

**WARD
HERBERT
DICKINSON**

A REPUBLIC WITHOUT A
PRESIDENT, AND OTHER
STORIES

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President, and Other Stories**

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Herbert D. Ward

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PART I

On the morning of the eighth of June, 1893, at about ten o'clock, crowds were seen clustered in front of the daily newspaper bulletins in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Boston. The excitement rivalled that occasioned by the assassination of Garfield, and by night the country was as bewildered and aghast as when the news came that Lincoln was murdered. This was the announcement as it appeared in blood-red, gigantic capitals by the door of the New York *Tribune* building:

UNPRECEDENTED CALAMITY!

AWFUL MYSTERY!

**THE PRESIDENT AND HIS WIFE SPIRITED
AWAY FROM THE WHITE HOUSE!**

TWO SERVANTS FOUND GAGGED!

**NOT A TRACE OF THE
DISTINGUISHED COUPLE!**

**THE COUNTRY AGHAST AT THE DREADFUL
POSSIBILITIES OF THIS DISAPPEARANCE!**

Extras found enormous sales, but they contained no more news than this. Business was brought to a standstill and stocks fell in half an hour from five to twenty per cent. The land

was convulsed. It was true that there were those who thought the whole thing a colossal hoax perpetrated by the defeated party. But as time went on the startling and incredible news was confirmed. The evening edition of the New York *Sun* had these ominous headers.

**THE PRESIDENT AND HIS WIFE
HAVE ACTUALLY DISAPPEARED**

**THE GAGGED SERVANTS OF THE
WHITE HOUSE TELL THEIR STORY**

**THEY ARE IN PRISON ON GRAVE
SUSPICION OF CONSPIRACY**

**THE CARD OF AN EMINENT
POLITICIAN FOUND IN THE VESTIBULE
OF THE EXECUTIVE MANSION**

**IS A DARK POLITICAL PLOT
ABOUT TO BE UNEARTHED?**

The next day found the situation unchanged. Rumors of every description ran wild. Telegrams of condolence from all the sovereigns of the world were received at Washington by

the dazed Department of State. These were fully given to the omnivorous press. By order of the Vice-President, all other news was for the present rigorously withheld from publication. To this censorship the press submitted cordially. Mystery was brooding over the land, and despair laughed detectives in the face. Men met each other and asked only this question:

"Have they been found?"

A sad shake of the head always followed.

"No wonder," the Governor of Massachusetts was heard to say, "with thousands of assassins coming over here every year. Even our President was not safe. God help our country!"

At the end of a few days the full news, as far as it went, was published, and the nation then drew its second breath. The facts about this stupendous abduction, as given to the public by the end of the week, were briefly these: This is the affidavit of the night sentry, who was stationed in the vestibule of the White House.

"My name is George Henry. I am thirty-four years old. I was born in this country. My father was a slave. It was about one-thirty last night when I was aroused by a double rap at the main entrance. I was not asleep, but I may have been a little sleepy. I asked who was there, and a voice answered that the Secretary of State wished to see the President on business of the greatest importance. I answered that the President was in bed. He said that he must see the President immediately. Then I thought I recognized the voice of Mr. Secretary. I opened the door and, sure enough, Mr. Secretary entered. He had on a silk hat and the

gray overcoat he usually wears. He gave me his card, and told me to take it right up to the President. The door was left open and I noticed it was raining. The carriage of the Secretary was standing under the portico. I did not see the coachman. When I bowed and turned to go upstairs there was a strange smell in the air, and I remember nothing more."

The cross-examination brought out from the prisoner, who seemed to answer honestly and intelligently, that he was sure it was the Secretary of State, but his voice seemed changed by a cold. He felt positive about the carriage, for he recognized the team, a gray and a black. He heard no voices outside. When chloroform was produced, he said that was the same smell, but there was something more that was considerably tarter. He persisted in the same story, and repeated it over and over without variation. It looked dubious for his excellency the Secretary of State.

The next witness was the night sentry on the second floor. He was badly frightened, was a little confused, but told a straight story. His deposition was as follows:

"Yes, sah, my name is Frank Steven. I have alluz been a colored man. I was bahn in Ohio when I was twelve years old." [At this juncture a glass of ice water restored the equilibrium of the witness.] "I moved to Ohio when I was twelve years old. I was born in Mississipy. I'm forty-two now, I think. It might have been half after one or two when I heard a step a-coming up the stairs. I went to the landing and saw Mr. Secretary

of State a-coming up with his hat on; and how he got there the Lawd only knows. He told me to show him to Mr. President's room. He spoke mighty sharp, and I thought it was all right, so I led the way. When I was a-going to knock at Mr. President's door, he told me to stop and have a cigar first. He never offered me one before, and I was mighty surprised. There was a strange smell, like an apothecary store and I don't know anything more about it. That is all I know, sir."

Subsequent examination brought out no new fact, except that the prisoner remembered that the Secretary coughed behind a handkerchief as he spoke, and that one hand was concealed under his gray overcoat; this was pulled over his ears. The thing that struck him most was that the Secretary kept his hat on during the whole interview. The watchman had never known him to keep his hat on in the house before. Like the first witness, he recognized the odor of chloroform, and thought there was something else besides. He was surprised to find himself gagged and bound when he came to.

As the two witnesses corroborated each other, and as neither had any communication with the other, they were substantially believed. The fact that this testimony was indisputably damaging to the Secretary of State, and the further circumstantial evidence of his card having been recovered from the floor of the lower vestibule, caused the investigating committee, of which Inspector Byrnes was the chairman, rigorously to exclude all reporters, lest the evidence might make it, to say the least, uncomfortable for

the suspected dignitary. It was natural that, by ten o'clock on the morning of the drama, a secret guard should be placed over the head of the Department of State, though no movement was made as yet toward his arrest.

The next witness of importance was the President's valet, who swore that the President retired unusually early that night and dismissed him with the special injunction that the house should be kept quiet, as the President had a headache and wished perfect rest.

It may be well to state here that the new incumbent of the presidential chair shared with his wife the traditions of Jeffersonian simplicity of living, and that they departed so little from their original home habits that house detectives were abolished, and the distinguished pair lived, entertained, and slept with as scant formality as the sovereign people allowed. The doors communicating with their sleeping apartments were rarely locked. Full dependence for safety was placed upon the two trusted watchmen whose deposition has been given.

The children and their attendants, who slept in adjacent rooms, heard no noise during the night. In short, none but the two under strict arrest were aware of the entrance of any person or persons after twelve o'clock. In the meanwhile, detectives were stationed unostentatiously throughout the White House, watching with professional acuteness the movements of everyone within its doors.

At eleven o'clock precisely on the morning of the ninth

of June, Inspector Byrnes and the chief of the Washington police drove up in a hack to the door of the Secretary's mansion, and requested a private interview. Within was feverish commotion. Senators and Representatives, public officials and men of eminence were sending in their cards and excitedly discussing the dreadful news. Telegrams were beginning to pour in. The first impression was confirmed that a political coup or revenge was at the bottom of the shocking affair, and whispers were mysteriously exchanged between sombre and stately heads.

When the Secretary saw the cards he immediately withdrew, with an aside to the Secretary of War: "This visit may clear up some of the mystery." These words were not calculated to soothe the impatience of the inner circle.

When the three were alone in the private office, the chief of the Washington police force tersely opened the subject. He was a blunt official of adamantine integrity, a veteran of the war.

"Mr. Secretary," he began, "this is the saddest day the country has known for many a year. You must pardon me if I ask you a few leading questions."

Inspector Byrnes sat with his back to the light; for, with an inimitable fashion of his own, he had, upon entering, made a debouch between two chairs and a table, forcing the Secretary to sit with his face to the glare of the window. Shaded himself he could with impunity watch the least expression on the sensitive and noble countenance before him.

"Sir, do you recognize this card?" The question came like

a musket shot, and a card dropped, face upwards, on the Secretary's knee. Kellar could not have performed this feat more neatly.

The Secretary glanced at the pasteboard for a moment, and said in evident surprise:

"Why, yes. It is one of my cards."

"Have you any more with you?" asked Inspector Byrnes, speaking for the first time.

The Secretary seemed puzzled, but good-naturedly opened his wallet, and produced several of the same description. These he handed to the Inspector, who took them and bowed profoundly. A moment was spent in intense examination.

"You must pardon me if I ask you if you use these cards when calling upon the President?" proceeded the Washington officer. The Inspector's eyes seemed to be still riveted upon the cards in his hands.

"Why, yes—no—that is, once in a while, if I happen to desire an audience at an unusual hour," answered the Secretary, exhibiting the first signs of embarrassment.

"Will you please tell us when you called there last?" asked Inspector Byrnes, furtively glancing up and speaking in a chatty, assuring tone.

The Secretary's face expressed relief.

"Certainly," he answered; "that is easy enough. I attended an informal reception in the Blue Room from three to four yesterday and saw the President alone a minute afterward. That is the

last time I saw him." One might almost have fancied at the last sentence that tears arose to the eyes of the cabinet officer; at least there were tears in his voice.

"Just as a matter of formality, Mr. Secretary, will you tell us where you were between twelve and two o'clock this morning?" asked the Inspector, with the unconscious look of a man who was asking for a glass of water.

"What does this mean, sir? Do you suspect me in this infernal mystery?" ejaculated the Secretary. His face was pale from excitement; his eyes flashed in manly protest.

"Not at all, not at all, sir. Calm yourself. This is only a matter of curious coincidence and a disagreeable formality," answered the Inspector, waving his hand as if he were brushing away a fly.

The Secretary stood a moment in thought, and then turned and touched a button. Immediately a servant appeared to whom the Secretary whispered a few words. The man in livery bowed and went.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Secretary, standing with much dignity before his callers, "wait a moment, and so far as I am concerned this mystery shall be cleared. I happened to be in this room last night from twelve until half-past two with some gentlemen, whom I am sure you will recognize. Ah! here they are."

A tap at the door and a "Come in" revealed to the astonished detectives the Secretaries of War and of the Interior, who entered the room.

"Now, Inspector," continued the Secretary of State in his grandest manner, "will you kindly ask your question again?"

It then transpired that the three Secretaries had conducted an informal meeting to confer about the distressing question of war with Canada which was at that time agitating the country, and that their interview had been prolonged into the small hours of the morning. The chief of the Washington police could not refrain from profuse apologies after this denouement. Inspector Byrnes thought profoundly, and then, after a pause, burst out with unparalleled frankness:

"Gentlemen, this is the most startling mystery in the annals of American crime. I must confess that up to this moment I am absolutely foiled." He then recounted, under seal of secrecy, the whole story as we have seen it. Ending his exciting narrative, he said:

"And, Mr. Secretary, do you know of any one in Washington or in the country that resembles you enough to deceive two men, taking into account a natural drowsiness that each admitted?"

The three gentlemen of the Cabinet thought hard but were soon bound to answer in the negative. For the Secretary of State was no ordinary-looking man. Conspicuous on any occasion, though not what might be strictly called handsome, he always commanded attention by his distinguished air. His luxuriant side whiskers, which were really magnificent were the most noticeable feature of his face. He had the happy consciousness that there were none like them in the United States.

"There is only one more question you can answer, Mr. Secretary," said Inspector Byrnes, with a deferential look. "The watchman on the first floor said he recognized your team. Will you please find out whether your coupé was in or not between twelve and two? Coachmen have queer tricks at times."

The coachman was immediately sent for. Meanwhile the Secretary stated that he had come in at twelve from a late call on a personal friend.

"May I ask your friend's name?" interrupted the national sleuth-hound, swiftly and politely.

"The Patagonian Ambassador," replied the Secretary with hauteur. He added that he had sent his carriage instructing John, the family coachman, to be on hand at eleven that morning. The carriage was evidently not there, and in the excitement of the news the Secretary had foregone his morning's Department business.

After half an hour of waiting, during which the two police officers had sent out several messages, the coachman was ushered in among the impatient quintet. Instead of the prim and stately master of the horse, who was the despair of even his co-peer the Jehu of the English Ambassador, and the admiration of the Washington gamin, there skulked in a battered, bandaged, hastily-dressed man, who shuffled out incoherent excuses, and burst into moist apologies.

"It wasn't my fault. The divil was in it. The hosses are safe. The kerridge is well. I woke up in the gutter, the blood sputterin'

down me backbone. They were picked up this morning. Don't discharge me! I've served you fifteen years and only trained twicst. What'll become of me? Lord have mercy!" The coachman of the Secretary had a stock of irreproachable syntax, which had been utterly scattered during the experience of the last night. At this spontaneous moment his native grammar got the best of him.

The coachman's testimony amounted to this: The driver was walking his horses to the stable in the fog when he saw a man beckon him from the sidewalk. Not a soul was on the street. Beyond was a dark, private lane. He stopped, and, to his surprise, saw, as he thought, his master standing and motioning him to come to a halt and get down. The Secretary's face was turned toward the dark. The voice sounded muffled. When the coachman alighted his master produced a silver flask and told him to take a drink as it was so damp. He dared not disobey, though full of wonder at this unprecedented favor. As soon as he had taken a pull he felt dizzy. Two or three more black figures appeared like ghosts before his eyes. He thought he struck out or tried to run to the coach, he didn't know which. A queer odor mounted to his head. Then he lost consciousness. He came to, early in the morning, a little after four, and staggered to the stable. The team was not there. He fell into a stupor of despair. About an hour after, an acquaintance of his drove the span up, and said they had been found unchecked, grazing near the Smithsonian Institute. He supposed that they had run away. The Secretary's coachman had then given the fellow five

dollars for his services and to hold his tongue. He was afraid of being discharged. He had just heard of the disappearance of the President and he feared being implicated in the affair. After the name of the person who found the horses was taken down, and after a searching cross-examination, the frightened man was sent away to rest, with assurance of continued favor. Subsequent examinations failed to find any traces of the catastrophe in the coupé. It had been carefully cleaned when it came back to the stable. There was no blood visible.

This completes the whole of the testimony and information that was received or discovered by the united efforts of all the detectives in America up to the fourteenth of the month. Clews had been manufactured and followed with desperate rapidity, but to no avail. Numberless arrests had been made, but no one could be legally held for high treason against the Chief Executive. All that was known was this: that some bold villain had successfully personated the Secretary of State; that he had gulled three servants by a close resemblance; that he, with others, probably, had forcibly carried the President and his wife from their very beds, leaving them but scant time to take the necessary articles of clothing; that these abductors had audaciously used the State carriage for their nefarious purpose; that they had left absolutely no trace behind; and, that moreover, in the darkness of the fog and rain no further track could be found of the direction they took. They could not have gone by train; so every house in the city of Washington and in the suburbs, to the distance

of fifteen miles or more, had been searched in vain. A like systematic investigation was carried on along the river, to the bay, in search of anything suspicious afloat. The authorities gave the robbers of the nation no time or opportunity to escape by land or water. All avenues were watched. Where were they and their noble booty? In short the foremost couple of the United States had utterly disappeared, to the horror and despair of the civilized world.

It was just one week from the morning of the shock when the New York *Herald* published the following manifesto in its original form. It was sent as an advertisement with five dollars enclosed. The envelope was postmarked from division II of the New York Post-office. The document bore no superscription. It read as follows:

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES:

We have abducted your President and his wife, and hold them for ransom. They will not be delivered up until their fine be paid publicly, under full sanction of Congress. Moreover, Congress and the people must guarantee, in addition to the full payment, C. O. D., entire liberty to the abductors permanently to withdraw from this country and live in future peace. Unless Congress and the nation give their honor for the payment of the ransom and our personal and impregnable liberty, we will not deliver our prisoners. We impose a ransom of a million dollars apiece for each week, for such time as this offer may remain unaccepted. The time begins from date of capture. These conditions are final.

When the country, through its representatives, accedes to this demand, the time and place of delivery will be published in these columns. The loyalty and honor of the nation are now on exhibition before the world.

This communication burst like dynamite upon the people. Did it not bear an undeniable stamp of genuineness upon its face, not only through the firmness of its tone, but by the audacity of the demand? Yet there was an equal division of opinion. Some thought it was the raving of a crank in search of notoriety, but others looked upon it as a veritable communication from those who held the President and his wife in their possession.

Two millions of dollars a week! A princely ransom worthy of a royal couple and of the United States.

It was natural that the handwriting of this letter should be scrutinized severely. Every ingenuity that detective art could devise for finding the sender was employed. During the next few days New York underwent an espionage worthy of the court of St Petersburg. But, to the utter mortification of Inspector Byrnes and his myriads, of Pinkerton and his myrmidons, they were bound to confess their utter failure. The perpetrators of the incredible deed, like

"An arm

Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,"

brandished the sword in the air and disappeared.

In the meantime the political nation was aroused. It

experienced some measure of relief to know, if it were true, that its chief was held for paltry gold. In that case, he and his would be safe from the assassin's sword or the vengeance of an alien party whose hatred he had incurred by patriotic scorn in his inaugural address. An yet, the question was raised whether some treasonable secret society had not secluded him, hoping to increase its revenue at the expense of the United States treasury. Many went so far as to pronounce it a Fenian plot to raise money for Parnell in his final overthrow of English rule in Ireland. Constituents wrote to their representatives in Washington, instructing them to vote the ransom, without delay, from the surplus fund, which was now one hundred and seventy-eight million dollars. Others instructed them not to waste the public money, as the President and his spouse must soon be found by competent detectives, and thus a "creditable saving to the treasury" would be made. The Vice-President, who had succeeded to full powers, sent a special message to Congress, requesting it to vote the ransom, no matter how enormous. The strain on him was not worth the people's money. So Congress met in secret session, and spent the balance of the week fighting, temporizing, and receiving telegrams to the effect that new clues were found.

On the twenty-second of June, exactly two weeks from the time of the distinguished capture, the following epigrammatic communication was printed by the New York *Herald*, in the same handwriting as the previous one. The envelope bore a Chicago

postmark:

"Congress has disregarded our generous offer: The ransom for the President of the United States and for his wife is therefore raised two million dollars."

This was all; cold and ominous. Like the first message it was unsigned. The style was unrelenting and imperious. Citizens awoke to the sensation that they who were now the nation's martyrs were in the hands of men who would not shrink from enforcing their demand. It was now universally believed that these were *bonâ fide* bulletins sent by the unscrupulous abductors themselves. This became the detectives' final theory, and they massed their skill towards it.

The unsolved mystery brooded like dog-days over man, woman, and child. A nameless fear, that of an unknown and irresistible enemy in their midst, paralyzed the citizens. Prayers were offered in every church, school-house, and home. The hostilities that but lately threatened the country ceased. Civilization breathed nothing but sympathy for the bereaved republic. Sovereigns redoubled their private guards and quaked upon their thrones. And yet, in the face of fears, petitions, and threats, Congress, in a spirit of disastrous conservatism that has marked so many of its deliberations, allowed itself to be ruled by a dissenting minority. Detective Byrnes, hoping to gain imperishable credit and also the reward of five hundred thousand dollars which Congress had been liberal enough to offer, counselled delay in a private letter to the Speaker of the

House. So it happened that this august body would not ratify the overwhelming vote for immediate payment of ransom which had just been passed by the Senate.

This filibustering brought the country into the third week of the calamity. The following communication to the New York *Herald*, postmarked Boston, written in the same hand as before, brought matters to a crisis:

"The nation has evidently more love for their surplus than for their President. The requisite ransom has reached six millions of dollars in gold. The treasury is not yet exhausted, nor are we. None can find us. Our defences are unapproachable. We laugh at your attempts. The wife of your President, we are grieved to say, is ill."

This proclamation aroused a new element, which had been smouldering, to white heat. The women of the country rose *en masse*. They fired old societies and organized new to collect ransom. The W. C. T. U. and W. H. M. A. and A. S. A. and A. B. C. and X. Q. B. Z. thrilled to the occasion. Infant Bands of Hope and Daughters of Endeavor invaded private families with demands for penny subscriptions. Weeping women persuaded dollars by the tens, hundreds and thousands from responsive men. They renounced their bon-bons and new dresses, parties and dowries in their patriotic fervor. The presidents of all the women's societies in the land trooped to Washington. They cried shame at those who trifled for the sake of the fiftieth part of the gold in the vaults with the noblest life in the Union. These

unselfish women stormed the capital, and literally poured two millions of dollars, which they had collected in less than three days, upon the floor of the House to rescue the first lady of the land from who knew what? They forced their husbands, their representatives, to do their bidding, and the final vote was passed amid indescribable scenes.

The ransom was now ready for the President and their lady. It had to be accompanied by the national promise to secure freedom to those who delivered up the suffering couple. That was the third of July. Still the impotence of the nation in this new crisis filled thoughtful men with apprehension. Was it moral that cash instead of justice should be given to these stupendous criminals? What a precedent for infamous success! Of what avail courts of law and prisons if such consummate daring goes unpunished? Is there a portion of our national machinery out of gear? If so, which? Nevertheless the excitement was now beyond fever heat. It is safe to say that the temperature of the people had risen ten degrees when the news was flashed abroad that the "President's money," as it was called, had been unanimously voted by Congress. Tears streamed as patriots met each other. Many developed a new species of insanity in their suspense.

The country had now done its part toward the rescue of its chief magistrate and of his perishing consort. Would the abductors be true to their portion of the contract? Party strife had been forgotten in this new anguish. All Fourth of July demonstrations had been postponed until a loving people's

thanksgiving for their President's safety could blend with the time honored celebration of a nation's birth.

But suspense was not long delayed. Promptly the New York *Herald* received a manifesto, this time the last, sent by the arch-conspirators to Congress and the people. This envelope was boldly postmarked Washington. This fact made those in the capital city almost afraid to stir from their homes lest unawares they might meet the demon in their midst who had dwarfed all principals in the records of crime up to the present date. But this final proclamation read as follows:

TO CONGRESS AND ALL AMERICANS.

We note your late and liberal response to our proposal. We shall not be outdone in the honorable discharge of obligations. At precisely eight (8) o'clock on the morning of July sixth (6th) the payment of ransom and delivery of captives will take place within one mile of Washington's homestead, Mt. Vernon. The government vessel with ransom and proper officials on board will remain in near sight of Mt. Vernon. At our signal (which shall consist of four Japanese day rockets, each representing a flaming sword) whether hurled from land or water, the officers of the government will steam toward the place of delivery. Guards will fall back immediately upon the discharge of whistling bombs until the ransom and the ransomed meet. The Presidential party will bear a flag, vertically striped black and crimson. On its centre will be a gold half-eagle. Payment must be made as follows: There must be eighty (80) leathern bags, each containing one hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000)

in gold; the amount of ransom being eight million dollars (\$8,000,000) for four weeks' board at one million dollars (\$1,000,000) a week apiece. This money must be paid and its genuineness certificated upon the honor of the United States by the Secretaries of State and of the Treasury. If there is any suspicion of infidelity on the part of the nation, the President and his wife will be held for another month on the same terms. Should we be betrayed in the trust which we have reposed in the American people, on the 6th of July, at, or previous to the time of delivery, the distinguished hostages will immediately be put permanently beyond reach of hope.

Unscrupulous and stern was the message, yet tinged with a spurious color of honor that demanded the true blue in return. It was the consensus of opinion that it would be madness to attempt arrest during the culminative ceremonies. The required gold was transferred from the treasury vaults to the new and swift cruiser *Washington*.

Final arrangements were made for giving the imprisoned couple the most glorious reception which ingenuity and patriotism could devise. Reporters by hundreds bivouacked on the grounds of Mt. Vernon on the night of the fifth. Gunboats, steamers, yachts and sail of every description congregated to the scene of the surrender. The land teemed with sight-seers and soldiers with stacked arms. In the midst of all this apparent disorder, Inspector Byrnes, on his own responsibility, had his thousand trained men, who patrolled every foot of ground within five miles of the historic site, and who had surveyed every inch of

water from the mouth of the Potomac to the city of Washington. He had hoped to retrieve his fame by a successful capture at the eleventh hour.

At last, though it seemed a century in coming, the morning of the sixth of July broke solemnly upon Mt. Vernon. The revered site was flanked on all sides by seething, excited, hopeful humanity such as these historic shores had never before witnessed. The official command had been to abstain from all noise and confusion on land or water from the time of the sunrise gun.

The cannon boomed from the new navy. Then came the hush. The last hours of waiting were spent in maddening inactivity, in strained repose. From what quarter would the ominous signal be seen? Who would catch the first glimpse of the boldest and most successful gang of malefactors that this country had ever produced?

PART II

Colonel Oddminton was a widower, with only one son, fifteen years old. It was natural, then, that the colonel himself should balance between forty-five and fifty years of age. Let the fact only be whispered in desert places that the colonel was no more a colonel than you are. He had never smelt powder, except when shooting mallard ducks. He never had seen a regiment, except when it was marching on Decoration Day peacefully through the woebegone streets of Charleston, preparatory to a good dinner. His nearest idea of regalia and medals consisted of the many adornments worn by Queer Fellows or any other order of Honorable Unextinguished Redskins as they either laid a cornerstone or a comrade ceremoniously in the ground. Where could he have lived and not have been an active partisan in the stirring days of our devastating civil war? Surely, not in the United States!

Of English exile blood, that came over a hundred years ago, he would have been a thorough American had his parents and his environment permitted. His family had settled on one of the many Sea Islands that dot the coast of South Carolina, and there they had staid and raised the famous Sea Island cotton which is still successfully used, so fine its fibre, to adulterate a fashionable fabric. Like the baryte of Cheshire, the cotton of Oddminton Island became valuable as it became an ally to fraud. The one increased the weight of white lead; the other swelled the

unlawful receipts of the manufacturers of silk. Oddminton Island did not follow the regular markets of trade. It always had its peculiar channels of commerce; its cotton had an undiscoverable destination.

The colonel, as we will still call him, was, from his earliest memory, sternly brought up under an atmosphere of uncanniness and secrecy, nor did he leave his fertile island, except, as we shall mention, until his father died and made him sole proprietor of land, slaves and family traditions. Fully two hundred acres were under cotton cultivation. The insignificant remainder was unentangled marsh.

Colonel Oddminton's father died in eighteen hundred and sixty-one. Then the colonel began to expand. He had two hobbies that consumed his imagination by day and agitated his visions by night. The one had been shared by his deceased parent, namely, an inordinate desire to be rich; not as wealthy as the richest family in Charleston, but as rich as all the merchants in the "City by the Sea" put together. Cotton had always given a comfortable living, but cotton was declining. It became unsatisfactory. It was not enough.

Colonel Oddminton's other hobby was a fast boat. He had always been a more than enthusiastic sailor. When the boy was only eighteen, his father had given him a ten-ton sloop and allowed him to go anywhere, provided he did not touch the mainland. This order was in accordance with the old man's peculiarities, but was strictly obeyed. With his black sailors the

boy had cruised in every bay and inlet for a hundred miles about. Though no one else knew it, he was the best pilot those waters ever saw. During the war, when he was master, he never left his island except to put his own cotton aboard English blockade runners. In these hazardous attempts he never failed. This experience cultivated his native qualities of courage and of self-possession.

On this island of his there was a bay that afforded fine anchorage for two large boats. It abutted on the marsh. It was there he had built a small camphouse. Neither the cove nor the house could be seen from the open sea. The former could only be entered through an intricate channel, and that when the wind and tide were favorable. The latter was approached through heavy underbrush by a winding passage that was known only to a few.

Colonel Oddminton was a tall, fine-looking man. He wore a long flowing beard that had never seen the razor. His build was massive; his height was manly.

About the time of which we are writing—this was in—but the reader remembers—his new schooner, which he had dignified by the name of yacht, much to the amusement of a few acquaintances, had been easily beaten by a trim stranger, that ploughed its way to windward as if it had been a knife eating into the teeth of the gale. He had followed this new craft to harbor and found her to be a Herreshoff model. That night, for the colonel's schooner was really an able and fast one, the disappointed man was sadder than when he saw his only friend, his father, die. He

was proud of his schooner. He had cruised in her from Baltimore to the St. John's river, and had never been so disgracefully out-pointed and outfooted by any boat of her size before.

It was at this time that he fell into a revery that lasted a month. It was the longest month in his life, the only one he had ever spent upon the mainland. People pronounced him "daft," decidedly cracked, but "harmless, you know." His tall figure flitted from the lobby of the Charleston Hotel to the great cotton wharves, and then back again. At last he awoke, and this was the outcome of his supposed aberration.

"I don't care if it costs me my last cent, I'll have the fastest boat in the world, and no one shall beat me again, by gum!"

To make a long story short, he sold to an eager syndicate of English capitalists his island for an asparagus farm, reserving for himself the odd acres of marsh, his camp house and bay with its two moorings. On this sale he realized a hundred thousand cash down. He then turned his father's savings, fifty thousand dollars' worth of London consols, into ready money. He now had a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. With this he and his boat disappeared. No note was taken of his absence either on his former property or in Charleston, the only other place that really knew him, so frequent were his vagaries, so infrequent his presence.

Let us follow the Colonel in his unostentatious wanderings. He first sailed with his son and his two trusty men direct to Washington city. He took in the sights of the Capital for a few

weeks, and then, leaving his boat behind, pushed on by train to New York, that wonderful metropolis that obliterates or worships men with an idea. He took lodgings with his son in a modest boarding-house, and there met a Swedish sailor, a man who had been captain of a steam yacht during the summer, and now happened to be out of employment. Nautical people do not take a long time to become acquainted. Colonel Oddminton at the end of a week had engaged Hans Christian on the strength of his name, without further references, at a salary of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a month, with the proviso that his new captain should hold his tongue and obey orders. This was about the first of November. During the last week of the same month the yachting world, and indeed the whole maritime contingency, were interested in the following paragraph, which was duly copied and commented upon by the national and foreign press:

"The famous builders, the Herreshoffs, have taken a contract to build a steel yacht that shall develop the enormous speed of 35 knots an hour. They are given 'carte blanche' for everything that pertains to increase of speed. The new phenomenon will be about a hundred and fifty feet long, as less water line will not admit of the speed contracted for. A bonus of \$500, it is rumored, will be paid for each additional one half-knot speed over the contract requirements of 35 knots. The engines that will effect this speed will be of a new and untried pattern. They will not be exhibited unless the vessel prove a success. The owner of this phenomenal craft, which will be the fastest in the world,

is unknown. It is suspected that it will go to the Swedish government for use as a torpedo boat. The yacht will be finished in five months, and her name is undecided. We should respectfully suggest 'Sheet Lightning.'"

At this time Colonel Oddminton and his son began to travel restlessly. They kept it up all winter until the first of May. The lad had developed as much aptness for the land as he had for the water. There were two things the boy did admirably, and for which he was conspicuous beyond his years. He held his tongue and obeyed his father; moreover, he was clever enough to take care of himself.

With the first of May the ceaseless journeying came to an end, and Rupert Oddminton was sent to Washington to put his father's old schooner in readiness for future orders.

The press, which had volunteered during the winter much plausible but little real information about the wonderful new Herreshoff model, now blazed into the rare glory of fact.

"The first trial trip of the unknown took place yesterday. The marvellous witch astonished spectators by showing up to the tune of 35-1/2 knots, and it is suspected the end was not reached. This unparalleled speed was continued for 125 minutes in favorable weather. This proved the most successful trial trip the Herreshoffs ever held. Thus the singular and hitherto undivulged electric machinery proves a triumphal hit. After a few minor changes the unnamed yacht will be ready for its destination. Who will own the fastest ship in the world? It is conceded that she goes to Sweden.

Her crew, which is entirely composed of Swedes, is strangely uncommunicative—" and so on.

One fine day, the magic craft shot out of Newport harbor and vanished. Some said she went straight to Europe. Each daily had its own theory. The boat and her evanescence were a nine days wonder. The yacht that represented the most exhaustive skill man had ever applied to navigation had melted away, unnamed, unlicensed, and without destination. Even her builder knew her no more.

The reader knows, as well as we, that this triumph of speed was Colonel Oddminton's venture. He had literally sunk his all in it with maniacal satisfaction, and had only a few thousands left, barely enough to pay expenses for three months. He had pursued his ideal until he had her under foot. He had not touched the new yacht until after it had left the world in wonder. He had now met her on the high seas in his old schooner, and the four—himself, his boy Rupert and the two black sailors—with sad eyes, scuttled the home of many years. When the Colonel's foot touched his new, bright deck, Captain Christian nodded, and the blue flag to starboard of the mainmast (signifying owner absent) was hauled down. The crew beheld their master for the first time. Not a sail was in sight. The Colonel was dazed. He went below, gulped down a pint of whiskey, and tried to think. He was intoxicated—not on liquor, but on final possession. When he came aloft, spray was whistling from stem to stern, and behind was a wake that overtopped the racer itself. Water

rushed as though projected through a pipe, past the shining sides of the vessel. Colonel Oddminton, in a trance, leaned over and touched the steel plates carefully. He expected to feel the heat generated by the tremendous friction. Captain Hans Christian stood respectfully at his side.

"What speed does she register, Captain?" asked the owner, with a tremulousness new to the man.

"Only thirty-two knots, sir, in this chop, but we can drive her thirty-eight. I think she can go forty on the hardest push."

Only the owner of Nancy Hanks, the fastest racing horse the world has yet produced, can imagine the sensations of the Colonel at this answer.

"What is the speed of the fastest government boat?" he asked with deliberation.

"Twenty-six knots, sir," was the quick reply; "they've only two torpedo boats that go that; and they are always up for repairs. As for war-ships or cruisers, none average over twenty. A common ocean steamer can beat them out." This last was uttered with the contemptuousness one always feels toward a mighty government that allows itself to be outdone by corporations or individuals.

"Suppose you change her top hampers, and make her so that no one can recognize her; say, tack on a false stem and stern to the water line, will she still go as fast?" continued the Colonel cautiously.

"Certainly, provided you don't interfere with her hull," answered the captain in surprise.

"I will take the wheel," the Colonel said. The electric vessel from whose wheel there was an unobstructed view ahead, without smokestack, with masts that could for speed's sake be lowered, was steered like any sail-boat, from her heaving stern. The owner's hand marked half speed, quarter speed upon the indicator. To the disgust of the crew he gave orders not to have the speed increased except to keep out of sight of coasters. At dead of night the beauty was anchored in his own cove, opposite his clapboard shooting lodge on the marsh. No one noticed his approach. The marsh and the bay hid their secret.

The next day at dawn a transformation began to take place. The white paint, the original and dainty body color of the electric yacht, was changed to a dull gray, and the new coat looked as if it had been put on in amateur patches, so dingy was its appearance. The boats on the davits were touched up with a combination of green and black. They looked at first glance as if a collier might have lost them at sea. The electric launch was smeared with the refuse of the paintshop put into one pot. The mixture attained was indescribable. But by far the greatest change consisted of a false stem and stern. These were modelled and put on, so that after a few screws were drawn, the mask would slip off, leaving the original sheer of the boat in all its beauty. A large smokestack of hollow timber, painted black with a red stripe, was improvised and set up. This ornament led into the galley stove below, and the cook was instructed to burn smoky materials when on the run. The deck was then covered with canvas and painted a sickly

yellow. The brass work went unpolished. As may be imagined, the new model was as different from the old as the carefully disguised ruffian on the stage is from his elegant self.

"Now she is ready," said Colonel Oddminton to his captain. "I will double the wages of all on board if the crew does not leave the ship or converse with any person off of it except by order. My two colored men will get all supplies. The future speed of my boat will be eight knots an hour. She is incapable of going more. That is her limit until further orders. Give command for an immediate start. We will now go to Charleston."

The son and the crew from the captain down suspected that something was in contemplation out of the usual run of pleasure trips. The son dared ask his father no questions, though he burned with indignation at the vandal changes. The crew did not care, even if they went pirating. Nothing could overtake them. Their fuel was limitless. Their pay was princely. Their cook was supreme. These stolid natures obeyed orders and drew their rations with faithful punctuality.

It does not take long to run to Charleston, going at even so slow a pace. Small steamers ply daily between the Sea Islands and the cotton metropolis. It happened that some of the Colonel's acquaintances were on board one of the passenger boats, and they saw this new craft lumbering along, puffing out volumes of black smoke. They slowed up, and were soon overtaken by the strange boat. The Colonel was sitting on deck.

"Halloa," one of them yelled, laughing. "Where did you pick

up that thing, Colonel?"

"Oh, down in New York. She's an old-fashioned steamer. I haven't had time to get her fixed up yet," answered the Colonel. "I always wanted a steam yacht, and I got this cheap." The passengers set up a laugh.

"We'll race you in," spoke up one of the Colonel's acquaintances, with a wink at the others. The man knew the Colonel's weakness when he challenged him.

"All right," said the Colonel briskly. "John!" yelling forward, "tell the engineers to put more steam on and let her go."

New puffs of smoke came from the bogus smokestack. The sidewheeler increased her pressure. It forged ahead at its highest speed, ten knots, and no more. Colonel Oddminton swore, but to no effect. The passenger vessel left the Colonel behind, amid jeers and all the catcalls familiar to Southern methods of demonstration. The Colonel seemed heartbroken. When he *steamed* into Charleston harbor two hours after his ancient rival, the wharf was crowded with the Colonel's "friends." When the Colonel came ashore he dropped a few characteristic oaths, ordered drinks all around, and said that, after the *Mary Jane* (that was the name painted, on her square-stern) was prinked up and her bottom scoured, she would beat the best of them yet. He had great faith in her possibilities. At any rate she could go in a calm.

Similar performances were repeated for a week. The Colonel planned it to get to the city in the morning and he went back at night, until Charleston was thoroughly familiar with

his ridiculously antique yacht, and had joked itself tired at his expense. Soon an elopement and a murder tickled the palate of the city, and the Colonel and the *Mary Jane* were forgotten. When that stage was reached Charleston knew him no more. It was now the second of June, and the *Mary Jane* turned her ugly prow toward the mouth of the Potomac river.

Every one knows that the Potomac empties itself into the Chesapeake bay. The Potomac is between ninety and a hundred miles long, in its tortuous route from Washington to the bay. At its mouth are many inlets. Each one of these was known to Rupert and the two negro sailors. It was in the most retired estuary that the *Mary Jane* cast anchor on the evening of the fifth of June. At her normal rate of speed she lay within two and a half hours run of the Capital. At nine, at black of night, she started for Washington. Her deck-log registered thirty-six knots an hour. She hugged the shore, where she laid for safe passage, until she modestly crept to an anchorage near a city wharf. Then the Colonel went ashore with his two black men and two Swedes, to reconnoitre the town. He always took with him a preparation of chloroform and another drug, which, for the sake of public safety, we will not mention. This was compounded for him in Chicago, by a chemist formerly in the employ of Anarchists. This preparation was warranted to "make a man who smelled it lose consciousness in less time that it takes to say Herr Most."

When Colonel Oddminton was last in Washington a casual smoking-room acquaintance remarked, eying him with the gaze

of a professional physiognomist:

"If you'd shave off your chin, and keep your hat on, you'd be the very picture of Senator X—."

Now Senator X—, through a revolution of the political wheel, had become Secretary of State. That casual remark had penetrated into the imagination of the Colonel. He tried to shake the impression off. Flattered by this suggestion—no one had ever made it before—he bought photographs of the Senator, all he could find, and studied them diligently. For days he haunted the Senate chamber and learned the personnel of the Senator by heart. [This, it will be remembered, was in the last administration.] Then was born the thought, Why not make capital out of this resemblance which art could easily magnify? The Senator was a millionaire. There might be money in it. But this seemed, after all, rather impracticable and rather commonplace. The Colonel was no sneak thief. He had broader elements than that. The man, but not the blood, was ignorant that his grandfather's great-grandfather was hung for piracy in England. It would be impossible to state when the stupendous plot, which he finally executed, shaped itself in his subtle brain. This idea startled him, haunted him, conquered him; why not kidnap the President of the United States, demand a ransom and throw suspicion, for a time at least, upon the wily politician? His thoughts now worked only in that conduit. Jacobi said that the greater a man's ability to act for distant ends, the stronger his mind. The Colonel silently plotted for months. We see where

it had led him. Having studiously perfected himself in the rôle of Secretary, which he was prepared to play at a moment's notice, the Colonel spent the remainder of these last nights in Washington, awaiting an opportunity to capture the Secretary's coach, after it had been dismissed by its owner for the night.

He also kept himself closely informed of the President's habits and his simple domestic hours without arousing any suspicion. All Washington knew the customs of its unostentatious chief. Society had criticised his "affected Democratic ways." Every one knew that he habitually retired as early as a New England deacon, never later than eleven. White House dissipation was now out of season. The Colonel knew that the interior of the executive mansion was unguarded at night. Could he once gain access thereto, the rest of his plot, so ignorant and so trustworthy his tools, could not miscarry. The Colonel made the attempt for three consecutive nights to capture the Secretary's coach. He arrived each time in Washington between eleven and twelve. He knew the approaches to the stable, and luckily for him, on the dark night of the eighth of June he accomplished his design, how successfully the reader well knows.

The strategic Colonel, with his four devoted men, invaded the privacy of the White House at exactly quarter of two o'clock in the morning; he had the aid of a card taken from the case in the coupé, and the re-enforcement of his now marvellous resemblance. What he now did the veriest tyro could have performed. He had not meant to abduct the first lady of the

land, but what could he do with her? His native chivalry would not permit him to harm her, though the President was made unconscious by the aid of the Chicago anæsthetic. The wife entreated to accompany her husband. She would undergo any fate so that he should not be taken without her. On condition of perfect quiet her wish was gratified. She was softly led, the President was carried, down the deserted stairs. The familiar state coach bore the distinguished victims away, and the deed that baffled the detective skill of the country was done with an ease which seems ridiculous.

The next evening the President and his wife might have been seen by Inspector Byrnes, had he been there, silently sitting on the deck of a murky-looking vessel, bearing name *Mary Jane*, and anchored in a little cove off a swamp and cottage on Oddminton Island. So remote and quiet was this locality that the rumor of the President's effacement had not even reached it. The kidnapped couple waited patiently for the relief that they momentarily expected. They had no news, nothing but scrupulous consideration, attention, and a respectful but firm guard night and day. But rescue did not come.

One member of that dark crew was left in Washington to hold continual communication with the Colonel. This was the boy Rupert, who, if he had suspected by this time what had happened, was either too loyal or too terrified to reveal the fact. The letters that astonished the world were written by the Colonel, sent to his son sealed, directed each in a different handwriting,

and stamped with full instructions how and where to mail them. The boy had travelled faithfully and far. Of course a letter posted by an innocent-looking boy of fifteen, who was unsuspected and unknown, was able to baffle the law. He was the only confederate, a helpless and faithful tool.

A country that opens itself in so many ways to foreign foes must not be startled if one of its own sons, perceiving the weakness of the armor, should take advantage of it and choose his direction for the vital thrust. The Colonel aimed high. He kept his counsel and accomplished the incredible in the simplest way. Who thought of him and the crazy *Mary Jane*? The President and his wife were as far away from rescue as if they were on the Island of Borneo. There are a thousand such places on our coast where a hostile fleet might ride without even the suspicion of our "Lord High Admiral."

It was ten minutes of eight o'clock on the morning of the eighth of July. A fleet of many hundred vessels of every description lined the banks of the Potomac opposite the revered home of Washington. There were gunboats and catboats, excursion steamers and yachts from every part of the country. They idly lay at anchor, or jogged barely enough to hold their own in the tidal river. All flags hung at half-mast. While most eyes scanned the heights with impatient glance, others watched the water for a revelation. The sides of the hills were black with humanity. The world seemed to wait there with a throe of hope subsiding to an interval of despair.

The high officials of the government were standing on the quarter-deck of the new man-of-war. *The Washington*. Each had a pair of glasses to his intent eyes. This was the moment when the Secretary of State, from his high elevation, spied a long, low vessel moving slowly amid the floating palaces and dreary hulks. It seemed apologetic in its movements, and afforded a sad contrast to the jaunty yachts it almost grazed. None but the Secretary had as yet noticed this insignificant boat. Somehow it fascinated him, and he followed it intently. It was propelled by steam, and crept up as if it wanted a nearer view of the morning's performance.

Now a police patrol launch whistled that way, and gave the sailor at the wheel an abrupt command to bring her up to a stop. Hardly was this order given when there came a puff of smoke from her uncouth bow, and an ominous flaming sword appeared against the dead gray sky. A sound that could at first have been mistaken for a subterranean growl rolled upon the still air. When the second flaming sword flashed into mid-heaven the mutter of the populace became a roar. It was true! True! The President and their lady were at hand and in their midst. Two more ill-omened rockets gleamed above. Was it execration or was it joy—this mighty sound that broke from river to shore? Then silence came again. Eyes strained to see this mysterious thing that made straight for the great man-of-war. But one soul was seen on its dingy decks. Only the man at the wheel was visible. He was clad in black. A hundred vessels instinctively closed about this daring

and defiant craft. Its escape was cut off. It could neither go to the right nor to the left, forward nor back. It sullenly stopped.

Then came a whistling shriek, followed by a cannon peal from its forequarter—another—and the flag of black and crimson crowned by the gilt eagle, touched by unseen hands, shot like a baleful spirit from the peak.

"Keep off!" shouted a stern voice from the bow. "Keep off, ahead there! Let the nation stand back at the peril of their chief magistrate!"

Now the Mystery swung ahead, until she was abreast of the high warship, any one of whose lowering guns would have gladly shattered her if it had dared.

When the execrable vessel came to a halt, and breathless and dignified faces peered upon her decks from above, a sudden bustle was observed. From below there mounted slowly his excellency the President of the United States, attended by the first lady of the land. Both looked pale and anxious, but bore signs of powerful self-restraint. At sight of the revered couple, the man-of-war's crew could not control themselves, and set up a mighty cheer. This was caught up from ship to ship, from shore to height. Flags were hauled aloft. Guns were discharged. A pandemonium of joy set in. Behind the captured couple two men in black walked, each with a cocked revolver. The honored pair reclined on steamer chairs in full view of their people. The world knew now that they were safe and nearly home. Greetings were exchanged between Cabinet and Chief. Even war-scarred

veterans could not choke down the rising apple in their throats.

Again there was a hush. A figure now stepped from a forward hatchway on deck of the *Mary Jane*, walked up to the captured couple, and bowed low. This salute was succeeded by a courteous recognition of the impatient crowd above on board the *Washington*. As the unknown raised his silk hat for the second time, he stood directly in line with the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State and Col. Oddminton regarded each other. Bystanders started in surprise. The resemblance between the two men was deeply suggestive of the success of the plot. The villain had the same noble brow, the same delicate complexion, the same incomparable whiskers. But, alas! he was bald on the top of his head. The Secretary involuntarily stroked his own luxuriant crown with a sigh of relief.

"Gentlemen, representatives of these United States," said the Colonel slowly, "I have faithfully fulfilled my part of the contract. Do you yours. I will come aboard and inspect the ransom. Then it may be lowered down, and the President is free. I have not long to stay." In the meanwhile, so intent were all eyes upon the star actors of this scene, it was not noticed that men were busily engaged at stem and stern of the unshipshape-looking steamer.

Hands worked deftly at masts and funnel.

After a few minutes, during which the expectant couple sat with as much comfort as one can before loaded pistols, the ransom was inspected, the Colonel satisfied. Eighty bags of gold were carefully lowered to the pirate craft.

As the Colonel descended alone to his own deck he motioned with his hand. Immediately the pistols were flung into the water. The seamen in black fell back as a guard of honor. The Colonel, with Southern grace and British dignity, extended his arm to the distinguished and trembling hostage. This she did not refuse and he led her to the cream-white companionway that now reached from the *Washington* to the *Mary Jane*. The marines presented arms. The women sobbed. Then came the President. When his foot touched his own deck there thundered forth a salute of twenty-one guns from the American navy. Whistles blew, flags and handkerchiefs fluttered, and mad salvos rent the air from subjects that any sovereign would gladly call his own.

The President now looked down with sad curiosity upon his former prison. But there strange things had happened. The caterpillar had cast off its chrysalis, and the incomparable butterfly appeared. Where was the smokestack? Where were the masts? Where was the *Mary Jane*? A load seemed to fall from stem to stern, and there appeared beneath dingy paint a sheer which a king might long to possess. This was the crowning surprise. Naval officers now recognized for the first time the nautical marvel which had deluded the nation. The Colonel stood alone upon the deck of the transfigured boat. With uncovered head he spoke. His left hand grasped the wheel.

"Mr. President—I have guarded you safely, and treated you as well as circumstances could permit. Your patience in adversity, and that of your wife, have compelled my reverence. You were

but the scapegoat of a nation. This country can never afford to be careless of its defences and of the treasures which they protect. People of America! You regard me as the chief malefactor of your times. The day may come when you will call me its greatest benefactor. To-day you execrate me. To-morrow you may bless me. I have taught you a solemn and a costly lesson, but the price of such wisdom is cheap. Good-morning!"

There was no opening, but the hawsers were suddenly cut. There was a rush and billows of foam. As a cat plays here and there in her pretty antics the "*Lightning*" (for a blow of the hammer on the stern had annihilated the *Mary Jane*) wound in and out at an unequal rate. When she turned, she careened far over on her side. The water lapped the Colonel's feet. Who could stop her? Who could overtake her? At the first shock the gunners stood motionless, then sprang to their guns. The President, Commander-in-chief of the army and navy, raised his hand and shook his head.

The faith of the nation was pledged, and the pirate escaped without a shot. The incredible speed of the *Lightning* increased. It became terrific. Nothing like it had ever been witnessed in maritime history. Spectators stood with held breath.

A lieutenant in his excitement shouted: "For God's sake, overtake her!"

The crowd yelled: "Run them down! See where they go!"

But the navy of the United States might as well have chased a cannon ball. The mental pressure became tremendous.

Spectators had hardly drawn a breath when the miracle was hull down. The American love of audacity and speed struggled mightily for the moment with American patriotism. The moral sense of the people could not prevent a murmur of admiration when the *Lightning*, with eight millions of national gold aboard, in less than nine minutes was but a speck. A bend of the river, and the mysterious, courtly and successful pirate was gone.

I

"Great guns!" The ejaculator tipped his straw hat off with his left hand, let it roll upon the office floor, made a dab for a damp pocket handkerchief in his right pistol pocket, and stared at the yellow paper again. "Whew! I don't believe it!" he muttered. Then, aware that the keen eyes of the three-and-a-half-foot messenger boy were upon him, as if sizing him up for news, he stared at the telegram again, mumbled "It's a fake! Great guns!" and rushed from the room.

The messenger boy looked after the editor's retreating form with a knowing wink, as if the whole thing had been a special job put up by himself, whistled "Annie Rooney," took up a tattered copy of "Famous Quotations," laid it down again with an expression of mingled respect and scepticism, characteristic of his kind, and then swaggered out of the editorial sanctum.

"Well, Swift, what's up now?"

The editor-in-chief of the *Daily Planet* (Democratic) lifted his young, alert face from the evening edition of his own journal to that of his news editor. Interruptions were the expected thing in that stirring office.

Swift did not speak, but laid the telegram upon the desk, pulled out a Victoria Regina, and chewed it nervously. The chief read the message through once to himself, gave one glance at the face of his subordinate, and then said:

"This is a repeat, is it not?"

"Yes sir. First news came three hours ago. I didn't believe it. Thought it a fake. Half think so still. I wouldn't insert it, and wired for an immediate reply. Here it is. It is too late for the five o'clock edition. What shall I do?"

"Well, this *is* extraordinary!" conceded the chief. This admission meant a great deal in that office, deluged with news from all parts of the world, where it frequently happened that fourteen columns of purchased and paid for telegraphic despatches were not considered important enough to use, and were dropped in the waste-paper basket. The chief pressed the button in his desk and asked the boy that appeared to inform Mr. Ticks that he was wanted at once.

Mr. Stalls Ticks answered the summons promptly. He was a sallow, faded, middle-aged man, dressed in a sere and faded Prince Albert coat, with sallow and faded boots. In fact, the whole appearance of this invaluable member of the *Planet* corps gave one the impression of the last minute of autumn, when even the trunks of the trees, the stones of the hills, the soil of the valleys look sere and yellow and faded and ready for a winter's sleep. Mr. Ticks looked as if he were waiting for the trance that never overcame him.

"I wish to know something of Russell, the capital of the new State of Harrison, Mr. Ticks."

Mr. Ticks pulled out a yellow, faded, silk bandanna, wiped his spectacles sadly, and with an over-aspirated tone asked:

"Yes, sir?"

Mr. Swift looked at him with mingled disgust and respect, and tapped his foot impatiently on the bare floor.

"Let me see; it is situated?" proceeded the chief quietly.

"On the southeast shore of the Great Gopher lake." Mr. Ticks finished the sentence mechanically.

"Ah! I remember. Its population?"

"Twenty-nine thousand five hundred and fifty-two. It increases at the rate of thirty a day."

"Exactly so! It is—?"

"Just two years nine months and twelve days old."

"To be sure. Its property—?"

"Is one hundred and sixty-four million dollars, in round numbers."

"Of course. Its industries are—?"

"The usual pertaining to Western cities, I suppose. I confess ignorance to concrete particulars. The reports have been singularly deficient in this respect. I credit this entirely to its youth."

"Indeed! Its railroad facilities—?"

"The C. H. & S. F. is its great trunk line. Three branch lines have their centre there—just built. Two roads are surveyed to shorten the distance to Chicago and San Francisco respectively."

"Any other facts of interest, Mr. Ticks?" Mr. Ticks hesitated.

"Well—no—yes—no. In fact, there is nothing of special importance that I—that is different from any other city—"

except—nothing, sir, that I am willing to stake my professional reputation upon; you must excuse me, sir."

"Is it in the cyclone area, Mr. Ticks?"

"No, sir. The centre of barometric depression is farther north. The Buzzard mountains to the south deflect all such storm centres. Russell will be singularly free from tornadoes."

The editor-in-chief looked somewhat nonplussed, and handed Mr. Ticks the telegram, with the remark:

"What do you think of that?"

"I do not know, sir. I cannot give an opinion."

"I, Mr. Ticks, I for one believe this is true. I'll—I'll stake my reputation on it!" said Swift decidedly. Mr. Ticks' exasperating caution grated on the news editor and converted his scepticism into conviction.

"If it is," replied his chief, quietly, "you can start for the scene to-night on the six thirty express. You did up the Charleston earthquake. You were the first on the spot at Johnstown, and this promises to be as bad—or as good."

Swift tried to look indifferent at this cumulation of trust. He had been on the paper for five years; he had started in as night reporter, and his own ability and quickness, united with a certain caution, one might call it a news integrity, had raised him to his present position. The *Planet* had the singular reputation of printing the truth. It rarely was "taken in," with a false item. It aspired far beyond the local.

The *Planet*, under the able management of its chief and of

Swift, had become the mirror of the world. And, if at times it reflected important news from a convex surface, it did no more and far less than the majority of its contemporaries, who had no telegraphic facts to throw away daily, and who, when hard pressed to it, manufactured a murder at home or a war rumor abroad to help pad their lean columns.

"Let me see! It is five forty-five," continued the chief, consulting his watch. "I will not detain you any longer, Mr. Ticks. We shall want a column from you on Russell, to-night. And now, Swift,"—when Mr. Ticks had faded out of the room,—"who's this correspondent signed D.?"

"It's Dubbs. You know him. Associated press man and special correspondent. Never failed me. He's the only one there who knows our cipher."

The editor-in-chief did not change his expression, but his eyes had the steady, stern look that showed easy determination. He quickly wrote a few words on his pad and handed them to his favorite "sub."

"Take this to the cashier! Get to the elevated as fast as you can! Buy what you need when you get time, and—*go!* I depend on you for the fullest description to be had. If you do as well as you did on the Conemaugh, I'll give you a raise on your return. Good luck to you."

It did not take Mr. Swift five minutes to rush to his den, slip on his coat, snatch his hat from the floor, run downstairs, receive a fat roll of bills from the phlegmatic cashier and bolt for

the elevated train. In twenty-five minutes he was at the central station, with two minutes to spare. He nodded pleasantly to the gatekeeper and boarded the train as nonchalantly as if he were going to his suburban boarding-house.

II

All of our readers will remember the curiosity, the speculation, the horror, the apprehension, and the sympathy universally excited when, on the tenth of September, it was learned from the morning papers that Russell, the new capital of Harrison, was cut off from all communication. Each morning sheet hinted darkly at the cause of this unheard-of calamity. The *Daily Braggart*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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