush came bursting in, followed by Hong Yo, who was assisted by a couple of men, they found the adventurer seated coolly in a steamer chair, rolling a cigarette. And as they stood staring with eyes of wonder, he looked up and smiled.

"Ah, gentlemen," he greeted, "how do you do?"

For a moment neither Hong Yo nor Farbush was able to speak; then the former waved his hand in dismissal to the two men who had helped him down into the cabin; when they were gone, he turned to Kenyon once more.

"Well?" asked he, and his deathly face was set like stone.

"I'm sorry to say that it does not seem to be at all well," replied Kenyon. He lit the cigarette and pointed to a couple of chairs. "Won't you sit down?"

“Where is Forrester?” inquired Farbush. His face was flushed, and there was anger and suspicion in his eyes.

“I haven’t the faintest idea.”

Both men sat down and looked at him silently for a time. Apparently they were wholly unable to account for him. At length Hong Yo spoke again.

“What are you doing on board the *Wizard*?” he asked.

“My errand is exactly the same as your own,” smiled Kenyon. “I came to find Forrester.”

A light of intelligence crossed the countenance of Farbush.

“Ah, I think I understand!” exclaimed he. “You received my message after all.”

“It is very seldom that I miss anything of importance,” evaded Kenyon, evenly. “It is a thing that I have drilled myself to, you see.”

“And when you learned the circumstances, you suspected Forrester of the burglary,” cried Farbush, triumphantly. “Hong Yo said that you would not—that like himself you had confidence in the traitor.”

Kenyon drew the cigarette smoke deeply into his lungs, and expelled it slowly.

“I am astonished at Hong Yo’s trusting anybody,” commented he.

“It was not trust,” spoke the Chinaman, coughing hollowly. “It was my fixed belief that it was to his advantage to remain faithful.”

“A fool can never be trusted even to see an advantage,” declared Farbush.

“I would not be quite so confident of his folly,” advised Kenyon. “He seems to have been shrewd enough to escape us to-night. He suspected that the yacht would be stopped on her way out, apparently; so he did not venture aboard her. And, to gain time possibly, he sent her out in charge of three of her crew. There is no knowing where he has gone in the meantime.”

“Have you searched the yacht?” asked Farbush.

“No.”

“Then he may be aboard, after all.”

A half-dozen men searched the *Wizard* from end to end; but, as Kenyon had reasoned, Forrester was not on board. Steam was

gotten up and the *Wizard* was headed toward Pelham Bay, the two power-boats following in her wake.

"That, then, was your boat that we heard all along," said Farbush, as he leaned over the *Wizard's* stern rail, his eyes upon the two low-lying, shadowy crafts.

"Very likely, you did hear us," answered Kenyon.

"You seem to have quite a crew on board of her," commented Farbush, peering through the night.

"Of course. Like yourself I was not at all sure as to what resistance I'd meet with. Success only comes to the ready man."

Just then a great beam of white light shot across the water and brought all three vessels into strong relief. It was the searchlight at Fort Schuyler; the firing had evidently been heard, and they were endeavoring to locate the trouble. At the first swinging sweep of the light the *Vixen's* decks were flooded. Kenyon saw Gypsy Brady and his followers still grouped about the rebellious skipper and engineer; at the wheel was a slim, girlish figure enveloped in the long coat, and near by was Garry Webster.

At the first flash Farbush uttered an exclamation; then he turned upon Kenyon with distorted face and upraised hand, his whole frame shaking with what looked like fury. For a moment he stood thus, glaring at the imperturbable adventurer. Then his hand dropped and the look gave place to a smile, while he said, hurriedly:

"What the devil! That confounded light almost startled me out of my wits!"

XXI

Kenyon begins to see the light

"And, so, the youth he sat him down in the shade of the tree, and told him many things that he had not heard before."

—*The Amazing Adventures of Mansour Bi.*

It had been after dawn when Kenyon reached his hotel, and he had slept all day. So it was about six in the evening when he arose and bathed and shaved and put on a well-fitting business suit of gray which his tailor had lately delivered.

"I've been living in my evening clothes of late," said he; "and it feels rather good to get into something else."

A knock came upon the door.

"Come," said he.

A bell-hop opened the door, and said:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

Kenyon looked at the card. It contained the name: PHILIP AUSTIN.

"Again it begins," muttered he. Then to the boy he said: "Send him up."

The lad closed the door, and Kenyon threw the card upon the table.

"I had intended to have a turn at hunting up that last name," said he. "But this will probably save me the trouble."

A few moments later a stout, stoop-shouldered young man was ushered in. He stuck a pair of glasses upon his nose and looked Kenyon over carefully. Then he said:

"Mr. Kenyon, I thought it as well to call upon you."

“Quite right,” returned the adventurer, affably. “Will you sit down?”

“Thanks.”

All the lights were turned on and Kenyon inspected his visitor with the same care that the latter had bestowed upon himself. As he sat holding out his hands toward the gas logs, for the November evening was decidedly cold, he looked small and placid and good-humored; nevertheless there was a keenness about him that was unmistakable.

“I had expected to hear from you,” said he. “The understanding was, if I remember correctly, that you were to come to me immediately upon my grandfather’s death.” He looked inquiringly at the adventurer. “But, perhaps,” he added, “you had reasons for not doing so.”

“Good reasons,” replied Kenyon, grimly.

“I waited patiently; but when I learned from Miss Gilbert that the old man was dead, and still you did not put in an appearance, I could wait no longer. I got into town this afternoon, and called up about all the hotels in New York, inquiring if they had anyone of your name. I got to this one about a half hour ago, and so I came immediately upon learning you were here.”

“I’m glad you did so,” replied the other. Then as an afterthought, “Have you seen Miss Gilbert to-day?”

“I have never seen Miss Gilbert.” Austin ran his fingers through his sandy hair. “In fact I never knew that there was a Miss Gilbert until the other day.” He looked at Kenyon speculatively for a moment, and then continued. “Do you know that you have her puzzled, more or less.”

“Indeed.”

“At least I so gathered from her letter. She seems to be not at all sure of you. She told me that she desired to believe you a friend to me, but that she could not honestly assure me that you were. She feared that you were leagued with the others.”

Kenyon nodded, coolly; but he was amazed.

“Is it possible,” he mentally exclaimed, “that I have here the mysterious unknown!”

“But look here,” said the young man, “I think this whole situation is really farcical. There is no common sense to it. You see, because

I've always been messing among inventions and things of that sort, my grandfather got the notion that I was far from practical, and actually not qualified to take care of myself."

"Old men have rather odd fancies at times," said Kenyon.

"Just so. And he would not listen to any of my protestations; he ordered me under cover until you had come along and pronounced everything safe. The whole thing was absurd; but what was I to do? Even now I'm going against his wishes."

"So it would seem," agreed Kenyon.

"The idea of these partners of his being such formidable and ruthless persons, got to be a sort of obsession with him," proceeded Philip Austin. "Why, he feared them, as far as I was concerned, as he had never feared anything before. You see," lowering his voice and leaning toward Kenyon, confidentially, "he had the notion that they wanted my cousin, Scott Austin, to inherit the control of the business, in order that the contraband end of it should continue."

"Ah!"

"You know, this branch of the business of Austin & Co. was largely carried on by Farbush, at New York, and Hong Yo, at Hong Kong. I don't think," and the young man looked at Kenyon, appealingly, "that my grandfather ever profited a dollar by it."

"Perhaps not."

"When it became known that the old man was about to die—that he could not live above a few months at most, he sent a young man, a minor partner, Forrester by name, to acquaint me with many things which he felt that I should know—he meaning that I should be his heir. I remember very distinctly expressing myself plainly as to the illegal features of the business of Austin & Co. If I should ever come into control, I promised to smash the contraband end as flat as a board."

"And Forrester told the other partners at Hong Kong and New York?"

"He must have. At any rate they both appeared at Seattle; and what they said and did must have frightened my grandfather thoroughly. It was then that he ordered me to lay low until you came along to take charge of things."

"Why I, in particular?"

“His first thought was to secure the services of General Nunez. But he learned that Nunez was dead. It seems that he had heard much of you through Nunez; and, rather naturally, you were the next person considered.”

That the young man was speaking the plain truth Kenyon never questioned for a moment; he saw that the time had arrived to make some sort of a finish to the case, and that to have a free and frank understanding would perhaps serve him better than anything else. So, beginning with his coming upon the *Blenheim*, he related his adventures since arriving in New York. Philip Austin listened as Webster had listened, in astonishment, and silence. When he had heard all, he remarked, slowly:

“Do you know, that is all very wonderful? I now begin also to get an idea of what Miss Gilbert hinted at in her letter.” He looked at Kenyon, curiously, and then laughed. “Things do turn out strangely, don’t they?”

“Undoubtedly,” Kenyon answered. Then with a change of tone: “Who is Miss Gilbert?”

“I don’t know,” answered the other frankly. “You see I had little or no knowledge of my grandfather’s household. I never visited there; we did not even correspond, for he always fancied that I was next door to a fool for not giving up my experimenting in chemicals and mechanics and settling down to practical business. But,” and young Austin wrinkled his brow, “it seems to me that I did hear something about his adopting the daughters of an old friend, years ago, when I was quite a youngster. However,” and he nodded his head confidently, “whoever she is, she must be all right; for the old man seems to have trusted her in everything.”

Kenyon had passed the other his cigarette-case; and now they smoked silently for some time. Finally the sandy-haired young man spoke, and his voice was grave.

“Do you know, what you have said has astounded me! All along I have been holding this thing lightly, as a sort of hallucination which a man desperately ill is likely to be seized with. I could not seriously consider that, at this late day, any such ornate scheme of murder would be undertaken by the settled and prosperous members of a great business enterprise.”

“One can never tell,” replied Kenyon. “The crooked element in the business of Austin & Co. may have proven so very profitable that Hong Yo and Farbush would rather risk their necks than give it up.”

Just then the telephone bell rang.

“Pardon me,” said Kenyon, rising. He took down the receiver and called. “Hello! Who is it?”

“Kenyon of Saginaw wants the other Kenyon,” answered a voice.

“Well, here he is. But how’s the head?”

“Fine and fancy. I’m still under wraps, but it’s only to make sure. I really don’t need ’em. It felt so good to-day, that I went out hunting that guy, the ‘Stalker.’”

“And did you find him?”

“In a minute! You see I had picked up a fellow that knew him, and he pointed him out to me. Well, I wasn’t taking any chances of mixing it with him; I wasn’t just ready for *that* yet. So I followed the plug around to see where he was stabling. I wanted to be able to pick him up any time I wanted him, you see. And after a while he gets so funny in his actions that I felt sure that he had something on. You know, you told me that if I could dig up any more news about this Selden’s Square thing, to do it; and it struck me that I was just ripe to find something out if I stalked the ‘Stalker.’”

“And did you?” eagerly.

“I did. You see, when—”

“Just a moment. Come over to the hotel. I’ll leave word at the office to have them send you right up.”

“All right, bo, I’ll be there in ten minutes.”

Kenyon then called the office, after which he hung up and turned to Austin.

“We will possibly have some news of consequence in a little while,” said he.

“I hope so,” returned the other, “as the thing stands it’s rather unsatisfactory. This little matter of Forrester is really aggravating.”

Promptly at the expiration of ten minutes, the pugilist from Saginaw was shown in. He seemed all eagerness, and at Kenyon’s invitation immediately began his story.

“As soon as I falls to it that I’m due for some information, why, I begins to play the fox myself, see? So the more this Stalker throws

his gaze around, the hotter I'm on the Sherlock thing. After getting a lot of stuff together at different places, he hikes out and gets a train for South Norwalk. But he can't shake me, so I'm about three seats behind him all the way down. Once or twice I notices him piking me off. It's the bandages on my top that does it; he's sure that he's seen them before and is trying to locate them. But I keep the innocent look, and have my nose pointed into a magazine; it's a plain thing to me that I've got him guessing.

"He gets out at South Norwalk. I pike him on the platform waiting to see if I follow him. But I have the wisdom with me, and make my duck on the other side. He waits awhile; but as I'm not to be seen he starts straight off. He gets a buggy and I get another. About five miles outside the town he meets another party, quite a big stuff, who has another buggy, and hands over the things that he's brought along. They talk for some time, and then his Stalkers turns his horse and starts back. I'm pulled off the road into a kind of wagon track, all this time, you see, so he drives by and goes on his way to the station, while I pull out and starts to follow up the other party."

"Excellent!" praised Kenyon.

"It was only a chance," continued the other. "I thought it might have something to do with the affair you were asking me about, you see. Well, at last the big guy comes to kind of a fine-looking old house standing away back in a little woods, and there he meets a girl with yellow hair that seems mighty glad to see him."

Kenyon and Austin exchanged looks, but the other continued:

"They went inside and I lingered around for a while to see if there would be anything doing; but as all was quiet along that section of the pike, I drove along a little farther until I sights a young heck cutting wood. In a minute I was framed up against him, handing him the wise talk; and he told me all he knew—that is, all of it that I wanted to hear. The people at the old house in the woods had only come last night. As far as he knew a man and a woman arrived then—late. But this morning about a dozen men landed. He had no idea what was up; but he had a kind of hunch that it wasn't quite level. So after that I got back to the station and caught a train for New York."

"It's Forrester and the girl Anna," said Austin, promptly.

“Precisely.” Kenyon picked up a time-table and began studying it. “I rather think I’ll pay them a visit to-night.”

“Good,” cried the other. “And shall I go with you?”

“Glad to have you.” Kenyon then went to the ’phone and called up Webster.

“What is it,” answered the young man from Chicago.

“Another adventure. Are you game for it?”

“Only try me,” came the eager reply.

“Very well, I’ll pick you up on the way to the station.”

The motor-car which Kenyon ordered was announced, and he and Austin had drawn on their overcoats when the little pugilist said:

“I say, if you think you could use a guy of my tonnage, pal, why, just give the word.”

“I wouldn’t think of trying to do without you,” replied Kenyon. “Come along.”

XXII
The light grows stronger

“The plans of men have various terminations.”

—*The Strategy of Nunez.*

The little party left the train at South Norwalk; it was shortly after nine o’clock when they engaged a carry-all from a liveryman and began the journey along the road which the youth from Saginaw indicated.

“Rather a dark night,” commented Webster.

“Like ink,” replied Philip Austin.

A lamp hung at each side of the trap, and they projected their struggling rays for a very short space ahead; the horses, with ears cocked, jogged briskly along. The road, when they had left the town well behind, grew lonely and still.

The lines of rail fencing went wavering by in the lamp-light; trees by the wayside seemed vast and shadowy and full of strange murmurings; now and then, from far across the fields, they caught the flicker of a light in a farmhouse.

At length after they had been on the road about a half hour or more, they heard a faint whistle.

“This is the place where the Stalker met the other party,” whispered the pugilist. “I can tell it by the cross-roads.”

Kenyon drew in the horses, and a man emerged from the shadows. He peered into the vehicle and seemed disappointed.

“Excuse me,” said he. “I thought you were some friends of mine.”

“Sort of a lonely place to wait, isn’t it,” asked Kenyon, examining the man keenly.

“It’s not very lively,” returned he, rather surlily. “Going on to Cranberry?”

“Beyond that,” answered Kenyon. He was about to drive on when the man suddenly placed his hand upon the shaft, as though struck by a thought.

“Say,” said he, “did you have anybody walking ahead?”

“No. Why?”

The man ignored the question.

“Did you see anyone on the road as you came along?” continued he.

“No.”

“It’s damned funny!” muttered the fellow, and with that he turned away and was lost in the darkness.

Kenyon touched the horses with the whip; a little further on he remarked: “That would appear to be one of the men who arrived this morning, eh?”

“It must be,” answered Webster. “And apparently he’s posted at the cross-roads as a sort of lookout.”

“Did it strike you that he seemed a little bewildered?” asked Austin.

“He’s ‘seeing things at night,’” put in the pugilist. “And when a guy begins to do that in a nice, dark, lonely place, it kind of gets him going.”

“Someone probably passed along the road, and paid no attention to his signal, if he gave one,” suggested Kenyon.

“Um-m-m!” grunted Webster. And as they proceeded slowly along he narrowly scanned the roadside; also he listened attentively for any sounds that the night might hold, beyond his line of vision.

After a time the youth from Saginaw said:

“See that bunch of deeper black over there? Well, I’m pretty sure them’s the trees that I told you about. The house stands right in the thick of them.”

A dense black mass loomed against the sky to the right; and as they looked they caught the glimmer of light through it. Kenyon was about to pull up the horses when a second whistle fell upon their ears; so, instead, he shook the reins and went jogging on.

“Apparently Mr. Forrester is a most cautious person,” said he, in a low tone. “He seems to have the place as thickly picketed as the

camp of a flying column. I wonder why."

"He fears visitors, perhaps," suggested Webster.

"Then why does he remain so close to the city? Why did he not put a long distance between himself and pursuit."

"Depend upon it," put in Austin, confidently, "he has some excellent reason. And I feel that we are to have it made plain to us before long."

Some little distance further along they took down a section of fence, drove into a field and unhitched. After tying the horses securely they made their way softly back across the fields in the direction of the gloomy grove where they had seen the twinkling light. The earth was hard with early frost. Here and there the thin ice, that had formed upon some shallow pools, crackled under their feet; there were fences to climb, and once they came upon a small creek which had to be waded with some discomfort. But finally they arrived at the edge of the grove.

"Well," commented Kenyon, as they paused for a moment among the trees, "he doesn't seem to have safeguarded all the approaches, at any rate."

Softly they advanced toward the house. In places the earth was littered with fallen leaves which were dry and would have made a great crackling under the feet of four men; but by instinct, it seemed, Kenyon led them along the wind-swept spaces, soundless and like shadows.

The house stood in a narrow clearing. Several of the lower windows were brilliantly lighted and threw bars of radiance across the lawn.

"It has quite a colonial look," said Webster. "Witness the high, narrow windows, the small lights of glass, the many stone steps, and the tremendous main door."

Austin suddenly clutched Kenyon by the arm.

"Look there!" he breathed.

"What is it?" in the same low tone.

"At the window, to the right. It was a woman."

"I got a little glimpse of her," said Saginaw. "And, say, she looked as if she was tip-toeing around."

“That was my impression, too,” replied Austin, wonderingly. “Every movement seemed caution itself.”

“A servant, perhaps,” suggested Webster.

They remained in the shadow of the trees for some little time watching the window indicated; but the woman did not reappear.

“I should like to get nearer the house,” said Kenyon. “But it’s rather a ticklish proceeding to cross those shafts of light; for there is really no knowing how many of those dozen men may be lying about in the dark.”

“Perhaps the windows at the rear are not lighted,” suggested Webster.

“Good! I’ll work my way around there and see. It will perhaps be best for the rest of you to remain where you are. Don’t break cover until you hear me call or are sure that I’ve gotten into trouble.”

And with this he crept softly away into the darkness. While in the front of the house he kept to the trees; but when he reached the side where the light did not fall he ventured into the clearing, as the progress was less difficult there.

He had not taken a dozen steps when a heavy hand was laid upon his shoulder; and a rough voice said:

“I thought I heard somebody out there! So, now then, neighbor, give an account—”

He only reached this far when Kenyon’s arm shot around with a sort of hooking motion. The blow traveled no more than five inches, yet the man dropped as though he had been shot. Kenyon bent over him for a moment.

“He seems good for a half hour,” he muttered. “But I’ll have to risk his coming to and giving an alarm.”

He wasted no time over the fallen man, but continued on his way. When he gained the rear of the house he found that all was darkness. But he heard the constant murmur of voices from somewhere near at hand, and so did not dare to advance farther. At length, however, a door opened, and a man stepped out bearing a lantern. In the rays of this Kenyon saw two men seated upon an old-fashioned settle near the door; it was these whose voices he had heard.

The man with the lantern stood in the doorway for a moment; behind him Kenyon caught a glimpse of a dimly lighted hall of great width that seemed to run directly through the building. The three exchanged some remarks which Kenyon could not catch; the two men upon the settle arose, and the third closed the door. Then they struck into a narrow path among the trees and disappeared. Kenyon waited until the sounds of their footsteps had died away; then he advanced boldly, opened the door and entered.

No one was to be seen; the lights were dim, as he had noticed from the outside. Softly but deliberately he walked down the length of the wide hall and turned into a room where a bright light was burning. But the room, also, was empty, and he paused, looking about him. There was a doorway hung with heavy portières, leading to a room beyond, and as Kenyon stood examining the place the voice of Forrester reached him from this latter.

"I tell you, my dear, it is all for the best. You shall see that before the night is over."

"I hope so, Griscom," said the voice of Anna. "But I can't help being nervous."

"Oh, of course not; and to tell you the honest truth, I am also a bit that way. It's the suspense that does it." There was a short pause, during which Kenyon heard the rustling of papers; then Forrester proceeded: "I don't fear Hong Yo in the least; and as for Farbush, well, you know how I classed him long ago. It's the other—that close mouthed, swift-eyed Kenyon that I really dread."

"And I," echoed Anna. "He is so secretive, he seems to know so much that we thought no one knew; and he is so cold and observing; he appears to be weighing one's thoughts, continually, and casting about for some means of profiting by the result."

"It must have been some sort of an evil influence that prompted me to encourage the old man in his desire to have this same fellow," said Forrester, and there was a note of complaint in his voice that made Kenyon smile.

"I never could understand what made you do it," said the girl.

"I thought it for the best. Like fools, Farbush and Hong began making threats as to what they would do if young Philip Austin succeeded to the business. The old man became frightened. One

day he told me that he intended to send for a man who he knew could be trusted to protect Philip."

"And that man was Kenyon."

"Yes. God knows where old Stephen had ever heard of him. And I had to encourage this notion, or perhaps have him invoke the law."

"The last would never have done," said the girl, hastily.

"Of course not. I saw at once that the only safe thing to do was to find the man, somehow, and arrange matters with him, if he was willing to make a deal."

"And the result of your efforts was those three foolish persons who wandered into the net like so many stupid flies."

Kenyon heard a fist strike a table impatiently; then Forrester cried:

"I'll never forgive myself for that blunder! It was caused by over-anxiety. I desired to gain time."

"But to write four letters; to direct them to different places! Was that not taking a desperate chance?"

"Something had to be done. I could think of nothing better. Old Stephen did not know where Kenyon was at that time, but he was trying to trace him. I found, in his desk, a list of four places where the person sought *had* been, and then conceived the plan of writing a letter to each of these places, in the hope that one or the other of them would reach him in some way. I named the house in Selden's Square as the place—Farbush taking it blindly at my request—and the night upon which old Stephen died as the time of meeting.

"All this was meant to save time. The idea was sound, and the whole trouble resulted from the old man's not knowing Kenyon's first name. So I was forced to address the letters simply to *Mr.* Kenyon. And the cursed post-office delivered three of them to strangers."

"Griscom! Griscom! It was not all ill-luck. You were foolish, indiscreet."

"But I fancied the man who wrote me from Butte was the right person."

"Were you sure? Was there anything to warrant your doing what you did. You at once told him everything. He might have ruined all."

"Why, my dear, have you, too, turned against me! Farbush has gibed at me for the past week for that mistake, and though Hong says little, I know he holds it over my head."

Then Kenyon heard a sudden rustling of skirts, an ejaculation; a succession of kisses and a smothered flood of endearments. Finally Anna's voice was heard, saying:

"But let them plot and struggle! What do we care? We have what we want—what we have always wanted. It does not make any difference to us who succeeds to Stephen Austin's business, now." There was a great rustling of paper, as though someone had plunged eager hands among a heap of loose sheets. "Five hundred thousand dollars!" came the girl's voice, high and triumphant. "A half million of money."

"Not money, my dear, but something just as serviceable. Negotiable securities. How fortunate you heard old Stephen trying to tell Dallas where they were that day while he lay dying."

"I did not dream that she understood. I almost died upon the night I met that man upon the stairs, for then I understood that she had told him."

"Ah, woman's intuition!" cried Forrester in delight, while Kenyon's shoulders shook sardonically. "And so when we found the safe opened and the securities gone, you knew the very place to look for them."

They both laughed at this; then there were more endearments.

"It would be interesting and perhaps somewhat profitable," mused Kenyon, as he patiently waited, "to know just how little acuteness and how much chance there is mingled with the majority of successful moves. I think I'd back the latter to win."

"But in spite of all our good luck," said Anna, after a time, "I cannot help dreading the coming of Hong Yo and Mr. Farbush. Oh, my dear, why did we not continue on. We could have left the country, and they would never have known where we had gone."

"But think of the continuous suspense that we should have been in; we should forever be fearing pursuit. No, no; trust me! The way I have selected is the best. They can do us no harm."

"No harm? They may murder you! You know what they are. And you cannot even defend yourself."

"But I have *others* engaged who can defend me." Forrester laughed, but Kenyon noted that it was forced and husky.

“Oh, this birth-curse,” the man proceeded, a species of despair now in his voice. “The mere thought of blood makes me smother with fear.”

“Humph!” was the listening adventurer’s silent comment. “The blood-horror was not a bluff, after all. What a peculiar situation.”

Apparently it was fully appreciated by the two in the adjoining room. The girl softly murmured her sympathy, and the man said, in a lowered tone:

“It’s a curse that I’ve carried through life like an incubus. A thousand times has it held me back when I’ve had victories in my very hands. Look at the case with old Stephen. Hong did not trust me. He made me plead my disability in order that the old man should not tell me too much, and so give me an advantage over himself and Farbush! Oh, if I could only shake it off! If I could only rid myself of it for good!”

The girl was still comforting him when there came the steady tramp of footsteps upon the hard ground without and the sound of voices.

“They have come!” Kenyon heard the girl exclaim, and there was terror in her tones.

“Be brave!” Forrester whispered, as the great hall door opened, and a gust of cold air swept through the passage and into the rooms in a way that made the lights dance. Then footsteps were heard in the hall—slow, painful footsteps—and the door closed with a bang. Kenyon peered through the portières to get a view of the newcomers. He saw Forrester and Anna standing beside a table in the centre of the room. In a doorway stood Farbush, his face white and ominous with rage; and leaning upon him was Hong Yo, looking like the spectre of death itself, but gazing at the young man and girl with laughing mockery in his slit-like eyes.

XXIII

What kenyon heard and saw

“The end, when it comes, comes quickly.”

—An Adage of Hong Yo.

For a moment there was silence, then, as Kenyon watched, he saw long, shuddering spasms of laughter shake the emaciated frame of Hong Yo, while one yellow claw was weakly raised, pointing in ghoulish mirth at Forrester.

Kenyon felt his skin prickle.

“What a hideous beast!” he muttered, his face showing his repugnance. “If it were possible to see his soul, I wonder what it would look like?”

“You were longing for our society, were you?” spoke Hong Yo, in his slow, careful English. “And we had all but given you up.”

He was racked by a fit of coughing; Farbush led him to a chair, and when the paroxysm had subsided, he was breathless and almost without life.

“Will you sit down?” Forrester said to Farbush.

The latter did so, silently. He sat far back in the chair, drumming with noiseless fingers upon its arms, his hard eyes full of fury, his thin, cruel mouth shut in a straight line.

“Our friend Hong is to be the speaker, however,” concluded Kenyon, from his vantage behind the portières. “That seems to be understood between them.”

After a few moments the Chinaman had recovered somewhat, but when he spoke it was in a faint, gasping wheeze.

“That was a pretty ruse—that of the yacht.”

Forrester stared at the speaker in surprise.

"The yacht?" said he inquiringly.

A ghastly grin crossed Hong Yo's face; he waved a hand in a feeble gesture of impatience.

"We met her before she had passed North Brother Island. We expected to find you on board—and these," pointing to the securities upon the table.

Forrester laughed.

"Is it possible that *you* went in chase of the *Wizard*? Why, that little matter was laid down for the astute Mr. Kenyon's private use."

The watcher saw Farbush start.

"Kenyon!" exclaimed the man.

"Why, to be sure. I was confident that, with his infernal cleverness, he'd think of the yacht when he found that Anna had gotten the securities."

"Ah! So you admit the cracking of the safe now?" Farbush leaned toward the younger man, and his thin lips curled back from his teeth. "You denied it strongly enough upon the night that it was done."

"I still deny it," answered Forrester. He seated himself beside the table and began gathering up the securities. "In fact I don't mind admitting that such a neat and effective job is entirely beyond me."

Hong Yo and Farbush exchanged glances.

"The securities were locked in the safe," said Hong Yo. "And you admit that Anna took them; then she—or you—must have forced the safe."

"Your conclusion is natural enough," replied Forrester, "but is scarcely correct. Anna did get the securities, as I said, but not from your safe," to Farbush.

"No," said the girl, "from Dallas Gilbert."

The two men started, but said nothing; Forrester smiled.

"You will be astonished to hear, I feel sure, that Dallas and Kenyon have established a sort of co-partnership in this matter of ours. He was on the premises upon the night the safe was opened; in fact, I'm quite convinced that it was he that did the opening."

There was a moment's silence; then Hong Yo said:

"Yesterday you would have surprised us with this; but not now. We were quite convinced, last night, that Kenyon, like yourself, is playing

a game of his own."

"And we may astonish *you* some," spoke Farbush, "by telling you that not only is he leagued with Dallas Gilbert, but with young Philip Austin, as well."

Forrester stared; Anna clasped her hands, nervously.

"I saw Austin with Kenyon last night," said Farbush, "as plainly as I see you now."

Both Forrester and Anna were visibly amazed; but not any more than was Kenyon himself.

"That's a point that I missed, somehow," he muttered. "Either that, or it's some sort of a blind to fool Forrester."

"But all this has no real connection with our visit," said Hong Yo, hollowly. "The Stalker said that you had a matter of importance to settle with us."

"I have," replied Forrester. He placed his hand upon the packet of securities. "It is about these."

Hong Yo coughed. The almost fleshless hand trembled as he lifted it to his lips; then he said:

"I imagined that. But go on."

"I want to withdraw from the arrangement that we made. I am not fitted to carry it out. As you are aware, I cannot go far enough. This booty is to be my share; the remainder I leave for you and Farbush."

"Oh!"

The burning little eyes shone through the puckered, slanting lids; the bloodless lips smiled. It was like the horrid mirth of a demon in a mediæval poem.

"Now that our plans seem apt to go astray," mocked he, "you have thought it well to feather your own nest."

"I offered all along to do this very thing," cried Forrester. "I knew when murder was seriously entertained, that I must withdraw."

Hong Yo arose. His step was wavering and strengthless; there seemed to be only a flutter of life in his shrunken frame; but, to the watching Kenyon, his purpose was as deadly as the look in his eyes.

"You persist in this?" asked he, slowly.

"I do," said Forrester, quietly.

Farbush sat with one leg crossed over the other; his face had suddenly grown expressionless, his body seemed tensely flexed.

“He expects a climax, I fancy,” thought Kenyon.

“Did it never occur to you,” gasped Hong Yo, steadying himself by laying his left hand upon the back of a chair, “that we might not be willing to fall in with your views.”

Forrester smiled, confidently. The fresh, boyish candor which had so struck Kenyon, at first sight of him, was perfect.

“Oh, I think you will,” said he. “I don’t see how you can very well refuse.”

“And why?”

Hong Yo had drawn nearer, and Kenyon noted the yellow claw once more stealing toward the breast of his blouse. But Forrester did not give way; he only smiled, quietly.

“You see,” he answered, “you are hardly in a position to refuse me. I have dropped my connection with your plot for good and all. With these securities I disappear never to be heard of again. Without them, I remain in New York to tell what I know.”

As the last word left his lips, the knife of the Chinaman flashed in the lamp-light. Anna screamed; but for a moment Forrester retained his calmness.

“He expects help,” was the thought that flashed through Kenyon’s mind.

But the help for some reason did not come; and then the confidence suddenly died, leaving the young giant white and apparently paralyzed with fear. Hong Yo was taking the step that would bring him within striking distance; and like a fascinated thing Forrester awaited the blow. Again Anna screamed; and now she threw herself upon Forrester’s breast. The knife was raised and would have fallen, but there came a sharp, answering cry, the sound of swift-moving feet, and two strong white hands clutched the arm of Hong Yo.

“Dallas!” cried Kenyon in amazement; and with the name upon his lips, he whipped out his long revolver, thrust aside the portières, and stepped into the room.

Farbush had leaped to his feet, but with what intention will never be known; for at sight of Kenyon and the murderous Colt he shrank back. Dallas uttered a little cry of joy; she sprang to meet Kenyon with outstretched hands.

“You!” she exclaimed.

“To be sure,” said he. “I am still trying to furnish proof of my rectitude.”

He pressed her hand as he spoke, and his brown eyes twinkled humorously; but, at the same time, they never left Hong Yo and Farbush, and the black muzzle of his huge weapon was not once lowered.

Then the adventurer swiftly stepped to the table and laid a hand upon the packet of securities.

“I think,” said he, coolly, “that I will take charge of these, just now.”

He slid them into his overcoat pocket, and then glanced sharply around as he caught a queer sound from Hong Yo. The Chinaman was swaying weakly; his hands vaguely clutched at the empty air, and his pale lips were muttering in his own language. Then suddenly he pitched forward and lay still. Farbush crept forward, cowed, to look at him.

“He’s dead,” said he.

And just then, through the doorway, came Philip Austin, Garry Webster, and the bandaged youth from Saginaw.

“We heard the screams,” said Webster, “and thought you might need us.” Then seeing the stark form of Hong Yo, he exclaimed: “Hello! What’s this?”

“It looks quite a bit like the end to me,” replied Kenyon.

XXIV
Conclusion

“And so they were married and lived happily ever afterwards.”

—*The End of Any Good Story.*

Garry Webster and Philip Austin were at dinner in the former’s apartments some few nights later, when Kenyon was announced.

“Have a bite, old boy,” Webster incited. “We have some little things here that I know you’ll appreciate.”

“Thanks, no; I’ve only stopped in to keep you from bothering me upon that confounded telephone of yours. I’ve not had a restful moment at my apartments for days. I’ve either been forced to listen to your frantic calls, or been in constant expectation of their renewal, every moment of the time I’ve been home.”

Webster grinned.

“Oh, well, you know,” said he, “it’s nothing but natural curiosity. I only wanted to know any little thing you’d found out.”

After he had put down his hat, overcoat, gloves, and stick, Kenyon turned his back to Webster’s ruddy log fire and looked comfortable.

“Look what it is to have money,” said he. “Log fires; nice little dinners; expensive hotels. The hardware trade must be an excellent one.”

“No better than the importing of fine oriental stuffs,” replied Webster, calmly, as he went on with his dinner. “Austin has just been telling me about his offer to you.”

“And I renew it,” spoke Austin seriously. “Since I’ve kicked out Farbush and that fellow Forrester, and since Hong Yo is dead, I’ve

got the entire thing to myself. I'll have you in as a partner, if you'll run the business."

"I'm going to take you up," said Kenyon, quietly.

"Bravo!" Young Austin arose and solemnly shook the adventurer's hand. "Do you know, the sudden shifting of all this upon my shoulders has sort of upset me. I've got work to do at my laboratories in Chicago, and will have no time to fool away on a shipping trade at Seattle. Another thing: I have no taste for the thing, and could never grasp its details."

"And Kenyon is just the fellow for it," put in Webster. "He knows more about China than most people; and then he's a regular bull-terrier for holding on. I always said he'd make an excellent business man."

"Thanks," smiled Kenyon, "your friendly offices, Garry, are very grateful. And they are much more kindly meant than those of my old co-laborer, Balmacenso."

Webster lifted his brows.

"You've learned something against that worthy revolutionist, then," said he.

"Yes; among the securities and other papers which I took from Forrester and turned over to Austin were a few letters which I took the liberty of withholding. They were addressed to Forrester and signed with my name—but they were in the handwriting of Balmacenso."

"The blackguard!" exclaimed Austin.

"Wasn't he! It was a neat, carefully laid little plan. From certain angles I have nothing but admiration for it. You see, he opened Forrester's first letter to me at Rio. I know he did it in the hope that it contained money, for I remember telling him one day that if things did not get better for us, I'd have to send North for a loan. And I had you in mind," bowing to Webster, with much ceremony.

"I should have been most happy," returned that gentleman, solemnly.

"Forrester's offer must have struck Balmacenso's fancy. At any rate he answered it, signing my name. Then came other letters carrying the matter farther along, including a number from your grandfather," to Austin. "Balmacenso must have known that the

Blenheim was due at Rio at a certain time, and wrote that he would sail in her. He always used my name, and not once did I get even so much as a breath of any side of the affair. And in his planning he was rather complete, too. He arranged for the place of meeting and the signal by which he was to be known."

"And that was?"

"The slapping of a folded newspaper upon the palm of his hand. The latter was scarcely original. It sounds like a 'personal' from the *Herald*. Perhaps proximity had something to do with it. Then there was a photo of Balmacenso that had been sent. Dallas fancied I looked like it. So when I, of all persons, happened to appear at the time and place specified, and unconsciously to give the signal, she could not doubt but that I was the man she was waiting for."

"It sounds like something that might have happened to one of the Barber's Seven Brothers."

"Doesn't it? But fever was a thing that Balmacenso had not counted on; he had been dead some little time when the *Blenheim* entered Rio harbor; and instead of *his* sailing on her, *I* suddenly made up my mind to do so."

"And so fell into the situation that was to have been his," said Webster. "It's plain enough now, old boy. Balmacenso would have grasped right bravely all the things that puzzled you so, that night in Selden's Square. No doubt but that old Mr. Austin had sent him all the information which the conspirators supposed you to have had. If, now, you only had come upon the rascal's papers!"

"I did make a search among his effects, thinking to get track of some relatives to whom I could send the news of his death. But there was not a scrap of writing to be found."

"He had been at pains to secrete carefully anything of the kind, I suppose," remarked Austin. "The villain!"

"Why, he had been a very decent sort all along," said Kenyon, beginning to resume his things. "It was being moneyless in a strange country that broke his nerve and drove him to rascality, like as not. There are types of men who cannot bear up under poverty, you know." He drew on his gloves and took up his stick and hat. "At any rate, I prefer to look at it so, for as I told you some time ago, Garry, he once saved my life."

He stood with his hand upon the door-knob, about to go, nodding over his shoulder at the two at the table. Then a sudden smile crossed his face, and he turned once more.

"That reminds me," said he. "You know that we were all rather puzzled by the statement of Farbush's made the other night, that he had seen us together," to Austin, "on the night of the adventure on the East River. Well, a chance remark of Anna's to-day shed some light upon that."

"Let us have it," pleaded Webster.

"It seems that Anna once had a glimpse of you in 'Frisco," continued Kenyon to Austin. "She was walking with Forrester when you went by in a motor-car; and he pointed you out." Then the speaker turned to Webster. "Do you recall the night that we dined downstairs—the night that Farbush first appeared?"

"Of course."

"Well, the girl in the heavy veil was Anna. And she mistook you for Austin. She had had only one glimpse of you," to Austin. "And I suppose the only impression left by it was that you were rather short, somewhat stout and had reddish hair. Well, if you'll notice it, Webster has the same general characteristics; and what more natural mistake could she make when she saw him with me at such a stage in the proceedings? So she told Farbush that Webster was Austin."

"But about the night upon the river?" demanded Webster, perplexed.

"It's very simple. When the searchlight from the fort swept the deck of the Vixen, you were plainly in sight. Farbush saw you; but I thought at the time that it was Miss Gilbert whom he had recognized."

"Life in large cities is a peculiar thing," mused Webster, sotto voce, and in an exaggerated attitude of melodrama. "It is, really!"

"And Farbush's hurried note to you that evening below, congratulating you upon your celerity and warning you against overboldness, was all upon the strength of your supposed rapid finding of me," laughed Austin. "Well, well! That was a curious turn enough."

"Have you learned anything as to why old Mr. Austin's body was removed secretly, in the night, from the house in Selden's Square?"

asked Webster. “I could never understand that move, among others.”

“They did not desire, so Farbush has told me, to have Austin, here, know of his grandfather’s death until they could so manipulate the matter of the securities, and some other things connected with the business, that even if his life were spared in the end, he would never suspect any tampering with the accounts. Toward the last, the correspondence having been interrupted, they had about given up hope of my arrival, and so they planned delays, until I should get upon the ground. These plans were under way when I arrived; and so, I suppose, they did not think it worth while to alter them.”

“When they had your three namesakes assaulted that night in Selden’s Square,” said Austin, “I think the conspirators took a great risk of betraying themselves to the police. I can’t see why the thing was necessary.”

“You forget that the man from Butte knew their game. He got his information from a second letter, written in reply to one from him before they heard from Balmacenso. After Balmacenso’s letter was received, they felt sure that *he* was the man they were looking for, and they realized that the Butte man was dangerous and must be removed. It is more than likely that the other two had never written, but just came on at the time appointed. We know this to be the case with Saginaw. His letter only reached him thirty-six hours ahead. So three men came to Selden’s Square instead of one; and as the plotters did not know which of them was the man from Butte, they did for all three, to make sure.”

“What do you suppose was to be your part in their game,” asked Webster.

“That of a traitor, almost entirely. I was thought to be stuffed to the neck with information that would throw the matter directly into their hands, when I was ready to act; all the secrets of old Stephen Austin were believed to be at my finger ends, you see. Of course, they knew that Forrester possessed the old man’s confidence; but they knew that it was only in a limited degree, and that it would be worth little unless coupled with what I was supposed to know.”

When Kenyon left the Waldorf-Astoria he walked up Fifth Avenue some little distance, and then crossed to Madison. In a quiet, old-

fashioned room, where there were potted plants at the windows, he waited for Dallas Gilbert.

When she appeared she was dressed in white and with a single red rose at her breast. She held out her hand to him, silently; but her face was flushed and her eyes were shining. Never had he seen her more beautiful, and his admiration must have been plain to her, for she dropped her eyes quickly.

"Anna has gone?" she asked, after they had seated themselves.

"I saw her and Forrester off in the noon train," answered Kenyon. "She cried a little when I told her how you had pleaded for Forrester with Austin, and she sends her thanks. She also begs you not to think harshly of her, nor of him. She said that neither of them had ever meditated any wrong against you."

"I feel sure of that," replied Dallas. "I feel quite sure of it." Then, eagerly: "And you think they will be happy together!"

"They love one another very much," returned Kenyon. "And, in my opinion, that is everything."

There was a brief pause; and then the girl said:

"I hope you are right, for I wish her all that is good. We have always been together, you see."

"You are really related, then?"

"She is my step-sister, and is a few years younger than myself. When our parents died, Mr. Austin, who was my father's friend, took us in and cared for us, for we were very small at the time."

"You lived with him at Seattle, then?"

"Not altogether. Mr. Farbush and he were our joint guardians; most of the time we lived at the Fifth Avenue house."

"I would have thought that life with such a man as Farbush would have been far from pleasant."

"He was never really unkind until lately. Indeed, he has always been rather inclined to be generous. You see he had social pretensions; he entertained a great deal, and Anna and I were useful. And, then, all his life Mr. Farbush has been regarded as a model of integrity."

"I fancy that you believed this of him and the others—at first."

"Yes; Mr. Austin had always been eccentric, and when, toward the last, he began to whisper to me of his partners' plotting against him, I

thought it must be the result of his age and his illness—that his suspicions were imaginings."

"He made a confidante of you, then?"

"Always; but especially so during his last illness. I believe he told me everything, including the whereabouts of his grandson, Philip Austin. He always insisted that his partners would endeavor to accomplish the death of Philip after he, old Mr. Austin, had passed away."

"So that Philip's cousin, Scott, would come into the business?"

"Yes. It appears that Philip had expressed himself as being against certain illegal features of the trade; but Scott had no such scruples. Indeed, he would have been more likely to have tried to extend them than otherwise. But Mr. Austin would whisper these things to me; no one ever suspected that I was so entirely in his confidence."

"But you did not consider the things told you as being worthy of serious consideration. That is, you did not really suspect the partners of wrong doing."

"None but Hong Yo. I disliked him from the first. Griscom Forrester I always regarded as honest—but rather weak. Mr. Farbush I did not suspect for an instant, until he denied knowledge of the securities which Mr. Austin had entrusted to him. It was then that I first became convinced that there was really something wrong. I demanded to be allowed to search the safe in Mr. Farbush's office. He laughed at me, but I could see that he was astonished at my knowledge, and frightened also. Then I determined to appeal to Griscom Forrester. I followed him one night, that I might have a chance to speak to him, privately. At Union Square he began to trail after a man who had just passed. It was you, and the fact startled me."

"Of course," said Kenyon, coolly. "You had small confidence in me then."

The girl flushed.

"I had every reason in the world to hate you," she said.

"I fancied that there was someone following Forrester and me, that night," said Kenyon, thoughtfully. From his expression and voice one would have thought that he had not heard her words. Nevertheless, he had, and was pondering them.

“After you turned into that brilliantly lighted street in the Chinese quarter, I lost track of you,” she went on. “Then suddenly I came upon the man swathed in bandages, looking deathly pale and unable to arise from a doorway into which he had fallen. I was frightened, but I helped him up, there being no one else at hand. He was like one demented, for he kept muttering and vowing vengeance. Then I caught the names of Farbush and Forrester, and heard him mention the house in Selden’s Square. I questioned him. In a few moments I knew the outline of his story, and of that of the others who lay injured in Bellevue.

“He said that he was going to the place called the ‘Far East’ to see Hong Yo and have a settlement. I helped him there, for it agreed with my plans, and shortly afterwards we were shown into another building near at hand.”

“How did Forrester know that you were thereabouts?”

“It must have been accidental.”

“It was not. He and I were in a rear room of the ‘Far East.’ As I was leaving it, I saw him go eagerly to a curtained window overlooking the restaurant; I’m convinced that he expected to see you; and was greatly disappointed at your departure. He immediately darted from the room by way of the door leading to the street.”

There was a pause. Kenyon saw that she was thinking deeply. Then her face lighted up.

“Hong Yo must have, in some way, discovered my presence with the wounded man. Mr. Forrester may have heard it from him.”

“That’s it,” cried Kenyon. “He had been talking with Hong just before. It was after he returned from this talk that he looked through the curtains and ran out. In the midst of his plottings, the blood-horror was strong upon him. He feared that some harm would befall you and the man from Butte, and he was on his way to save you when he disappeared from the rear room.”

“And he did save me—he and you!” She spoke in a lower voice, and he could see a misty trouble in her eyes. “Will you forgive me for what I said that night?” she pleaded, softly. “It was so very, very cruel! It must have cut you to the heart to have me say such a thing to you, and at a moment, too, when you were generously risking, perhaps, your life to help me.”

“It *did* hurt,” replied he. “It would be foolish for me to deny it. But, then, I realized what your convictions must necessarily be. And so,” smiling, “that eased it, you see.”

“At any rate, I realized, afterwards, what you had done for me, and so began to doubt that you were to be classed among my enemies. When I opened the packet of securities that night, after snatching them from you in front of the safe, I found some letters with your name signed to them.”

“Ah, yes,” said Kenyon with interest. “So you saw them, too?”

“There was something about them, I don’t know what, that caused me to distrust them. That night when you came to the Club, in Mulberry Street, a way of convincing myself as to this suddenly occurred to me.”

“You asked me to write my name in a book,” said Kenyon, quietly. “I remember wondering about that at the time. I was quite confident though that you had a secret motive.”

“The writing was not the same!” she cried, in triumph. “It was nothing at all like that of the letters. And so,” with a laugh, “I was then sure that—that you had not written them—that someone had used your name, that you had spoken the truth that night in the cab when you denied all knowledge of the Austin affair.”

“Clever!” commented Kenyon.

He watched the play of the lights in her brilliant face. When she smiled, her teeth seemed perfection; and her eyes fairly set him dreaming.

“I was pleased,” she said. “Indeed, I was quite delighted. And yet I was frightened. I could not altogether—”

She hesitated painfully, now; so Kenyon finished the sentence for her.

“You could not altogether trust me,” said he, good-naturedly. “But that was only natural. One seldom trusts, at the outset, persons whom one has suspected of affiliation with the enemy. It’s a sort of military instinct. Perhaps you get it from an ancestor, who may have been a soldier.”

She laughed at this.

“And you must have thought me a most unaccountable person, all along!” she cried. “Even to the very end I no doubt seemed a sort of

fay, appearing so strangely, as I did. Take the incident of a few nights ago at the old house outside South Norwalk, for example."

"I was astonished when you darted out so suddenly. But I had an intimation that some unlooked-for person was on the ground, before us. One of Forrester's men saw, or heard, you in the road."

"I heard his signal," said Dallas, "and oh, I was so frightened. But I hid myself and did not answer; later I stole away up the road."

"But why did you walk all that distance; it was a good five miles."

"I dreaded attracting attention by engaging a carriage. I thought Forrester might have someone on the watch."

"His watchers were scarcely trustworthy," said Kenyon, grimly. "You need not have been afraid. He must have instructed some of them to be on hand if his visitors offered him violence; but they failed him. I had no trouble about entering the house secretly; and I suppose you had none, either."

"No; and when I heard Anna and Mr. Forrester approaching the room that I had entered, I hid in a sort of closet that was at the upper end."

"Ah! that was when you went tip-toeing so cautiously across the floor."

"You did not see me?"

"No; but Austin did. But, of course, he did not know who you were. But, tell me: How did you learn that Forrester had gone to that particular place?"

"The young man from Saginaw telephoned me. You see, I had left word with him to keep me informed as to anything that he might discover."

"Of course, of course! I remember, now, his telling me of that, at the Hotel Suisse."

There was a short silence. He was looking at her, and there was the same question in his eyes that had been there in one form or another ever since he had first seen her that night in the hansom cab. All the other problems that the case had presented, he had approached with a native and nonchalant boldness. But as he came to this one, he was aware of a strange timorousness, a quick, short thumping of the heart, an odd lack of control of the situation that was most unusual.

“There is a thing,” said he, with a little effort, “that has had me wondering since our first meeting. I have often thought it over, but could never make anything of it.”

There is nothing more certain in the world than an agitated mind’s communicating its unrest to a neighboring one that is in any way sensitive. This was now plainly the case. She instinctively seized the thought before he had put it into words; the rich color flooded her face; her heavy, dark lashes hid her eyes.

“Why were you so scornful that night?” asked he, leaning toward her. “But no! When I come to think of it, it was not scorn, really; it was contempt!”

“Oh, please!” she begged, lifting her eyes, imploringly.

“Tell me,” insisted he. “There was a reason for it. You had never seen me before. And it could hardly have been a sudden aversion. It was too complete for that.”

The color was still deep in her face; her slim hands were clasping and unclasping nervously. But while her voice was low and her manner confused, her eyes were brave.

“It was because of your friend, Balmacenso. When Mr. Austin wrote the letter urging you to come to New York, the man answered asking what was to be his—his reward.”

“And your guardian replied—?” eagerly.

If it were possible the exquisite color in her cheeks deepened.

“He sent Anna’s portrait, and mine. He offered either of us in marriage. To give him peace we had consented to this. I—I was the one selected; but the reward was, apparently, not great enough for Balmacenso.”

“Not great enough!”

“He wanted money as well.”

The truth flashed upon Kenyon.

“And that was his price—that check that you gave me in the cab?”

“Yes,” she answered, almost in a whisper.

His eyes searched her face for a space. Heavens! Balmacenso must have been a fool as well as a knave.

“What sort of a portrait of you was it that was sent him?” asked Kenyon.

“A very good one.”

“It couldn’t have been,” disagreed he, briefly.

Then he took a folded slip of paper from his pocket. Opening it he said: “Then Hong Yo signed the checks for Austin & Co.?”

“Either he or Mr. Forrester.”

Kenyon touched one end of the slip to a flame that shot up from the grate. In an instant the check was in ashes.



KENYON TOUCHED ONE END OF THE SLIP TO A FLAME
“I don’t want anything to boot,” said he. “You are enough for me.”
“Oh!” She was upon her feet quickly, startled.

“Wait!” He, also, arose, and stood before her, very calmly, and quite master of himself once more. “The man who so deceived your guardian and impersonated me was an unscrupulous villain. But he showed a taste that I would not have credited him with.”

She made an involuntary movement away from him; he put out his hand as though to touch her, but let it fall without doing so.

“It is not often,” he said, “that a man has another select his wife for him, and without his knowing anything about it.” He waited for an answer; but as none came he proceeded: “But more seldom still, when it does occur, is the right girl selected.”

Again he paused, and still there was silence.

“I would not have allowed this man to select a sword blade for me. I would not have had sufficient confidence in him. And yet he has selected for me the one woman in the world whom I would make my wife.” One step took him to her side, and he looked down into her face. “Will you?” asked he.

“Are you—are you sure that you want me?” she whispered.

And the next instant she was in his arms and his first kiss was upon her lips.

The end

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