

**EARLE ASHLEY
WALCOTT**

THE APPLE OF DISCORD

Earle Walcott

The Apple of Discord

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Earle Ashley Walcott The Apple of Discord



Moon Ying

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CHAPTER I

I AM PRESENTED WITH AN OVERCOAT

Colonel Wharton Kendrick leaned back in his chair, stroked his red side-whiskers reflectively, and looked across the table with an expression of embarrassment on his round ruddy face. For the moment his command of words had evidently failed him.

As embarrassment and failure of language were equally foreign to his nature, I was confirmed in a growing suspicion that there had been an ulterior purpose behind his cordial invitation to luncheon. The meal had been a good one, and he was paying for it, and so I felt that I owed him my moral support. Therefore, I returned such a look of encouragement as might properly express the feelings of a fledgling attorney toward a millionaire who was the probable source of active litigation, and waited for him to speak.

"See here, Hampden," he said at last; "you know something about my row with Peter Bolton, don't you?"

"The Bolton-Kendrick feud is a part of my very earliest recollections," I admitted. "When I was a small boy I was convinced that it was quite as much a part of the institutions of the country as the Fourth of July. You may remember that my father took something of an interest in your affairs."

"Good old Dick Hampden—the best friend a man ever had!" And there was a note of tenderness in his voice that touched my heart-strings. "It was a sad loss when he went, my boy. Well, then I needn't go into the beginning of the feud, as no doubt he explained it all to you."

"I should like very much to have an account of it at first hand," I replied. In spite of my familiarity with the quarrels between Bolton and Kendrick, I had never solved the mystery of the beginning of the feud. Its origin was as deeply buried in the haze of historic doubts as the causes of the Trojan War. I had heard it assigned to a dozen different beginnings, ranging from a boyhood battle for the possession of a red apple to a maturer rivalry for the hand of the village belle, who had finally bestowed herself on a suitor whose very name was forgotten. None of the explanations seemed adequate. The first could scarce account for the depth of hatred that each felt for the other. As for the last—imagination refused to picture Peter Bolton in the figure of a sighing swain; the caricature was too monstrous for credit. Therefore, I spoke hopefully, as one who sees the doors of mystery ajar. But Wharton Kendrick shrank from the task of enlightening me, and with a shake of his head he replied:

"Well, there's no need to go into it all now. It began back in the Ohio village where we were born—long before the days we heard of California—and it'll end when one of us is carried out feet foremost."

"I hope you're not expecting anything of that sort," I said.

"No, I can't say that I am. I'm expecting something, and I don't know what it is. But what I want to know is this: Have you any objections to doing a bit of secret service?" The manner in which he plunged through his sentence, and the air of visible relief on his face when he had done, told me that this was what he had been leading toward.

"Well, that depends. You know there are some things considered unprofessional—"

"Even in the law!" said Wharton Kendrick with a jovial laugh. "Oh, thunder! What would the game be if we didn't pretend to have rules? Well, I don't think this is anything that would get you on the black books, though some of you fellows are so confounded touchy that I've shied away from mentioning it to you. I want you to keep an eye on Bolton for a while, and find out what he is up to."

"That sounds as though you wanted a private detective agency," I said dubiously, with distrust of my ability to fill the bill.

"If I had wanted one I should have sent for it," replied Wharton Kendrick dryly. "I've had enough experience of them to know that I don't want them. I want you because I must have some one I can trust."

I murmured my thanks at this expression of esteem. It was the more gratifying as, like the rest of my father's old friends, he had carefully avoided giving me his legal business, with a wise but annoying preference for having me try my 'prentice hand on the litigation of strangers. So at this I professed my entire willingness to be of service.

"That's good," he said. "Now, I've had warning from a source I trust that Bolton is fixing up some sort of surprise for me. I want you to find out what it is. Six months ago I got the same sort of hint that came to me this morning, and I forgot all about it. Then one day I got a jolt that cost me a cool hundred thousand dollars when I found that Bolton had taken the Golden West Land and Water Company away from me. He got hold of some of the stock that I thought was in safe hands, and I had to pay four prices to get it. I've a notion that the thing is more serious this time."

Something in his voice suggested alarming possibilities.

"Do you mean that Bolton is plotting against your life?"

"Oh, I don't say that. But, oh, thunder! You wouldn't put it beyond him, would you?"

"Not beyond his morals, perhaps; but I should certainly put it beyond his courage."

"Oh, P. Bolton isn't the man to go gunning for any one. But he hasn't any scruples against getting another man to do it for him. That's why he owns the Miroban mine."

"You don't mean to say so? I never heard of that."

"I suppose not. You're too young to remember the murder of the Eddy boys. They had located the Miroban mine, and one day they struck it rich. Bolton put in a claim that he had bought it from a prior locator, and pretty soon they were all tangled up in litigation. One night somebody poked a double-barreled shot-gun through a window in the Eddy boys' cabin, and filled them full of buckshot. There was a good deal of excitement about it for a while, but nobody could find out the man who did the shooting, and we were all too busy in those days to waste much time hunting criminals. When the talk died down, Bolton was found in possession of the Miroban."

"And you think—"

"I don't know who pulled the trigger, but I know well enough that Bolton pointed the gun."

"Old Bolton is a more interesting character than I had supposed," I confessed.

"You'll have a chance to get better acquainted with him," said Kendrick, "but I can't promise you that he improves on acquaintance." He smoothed his ruddy cheeks, and ran his fingers through his side-whiskers, and then continued: "You'd better not come to see me till you have something important to report. You'll find it easier to get hold of things if the old spider doesn't know that you are in my employ. Send word around to my office when you want to see me. I suppose you'll want some money. You needn't spare expense. I guess this will do for a starter." And, reaching into his pocket, he brought up a handful of twenties and passed them over. And in this pleasant way began my active relations with the famous feud that was to shake San Francisco to its foundations.

Several days of cautious but diligent inquiry followed before my industry was rewarded with an insight into Peter Bolton's purposes. Then a lead of much promise opened, and I sent word to my employer that I was prepared to make a progress report.

"Come around to the office to-night—nine-thirty," was the reply; and prompt to the minute I mounted the stairs of the California Street building in which Wharton Kendrick kept his business quarters, and knocked at his private door.

At his brusque "Come in," I entered, and found him seated behind his wide desk busily running over a bundle of papers. The gas-light fell on his ruddy face and was reflected in glints from his red side-whiskers with which he eked out the fullness of his cheeks. He was indeed a handsome man, and carried his sixty years with the ease of forty.

"So you have brought news," he said, thrusting his papers into a drawer and leaning back to receive my communication. "Well, what is the old fox up to now?"

"I have the honor," I returned, "to report that the old fox has turned reformer."

"Reformer?" And a puzzled look overspread his face. "Well, if he wants a job in that line he won't have to leave home to get it. He can spend the rest of his life reforming himself and not have time enough by half."

"He is not so selfish as all that. His zeal has reached out to embrace the regeneration of the whole human race—or at least the part of it that inhabits San Francisco."

"What do you mean? I may be thick-headed, but I don't get your meaning."

"Oh, it is just as I say. And to carry out his benevolent purposes he has engaged the services of the Council of Nine—or at least has entered into active cooperation with it."

"The Council of Nine! I never heard of it." Wharton Kendrick looked at me in amazement.

"Well, to confess the truth, I never heard of it myself until to-day. However, you are likely to hear more of it later. It has a valiant recruit in Bolton."

"But what is it? What is it trying to do?"

"So far as I can find out, it is the head-center of the local organization of the International Reds. It is made up of anarchists, socialists, communists, and the discontented of all sorts. I'll admit that I don't understand fully the distinctions between these elements, and they are so mixed up here that you can't tell one from another."

"That's a promising combination," laughed Wharton Kendrick; and then a thoughtful look followed his laughter, as he added: "But what does P. Bolton think he can get out of that crowd?"

"A liberal education—or at least an education in liberality. He has given a handsome contribution to their funds—"

"What!" ejaculated Kendrick, starting forward in astonishment. "You don't mean to say that he has given them money?"

"I have the authority of a good witness—to wit, a man who saw the money paid."

"Whew! That's pretty hard to swallow. What is the man's name?"

"Clark—Jonas Clark."

"Who is he?"

"Why, he's a shining light in the Carpenters' Union. He's a decent chap who is a little carried away by the eloquence of the agitators, but he is all right. He has been a messenger back and forth between Bolton and some members of the Council, but he had the fault of being too scrupulous, and Bolton gave him the sack. So now he is employee number one of our detective bureau."

"Hm-m! And maybe you can give a guess why P. Bolton is putting up his good money for that crazy crowd? You are not trying to tell me it's a case of pure philanthropy?"

"That is what he wants them to believe. He told Clark that before he gave any money he must be satisfied that the aims and methods of the Council were for the benefit of the people."

"Oh, thunder! To think of P. Bolton playing a game like that! Well, did they satisfy him?"

"Clark took him any quantity of documents. They fed him first with the brotherhood-of-man and the one-for-all-and-all-for-one course of lectures. He thought there was too much milk-and-water about that, so they gradually worked up to the dynamiting of royal oppressors and the extinction of capitalistic robbers. At this he gave up some good coin—five hundred dollars, as near as I can learn—paid in person at midnight to three members of the Council of Nine."

Kendrick leaned back in his chair, and meditatively stroked his red side-whiskers once more, while the thoughtful wrinkles chased each other about his eyes.

"That begins to look like business," he said at last. "I'm sure I could put a name to the capitalistic robber he would like to see extinguished. Still, I don't see what he is driving at. Have you got any light on his plans?"

"No. So far as I can find out, he has made no suggestions. He has only approved their propaganda, and hinted that they might look for more money if their course was such as to satisfy him."

"Then you think their schemes worth looking into?"

"Indeed I do. I have an engagement to meet Clark at their headquarters, down at the House of Blazes to-morrow night. He is going to introduce me to some of the leaders, and I hope to get a line on what they are planning."

"The House of Blazes? What's that?"

"Oh, it's a saloon down on Tar Flat. The socialists and anarchists and a lot of other 'ists' loaf around there and drink beer in their hours of ease, and I believe there is a hall there where they hold their meetings."

"Umph! I hope you'll enjoy your evening. But don't get your head smashed." Wharton Kendrick was silent a little, and then continued thoughtfully: "I don't see what P. Bolton can expect to gain out of a lot of crack-brained fanatics like that, but you can do as you like about looking into them. I suspect, though, that this is just a blind for something else. Just remember that if you are expecting P. Bolton to show himself in one place, he's sure to turn up in another. Now, is that all your budget?"

"One thing more. Bolton has a little detective bureau of his own. He has engaged Jim Morgan, the prize-fighter, with three or four more of the same sort, and you're being watched. I've no doubt there's a fellow out by the door, waiting to follow you home. So I'll take the liberty of walking with you, and engage a few reliable body-guards to-morrow."

Wharton Kendrick's mouth closed with a snap.

"Not much—no body-guards for me! I've walked San Francisco for twenty years in the face of Peter Bolton, and I'm not going to be afraid of him at this day. Hire all the men you want, but set them to looking after P. Bolton—not after me."

"There are two at his heels already."

"Good; but I'm afraid a hundred wouldn't be enough to keep track of the old fox," laughed Kendrick. "Well, it's time to be getting home. Reach me my hat there, will you? Make sure of the door—here goes the light." And he followed me into the hall and turned the key behind him. "Now, there's no need for you to go home with me," he continued.

"It's my way as well as yours," I replied, "and unless you object to my company, we'll go together."

We faced the west wind that came in gusts from over Nob Hill, with the salt freshness of the ocean fog heavy upon it, turned north at Kearny Street, and at Clay Street took the hill-climbing cable-car that still passed as one of the city's novelties. From the western end of the line we walked to the Kendrick residence on Van Ness Avenue.

"Well, good night, my boy," he said. "Sorry to have brought you up here for nothing. If you should get any light on the Council's plans to-morrow night, come up here next evening—say at eight o'clock. I may have an idea of my own by that time." And he closed the door.

As I turned to descend the steps, my eye was startled by a glimpse of movement among the shrubs that decorated the Kendrick lawn. At first I thought it but a branch tossed by the wind; but an incautious movement revealed the figure of a man silhouetted against the faint illumination from a distant street-lamp, and I felt a momentary gratification that my precaution had been justified.

I descended the flight of steps to the garden with assumed unconcern. Then, instead of following the second flight to the street, I turned, made a sudden spring on to the lawn, straight for the shrub behind which I had seen the man hide himself. It was but twenty-five feet away, and I reached it in an instant. No one was there. For a moment I thought my eyes must have deceived me. Then the rustle of a bush by the fence attracted my attention, and I made a dash for the spot. Before I could reach it a man rose from behind the bush, vaulted the fence, disappeared for a second of time, and then could be seen running swiftly down the street.

There was an eight-foot drop from the garden to the sidewalk, but I made the leap in my turn without mishap, and was running in the wake of the flying night-hawk before I had time to draw breath. I soon gained upon him, and as I came nearer I could hear his hoarse gasps, as the unaccustomed pace told upon him. At the corner of Sacramento Street I was near enough to reach out and grasp him by the coat.

He halted and turned.

"What do you want?" he growled, and then struck at me with sudden movement. "Take that!" he cried, striking again as I tried to close with him, and I felt the shearing of cloth before a sharp blade.

As I staggered back from the impact of the blow, my foot caught on the curb, the earth whirled about, the stone sidewalk gave me a thump alongside the head, and I witnessed a private meteoric display of unrivaled splendor.

I was stunned for a minute, but collecting my wits I scrambled to my feet, cleared my eyes, and looked for the flying enemy. He was nowhere to be seen, and no sound of his footfalls came to my ear. Making sure that he had escaped, I turned to take stock of my injuries. I could find no wound, though a rent through my coat showed how near I had come to the end of all my adventures. A memorandum-book in my inside pocket had stopped the blade with which the spy had struck at me. Then I recovered from my daze enough to become aware that I was holding an overcoat that was none of mine. The enemy had slipped from the garment to secure his escape, and had left it in my hands.

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF BLAZES

With the morning's light I looked carefully over the captured overcoat for identifying marks by which I might trace the elusive spy who was so near ending my life. A hasty survey of the garment when I had reached my room had revealed nothing by which I might learn of the owner; but after a night's sleep the detective instinct burned within me, and I was persuaded that there was something about it to differentiate it from other overcoats, if only I had the keenness to discover it. The garment was of cheap material, and even the maker's name had disappeared from it. There was nothing individual about it, and not even a handkerchief was to be found in its pockets. But when I was about to abandon search once more, a small inside pocket attracted my attention, and, diving within it, I brought out a square of paper, three or four inches wide. The detective instinct within me raised a shout of triumph, and I opened the paper with the conviction that it would bear some address that would lead me to the spy. The detective instinct became more humble to find that the paper bore only a few sprawling characters that were reminiscent of a Chinese laundry or a Canton tea-chest.

Nevertheless, it was the only clue in my possession, and during the day I made several attempts to secure a translation of the marks. But nightfall came without success, and, reinforced by a good dinner, I turned my steps south of Market Street to keep my appointment with Clark.

"Here's the place," said the policeman, pointing across Natoma Street to the corner building, from which lights flashed and sounds of laughter and drunken song floated out on the night air. "We call it the House of Blazes."

Even in the semi-darkness left by the street-lamps and the lights that streamed from the windows, I could see that it was a rambling two-story frame building, with signs of premature age upon it. The neighborhood was far from select, but the House of Blazes had characteristics of evil all its own. Above, the small windows scowled dark, stealthy, mistrustful, as though they sought to escape the eye of the officer of the law who stood by my side. Below, the broader windows, ablaze with lamps, and the swinging half-doors, through which we could see the feet of men and the occasional hat of a taller customer, made a show of openness. But it all seemed the bravado of the criminal who ventures forth by daylight, aggressively assertive of his self-confidence and ready to take to his heels at the first sign that he is recognized by the police. Across the windows and on a swinging sign were painted letters proclaiming that wines and liquors were to be had within and that H. Blasius was the owner.

"It doesn't look to be just the place for a stranger to show his money in," I said lightly.

"It's about as tough as they make 'em," growled the policeman. "There's a sight more throuble in that darty den than in all the others on the beat."

I thanked the policeman and bade him good night.

"Good night, sor. I'm hoping you won't need anything more from me, sor. But just blow a whistle if ye are in chance of throuble, and I'll do my best for ye."

And with this cheerful parting ringing in my ears, I swung back the doors and stepped into the saloon, with the shadow of a wish that the Council of Nine had shown better taste in headquarters.

I found myself in a long, low-ceiled room, lighted by a dozen lamps that struggled to overpower the tobacco smoke that filled it. A dingy, painted bar stretched half-way down the side of the room, and behind it a cracked mirror and a gaudy array of bottles served for ornament and use. Below the bar the room jutted back into an L, where a half-dozen tables were scattered about. The floor was littered with sawdust, trampled and soiled with many feet, and mottled with many a splotch of tobacco juice.

I looked about for Clark and his companions. Five or six loungers leaned against the bar, listening to a stout, red-faced Irishman, who was shaking his fist vigorously as an accompaniment to

a loud denunciation of the Chinese. There was something about the man that drew a second look, though at first glance I thought I had recognized the symptoms of the saloon politician. He had a bristling brown mustache, a shrewd mouth, and a strong aggressive jaw. A little above the medium height, with compact, heavy frame, and broad shoulders that betokened strength, he was a type of the substantial workman.

Beyond the oratorical Irishman with his denunciations of "the haythen divils," stood a man with hat drawn down over his eyes, half hiding his sallow face, and with hands deep in his pockets, who glanced furtively from side to side, as if in suspicion that an enemy was about. Something faintly stirred in memory at the sight of him, but he shuffled out of the saloon as I passed him, and it was not until he was gone that I connected him with the spy whose overcoat lay in my room. It was too late to follow him, for, before I had recalled the vagrant memory, a short fat old man waddled slowly forward and stood before me with the air of a proprietor. I divined that I was face to face with H. Blasius.

"Vat vill you have, mine friend?" he inquired deliberately.

I looked into his fat pasty face, that gave back an unhealthy almost livid pallor to the light that shone upon it, and caught the glance of his shifty bleary eyes under their puffy lids, and a shudder of repulsion ran through me. He was a man of sixty or more. His face, clean-shaven except for a mustache and chin-tuft stained with tobacco juice, revealed to the world every line that a wicked life had left upon it.

He rubbed his fat, moist hands on the dingy white apron that he wore, gave a tug at his mustache, and waited for my reply.

"I'm looking for Mr. Clark," I said.

"*Non*--no soch man is here," he said suspiciously. "I have no one of zat name."

"I'm quite sure he's here," I said. "And I must see him."

The brow of H. Blasius darkened, and he looked about slowly as though he meditated calling for assistance to hasten my departure.

"I don't vant ze trouble," he had begun, when I caught sight of my man at a table in the alcove at the other end of the long room.

"There he is now," I interrupted. "There'll be no trouble, if you don't make it yourself."

I was gone before H. Blasius had brought his wits to understand my meaning, and in a moment stood beside a group of men who were sitting around the farther table, beer glasses before them and pipes in hand, listening to an excited young man with a shock of long, tawny hair, who pounded the table to strengthen the force of his argument. As he came to a pause, I put my hand on the shoulder of a tall, awkward, spare-built man, with a stubby red beard, who was listening with effort, and evidently burning to reply to the fervid young orator. It was Clark, and he rose clumsily and shook hands with effusion.

"I'm glad you come, Mr. Hampden; I'd about give you up. Boys, this is Mr. Hampden, the friend I was telling you about. Won't you take this chair, sir, and spend the evening with us? We was having a little discussion about the Revolution."

"The Revolution!" I exclaimed. "Well, that's a safe antiquarian topic."

"Oh," stammered Clark, "it isn't the old Revolution. That's too far back for us. It's the coming Revolution we're talking about, when all men are to be equal and share alike in the good things of the earth. Parks, here, thinks he knows all about it." And he waved his hand toward the oratorical young man, who looked on the world with eyes that seemed to burn with the light of fever.

Parks accepted this as an introduction, and acknowledged it with a nod as I took a seat. I looked at him with keen interest, for I knew his name as one of the nine leaders who had banded themselves to right the wrongs of the world--with the incidental assistance of Peter Bolton. Then I looked about the rest of the group as Clark spoke their names, and was disappointed to find that a little spectacled German, with a bristling black beard, was the only other member of the Council at the table.

"Hope to know you better, Mr. Hampden," said Parks. "You don't look to be one of us."

"If it's a secret society, I can't say that I've been initiated," I said. "But I hope you'll count me as one of you for an occasional evening. What do you happen to be, if I may ask?"

"We," said Parks, leaning forward and gazing fiercely into my eyes, "we represent the people. We are from the masses."

"I'm afraid, then," I returned with a laugh, "you'll have to count me as one of you. I can't think of any way in which my name gets above the level of the lower ten million."

"Sir," cried Parks, shaking his finger in my face and speaking rapidly and excitedly, "your speech betrays you. You speak of the lower ten million. They are not the lower—no, by Heaven! Your heart is not with the people. There is nothing in you that beats responsive to their cry of distress. You may be as poor as the rest of us, but your feelings, your prejudices are with the despoilers of labor, the oppressors of the lowly. You are—"

What further offense of aristocracy he would have charged upon my head I know not, for Clark reached over and seized his arm.

"Hold on!" he cried. "Mr. Hampden is our guest and a good fellow, so don't be too hard on him. He ain't educated yet. That's all the matter with him. Give him time."

Parks' voice had been rising and his utterance had been growing more rapid and excited, but he lowered his tones once more.

"No offense, Hampden, but my blood boils at the wrongs inflicted on the downtrodden slaves of the wage system, and I speak my mind."

"Oh, go ahead," I said. "It doesn't worry me. Come to think of it, Mr. Parks, you don't seem to be one of the slaves of the wage system yourself. You are, I take it from your words and ways, a man of education and something more."

"Sir," said Parks, striking the table angrily, "it is my misfortune."

"Misfortune?" I laughed inquiringly, and the others laughed in sympathy.

"Misfortune—yes, sir. I repeat it. I have had schooling and to spare. And if it wasn't for that, I could raise this city in arms in a month."

My left-hand neighbor was an old man, a little bent with years, who had been looking about the table with dreamy eye. But at Parks' boastful words his face lighted and he gave a cackling laugh.

"Heh, heh! He's right," he said, addressing the rest of us. "There's a crowd of thieves and robbers on top and they need a taking-down. Parks is just the one to do it."

"You're wrong, Merwin," said Parks, calming down and looking at the old man reflectively. "I'm not the one to do it."

"And why not?" I asked.

"It's the cursed education you speak of," said Parks fiercely. "I am with the masses, but not of them. They mistrust me. Try as I will I can't get their confidence. I can't rouse them. They shout for me, they applaud me, but I can't stir them as they must be stirred before the Revolution can begin."

"What sort of man do you want?" I asked.

"He must be a man of the people," said Parks.

"By which you mean a day-laborer, I judge."

Parks ignored the interruption and went on:

"He must have eloquence, courage, and he must understand men; he must be a statesman by nature—a man of brains. But he must be one of the class he addresses."

"But how are you going to get a man of brains out of that class?" I inquired.

Parks struck the table a sounding blow with his fist, shook his head until his shock of hair stood out in protest, and glared at me fiercely.

"Do you mean to deny," he began hotly, "that brains are born to what you call the lowest classes? Do you deny the divine spark of intelligence to the sons of toil? Do you say that genius is sent to the houses of the rich and not to those of the poor? Do you dare to say that the son of a banker may have brains and that the son of a hodman may not?"

"By no means, my dear fellow. I only say if he has brains he won't be a hodman."

"I've known some pretty smart hodmen in my time," said Clark, when he saw that Parks had no answer ready. "I knew a fellow who made four hundred dollars on a contract. But," he added regretfully, "he lost it in stocks."

"I'm afraid that instance doesn't prove anything, Clark," said Merwin with a thin laugh. "He should have had brains enough to keep out of stocks."

"There's not many as has that," said a heavy-jowled Englishman who sat across the table. "I wish I had 'em myself."

"I'm afraid you're right, Mr. Hampden," said Clark. "We can't get a leader from the hodman class."

Parks leaned forward and spoke quietly and impressively.

"By God, we must!" he said. "I'll be the brains. I'll find the hodman for the mouth, and I'll teach him to talk in a way to set the world on fire."

"And then what?" I asked.

Parks gave his head a shake, and closed his lips tightly as though he feared that some secret would escape them. But the excitable little German with spectacles and a bushy black beard gave me an answer.

"Leeberty, equality, fraternity!" he exclaimed.

"And justice," added the heavy-jowled Englishman.

"These are words, and very good ones," I returned. "But what do you mean by them? You have these things now, or you don't have them—just as you happen to look at it. It usually depends on whether you are successful or not. What does all this mean in action?"

"For one thing," said the square-jawed man seriously, "it means an end of the sort of robbery by law that our friend Merwin here has suffered. Now, twenty years ago he was a prosperous contractor. He took a lot of contracts from old Peter Bolton for filling in some of these water-front blocks down here. He spent two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, d'ye know, and has been lawing for it ever since."

I turned and looked at the face of the old man with more interest. The case of Merwin against Bolton was celebrated in the law books. It was now before the Supreme Court for the sixth time. In the trial court the juries had invariably found for Merwin with costs and interest, and the appellate court had as invariably sent the case back for retrial on errors committed by the lower court, until it had become an impersonal issue, a jest of the law, a legal ghost, almost as far removed from affairs of to-day as "Shelley's case" of unblessed memory.

Merwin looked up quickly, the dreamy gaze no longer clouding his eye.

"I have been kept out of my property for more than twenty years, sir," he said. "It has been a great wrong. If you are interested I should like to tell you about it."

"I am pretty well informed about it already," I replied. "You have been much abused." The legal jest had become a living tragedy, and I felt a glow of shame for the futility of the law that had been unable to do justice to this man.

"I have been made a poor man," said Merwin. "My money was stolen from me by Peter Bolton, and I tell you, sir, he is the greatest scoundrel in the city." And in a sudden flash of temper he struck his fist upon the table.

"He ought to be hanged," said the heavy-jowled man.

"No, no," cried Parks. "It isn't Bolton you should blame. It is the system that makes such things possible. Bolton himself is but the creature of circumstances. As I have reason to know, his heart is stirred by thoughts of better things for humanity. Hang Bolton and another Bolton would take his place to-morrow. Abolish the system, and no man could oppress his neighbor."

"But how are you going to abolish it?" I asked. "It won't go for fine words."

"Rouse the people," cried Parks with passion. "The men who are suffering from these evils are the strength of the nation. Those who profit by the evils are a small minority. Once the people rise in their might the oppressors must fly or be overwhelmed."

"Here's to guns, and the men who know how to use them!" said the heavy-jowled man, draining his glass.

"*Oui, oui! Vive la barricade!*" croaked a harsh voice behind me, and I turned to see the pasty face of H. Blasius over my shoulder.

"Shut up!" said Parks. "We're not ready to talk of guns and barricades."

At this moment a sudden noise of scuffle and angry voices rose above the sounds of conversation and argument that filled the room. Some one made an abortive attempt to blow a police whistle; curses and blows thrilled the air; and then the swinging doors fell apart and a man staggered in, holding dizzily to the door-post for support. His hat was crushed, his clothing torn, and his face covered with blood that seemed to blind him.

As he staggered into the saloon, ten or twelve young men, hardly more than boys, crowded after him, striking at him with fists and clubs. Their faces were hard at best, the lines written upon them by vice and crime giving plain warning to all who might read; but now rage and hatred and lust for blood lighted their eyes and flushed their cheeks, till they might have stood as models for escapes from the infernal regions.

"The cop!" cried a voice; and others took it up, and I recognized in the battered man the policeman who had shown me my way.

"He's the cop as got Paddy Rafferty sent across the bay for ten years," shouted one of the hoodlums, striking a blow that was barely warded off.

"Kick him!" "Do him up!" "Kill him!" came in excited chorus from all parts of the room and swelled into a roar that lost semblance of articulate sound.

Parks and I jumped to our feet at the first sound of the riot.

"Here! this won't do!" said Parks roughly, throwing me back in my chair. "Sit down! You'll get killed without doing any good. I'll settle this." And before I could remonstrate he was running down the room shouting wrathfully.

As I got to my feet again, I saw him pulling and hauling at the mob, shouting lustily in the ears of the men as he threw them aside.

"Come on!" I cried. "We must take a hand in this." And at my call Clark and the Englishman and the little German rose and followed in the wake of the young agitator.

Parks worked his way into the crowd, shouting, appealing, using hands and tongue and body at once to carry his point. He was soon at the side of the policeman, who swayed, half raised his arms, and would have fallen had Parks' arm not come to steady him. The shouting hoodlums paused at this reinforcement. Then the leader, with a curse, struck wildly at Parks' face, and the cries of rage rose louder than before. At this moment, however, the tall, broad-shouldered Irishman, whom I had noticed at my entrance, deftly caught the hoodlum with a blow on the chin that sent him back into the midst of his band.

"Hould on!" he shouted in a resonant voice. "There's to be fair play here! Here's two against the crowd to save a man's life. If there's any more men here let them come next us."

"Here are four," I cried, and our reinforcement shouldered through the throng to the side of the two defenders. The tumult stilled for a little, and Parks seized the moment to burst into indignant speech. He had a high, keen, not unpleasant voice, though it thrilled now with anger and scorn, as he denounced the assault.

"He's the cop that got Paddy Rafferty sent up, I tell you," replied one of the hoodlums. "We said we'd fix him and we done it."

"Well, you get home now or you'll be fixed yourself, sonny," said Parks. "The cops will be on you in just three minutes by the watch. Git!"

"Come on, youse!" said the leader sullenly, rubbing his jaw and giving a spiteful glance at the stout Irishman. "We'll fix these tarrriers some other time,"—and the band slunk out into the darkness.

"That's the kind of cattle that keep back the cause," cried Parks, turning to the crowd with keen eye for the opportunity for speech. And he went on with rude eloquence to expound the "rights of the people," which I judged from his language to be the right to work eight hours for about eight dollars a day and own nobody for master.

"Well said for you, Mr. Parks!" said the Irishman. "I'm of your way of thinkin'. My name's Kearney—Denis Kearney—maybe you've heard of me."

"Maybe I have," said Parks. "I hope to hear more of you, Mr. Kearney. You came in the nick of time to-night."

The policeman now sat in a chair with his face washed and his head bound up in a cloth, and with a sip of liquor was recovering strength and spirit.

"There comes the boys," he said. "They've heard of the shindy." And in another minute four policemen burst into the place.

"Cowdery's gang!" was the brief comment of the commanding officer. "We'll have them under lock and key before morning."

H. Blasius had assumed a most pious expression in a most inconspicuous position behind the bar, but dropped it as the policemen left.

"I've found my hodman," whispered Parks to me.

"Where?"

"Here. He isn't a hodman, but he's just as good. He's a drayman with a voice like a fog-horn and a gift of tongue."

"And the brains?"

"I carry them under my hat," said Parks.

"What's his name?"

"Mr. Kearney—Mr. Hampden," said Parks, raising his voice and introducing me gravely. Then, taking the arm of his new-found treasure, Parks walked out of the saloon.

CHAPTER III

A GLIMPSE OF SUNSHINE

My watch-hands pointed to eight o'clock as I was ushered into Wharton Kendrick's library. It was a handsome room, with handsome books and handsome solid leather-covered furniture to match the leather-covered volumes that lined its walls, but the effect of dark walls, dark ceilings, and dark bindings was a trifle gloomy. I made up my mind that my library should be a light and cheerful room with white and gold trimmings, and was trying to decide whether it should be in the southwest or southeast corner of my château in Spain, when my architectural studies were interrupted by the opening of a door.

I rose in the expectation of meeting my employer; but it was not my employer who entered. Instead of Wharton Kendrick I found myself facing a young woman, who halted, irresolute and surprised, a pace or two from the door. Had it not been for her trailing dress I should at first glance have thought her but a young girl. She was short of stature and slender of figure, and for an instant I had the idea that the long gown and the arrangement of the yellow hair that crowned her head were part of a masquerade. But when I looked in her face I saw that she was a woman grown, and her years might have reached twenty.

"Why, I didn't know you were here," said the startled intruder. Her voice was even-pitched, but it had a curious piquant quality about it.

As I hesitated in surprise, she repeated her thought in more positive form: "I didn't know that any one was here."

"I was waiting for Mr. Kendrick. I was told to wait here," I said apologetically.

The gas-light fell on her face and I saw that she was pretty. Her head was small, but well shaped. Her color was that of the delicate blonde type, but her large eyes were of a deep brown.

"I don't believe you know me, after all," she said, with a sudden mischievous look.

I wanted to lie, but my tongue refused its office.

"You'd better not tell any stories," she added.

"I'm afraid—" I began.

"Oh, if you're afraid I shall go away. I was going to read a book, but it doesn't matter."

"I'm sure it does matter," I said. "If you go away I shall certainly feel as though I'm the one who ought to have gone."

"I don't believe I ought to stay here talking with a man who thinks he doesn't know me."

"I'm a very stupid person, I fear," I said.

"I'm afraid some people would say so," she said with another mischievous look, though her face was perfectly grave; "but I shouldn't dare."

"I'm on the lookout for a good bargain," I said desperately. "I should like very much to exchange names with you."

"Oh, that wouldn't be a fair exchange at all," said the girl, shaking her head gravely. "I know Mr. Hampden's name already. You must offer a better bargain than that."

"Then I must sue for pardon for a treacherous memory," I said.

"It's a very serious matter," said the girl, "but I'll give you three chances to guess. If that's not enough, you'll have to ask uncle."

"Miss Laura—Miss Kendrick!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, did I tell you, after all?" she cried in dismay. "I said uncle, didn't I? Now, you see, I'm quite as stupid as other people."

"Indeed, no," I said. "It's quite unpardonable that I should have forgotten."

"It ought to be, but I'm afraid I shall have to forgive you," she said, dropping into a chair. "It's a longish time."

"How many years has it been?" I asked.

"I'm afraid you're adding to your offenses," she said, with a shake of the head. "You should certainly remember that it was five years ago this summer."

"Have you been away so long?" I exclaimed.

"Oh, dear! what shall I do with such a man? First he doesn't remember me at all, and then he doesn't know how many years I've been gone, and then he has no idea it was so long."

"But you were only a little girl then," I urged.

"And not worth noticing, would you say if you dared? I used to think I was quite grown up in those days."

"You didn't—er—quite give the impression."

"I see I didn't make one," she said. "It's a very good lesson for one's vanity, isn't it?"

"And haven't you been back in all these years?"

"All these years' sounds better," she said. "I believe you are learning. I've been back twice, if you want your question answered."

"It was kept quite a secret."

"Oh, dear, no! Everybody knew who cared anything about knowing."

"And where have you been, and what doing?"

"I was in the East. First I finished the seminary."

"And then?"

"Then I went through college."

"Indeed?"

"Oh, you needn't be so surprised. It's nothing so very wonderful. You didn't suspect it from my looks?"

"You certainly don't look like a blue-stocking."

"I'm afraid I'm not. I never could get enough into my head at one time to be worthy of such a title. I believe a blue-stocking is a lady who has a great deal of learning."

"Or at least," I said, "is very fond of showing it."

"Oh, I think I have her main characteristic then," laughed my companion. "If I know anything I can't rest till I let somebody else know about it, too."

"I believe you're not alone. They say that failing has descended to all the daughters of Mother Eve. How long are you to be here?" I asked.

"Ages, I'm afraid," said Miss Kendrick. "Six months at least—maybe a year."

"Then I can hope for the pleasure of seeing you sometimes?" I said.

"I don't know," she answered, appealing to a bust of Homer on a book-shelf. "Do you think a man with such an uncertain memory could be trusted to keep it in mind that such a person is here?"

"I can vouch for him," I said.

"If you're quite sure—" she said.

"Quite sure," I repeated positively.

"Then you can be told that we are at home on Thursdays. There—I hear uncle showing that comical General Wilson out the door, so I'll be getting my book and go. It was uncle you came to see, I believe."

"It was Mr. Kendrick I called for, but—"

"You needn't go on," interrupted Miss Kendrick calmly. "I suppose you think it is only a white one, but I'd rather not hear it. Now if you wouldn't mind reaching that fourth book from the end of the second row from the top, you'll save me from the mortification of climbing on a chair."

"This one?"

"Yes, please," she said. "Thank you. Good night. I really don't see why I've talked so much."

"It was very good of you," I protested. "Good night."

The swish of her skirts had hardly died away when the opposite door—the one by which I had entered—opened, and Wharton Kendrick walked in.

"Come this way, Wilson. I can put my hand on the book in one second."

"You can't find your citation, Kendrick—it isn't there," said a short, stout, red-faced man, with short yellow-gray side-whiskers, as he bustled in the wake of my client. "I tell you you can't find it. I know the whole thing from cover to cover. Just give me the first line of any page and I'll repeat it right to the bottom. I never have to read a thing more than once and I can carry it on the tip of my tongue for years afterward. Lord bless us, whom have we here?"

"Oh, Hampden," said Kendrick. "I didn't see you. General Wilson, allow me to introduce you." And the magnate gave me a kind word of identification.

"A lawyer?" exclaimed General Wilson, his red face beaming in the frame of his yellow-gray side-whiskers. "Young man, you are entering on the greatest and noblest profession that the human mind has devised. You are following the most elevated and grandest principles that the wit of mankind is capable of evolving from the truths of the ages. I am a humble follower of the profession myself, and am proud to take you by the hand."

He was not proud enough to make the most of the honor, for he gave but a perfunctory grasp as I made some appropriate reply.

"I've been in the profession more decades than I like to tell about," said General Wilson, with a lofty wave of the hand, "but I've been trying to get out of it for the last five years. Perhaps you can't appreciate that, Hampden. Here you're trying to get into it, and I dare say finding it devilish hard; but if you're like me you'll be trying to get out of it some day and finding it a damned sight harder yet."

"I don't doubt it," said I with pious mendacity.

"Here's the book," said Kendrick. But General Wilson waved him aside.

"It's wonderful the way business sticks to a man. I've got clients who just won't be discharged. I thought a year ago that I was going to see the last of them, but no sooner did I mention it than they were all up in arms. 'We can't spare you,' they said. 'I must take a rest,' I told them. 'Take it at our expense,' they said. And the Ohio Midland gave me a special car and paid the expenses of a trip around the country, and the Pennsylvania Southern gave me a twenty-thousand-dollar check to settle for a vacation in Europe, and the Rockland and Western made me the present of a country place where I could go and have quiet; and after that what could I do?"

"They must have been irresistible," I admitted.

"Just so; but even then I tried to beg off. I told 'em I had enough money. It wasn't money I wanted. It was rest—freedom from worry of business, the grinding care of law cases—that I was after. But it wouldn't do. The Ohio Midland said, 'Wilson, if you can't be with us, you mustn't be against us. We know you'll be back again. Take twenty thousand a year as a retainer and count yourself as one of us yet. We shouldn't be easy else.' But the Pennsylvania Southern and the Rockland and Western wouldn't allow even that. They said, 'Wilson, we can't do without you. We'll give you all the help you want, but we must have you at the head. Name your own figures. It isn't a question of money. You must be our leading counsel, even if you don't look in on us more than once a quarter.' I couldn't shake 'em off, so, as I've been saying to Kendrick, I'm like to die in harness, though I'd give anything to be free and enjoy life as you young fellows do."

"Just so," said Kendrick cheerily; "but you're way out of the running about that Mosely matter. Here's the book, and here's the page, and it was just as I was telling you."

"Ahem!" growled General Wilson, turning redder than ever and taking the book gingerly. "Oh, this is the thing you were talking about, is it? Of course, of course, you were quite right—Mosely, of course. I don't need to read a word of it. I thought you were talking about that Moberly case. Mosely, of course. Well, I'll send you those papers as soon as I get to New York. I must be off now. I've got to see Governor Stanford to-night, and he's one of your early-to-bed men; so good night."

"You'll call in on me within the week, then?" said Kendrick, taking him to the door.

"Oh, I shall see you in two days. We must press this business to an issue. They are waiting for me in New York, and I can't waste much time in small affairs like this. Well, good night, Kendrick, God bless you! There ought to be more men like you. Good night." And the outer door closed behind him.

Kendrick suppressed a burst of laughter with a muscular effort that appeared to threaten apoplexy.

"The old humbug!" he gasped. "Hampden, you've seen the most picturesque liar that ever struck the Golden Gate. He is a regular Roman candle of romances."

"Is he a fraud? Is it all a case of imagination run wild?"

"No, not altogether, I should say. Half of it seems to be the truth, though which half to believe I'm blest if I can make out. He brings good letters."

"From New York?"

"Yes; and Chicago, too. He came out two weeks ago to work up a land deal. Represents a million dollars in a syndicate, though I fancy he's not so big a part of it as he makes out. He's full of these tall stories, though they don't all of them hang together well. It's fun to listen to him, though. I couldn't help taking him down about that Mosely affair. He was so cock-sure of knowing everything that I couldn't resist the temptation."

"You did give his vanity a sinige."

"It wasn't the politic thing to do with a million-dollar trade hanging in the balance, but I reckon he's got enough of his feathers left to carry him through the deal."

Wharton Kendrick leaned back in his chair, and his face glowed in amusement.

Then on a sudden he straightened up, all gravity.

"Did you bring any news?" he asked.

"I have a present of an overcoat," I answered. And I gave him the story of the adventure of the night.

"That was a rash play of yours," he said gravely. "Don't do it again. It wasn't necessary."

"Are you certain that Bolton is the only man who has an interest in setting a watch on you?" I inquired.

"Why, what have you found?" asked Kendrick, a little startled.

"I haven't found anything but an idea—and that," I said, handing him a bit of paper.

"What's this?" asked Kendrick, putting on his eye-glasses. "Your wash bill? China lottery? or what?"

"That's the thing that has puzzled me. You see, there's quite a bit of Chinese writing on it."

"Well, what of it?"

"I got it out of the overcoat that the fellow left in my hands."

"Ah-ha!" said Kendrick. "And you don't see what one of Bolton's men would be doing with a Chinese letter in his pocket?"

"That was just my idea—in part, at least. The letter was a clue, anyhow, and I took it to a Chinese firm I have done some law business for and know pretty well. I showed it to the boss partner. He talks English like a native, and chatters like a magpie. But when he saw that slip of paper he shut up like a clam, and all I could get out of him was 'No sabby.' You know the look of stolid ignorance they can put on when there's anything they don't want to tell."

"It's the most exasperating thing you can run against."

"Well, when my merchant failed me, I went to another I knew slightly, then to an interpreter, then to the boss of the Chinese guides. The same 'No sabby,' and the same stolid look everywhere."

"Why didn't you go to the Chinese interpreter at the City Hall? He's a white man, and wouldn't be afraid to give away secrets."

"I tried him, but he said it was nonsense. It's evidently a cipher, though it's one pretty well known in Chinatown."

"I'll tell you what to do then, Hampden,"—and he took out his pencil and wrote a few words on a card. "Take this to Big Sam at his Chinatown office to-morrow. Show him the paper, and he'll give you the reading. He is under some obligations to me, and he can hardly refuse."

"Just the thing! As Big Sam comes pretty near being the King of Chinatown, he will have no one to fear."

"Now about the Council of Nine. What did you get?"

"Well, I saw two members of the Council and a few of their followers. I tried to pump them, and I dare say I shall become as good a convert to their propaganda as old Bolton himself. They have some crack-brained notions of an uprising of the people, but they don't appear to have anything definite in view at present." And I gave my employer an account of my visit to the House of Blazes.

He stroked his red whiskers meditatively, and then said:

"Well, that doesn't sound as though they could amount to much, but as long as P. Bolton is backing them, you'd better keep a close eye on them."

CHAPTER IV

MACHIAVELLI IN BRONZE

Waverly Place was in the full tide of business. The little brown man in his blue blouse and clattering shoes was seen in his endless variety, chattering, bargaining, working, lounging, moving; and the short street, with its American architecture half orientalized, was gay with colors and foul with odors.

Patient coolies trotted past, bending between the heavily laden baskets that swung upon the poles passed over the shoulder. On the corner an itinerant merchant sat under an improvised awning with a rude bench before him on which to display his wares, and a big Chinese basket beside him from which his stock might be renewed as it was sold. Here was a store with a window display of fine porcelains, silks, padded coats and gowns covered with grotesque figures, everything about it denoting neatness and order. Next it was a barber shop where two Chinese customers were undergoing the ordeal of a shave.

Beyond the barber shop was a stairway leading to the depths, from which the odors of opium and a sickening compound of indescribable smells floated on the morning air. Brown men could be seen through the smoke and darkness, moving silently as though in dreams, or listlessly gazing at nothing. Here was a shop of many goods, with fish and fruits exposed to tempt the palates and purses of the passer: Chinese nut-fruits, dried and smoked to please the Chinese taste, candied cocoanut chips that form the most popular of Chinese confections, with roots and nuts and preserves in variety, appealing temptingly to the eyes of the Chinese who passed. Behind, were boxes and bales and cans, big chests and little chests, bright chests and dingy chests, in endless confusion. The blackened walls and ceilings gave such an air of age that the shop seemed as though it might have come out of the ancient Chinese cities as a relic of the days of Kublai Khan. Shoe factories, clothing factories, and cigar factories, were scattered along the street, with wares made and displayed in the American fashion, and here and there, as if in mockery, hung signs that bore the legend "White Labor Goods."

The little brown men sewed and hammered and smoothed and polished and smoked and chattered and traded—the great hive of Chinatown was astir; and over all rose the murmur of the strange sing-song tongue that finds its home on the banks of the Yellow River. Here and there a white face showed. But where it belonged to a dweller in Waverly Place it was sodden, brutal, depraved. Waverly Place got only the dregs and seepage of the white race, and such as dwelt there boasted of an intimate knowledge and possession of the vices of three continents.

Half-way up the block from Clay Street I paused before a dingy doorway. The building had been one of the substantial structures of early San Francisco, but the coolie occupation had orientalized it with a coating of dirt and a mask of decay.

"This is an unpromising place to look for the richest Chinaman in San Francisco," was my mental comment. "But it is surely the number given me."

As I moved to enter the door, a stout, well-fed Chinaman, with a pockmarked face, his hands hidden in the sleeves of his thick blue blouse, put his body in the way.

"What you wan'?" he asked, with a trace of aggression in his voice.

"I want see Big Sam," I said.

The Chinaman's face took on the blank, stolid look of utter ignorance.

"No sabby Big Sam. No Big Sam heah."

"Nonsense! You know Big Sam. Every Chinaman in San Francisco knows Big Sam. This is where I'm told he lives. I've got to see him."

"No sabby Big Sam heah. One Big Sam he live Stockton St'eet, one Big Sam he live Oakyland. You go Stockton St'eet, you go Oakyland. No Big Sam heah."

"See here, John," I said, "I've got to see Big Sam, and I know he's here, and I'm going to see him. So get out of the way."

The Chinaman straightened up in offended dignity. "John" was a term of insult, or at least of derogation in the Chinese mind. Then he called back into the darkness and two other Chinese appeared. They were better dressed than the ordinary, and were evidently some grades above the Chinese laborers who thronged the street.

There was a minute or two of conversation in the high-pitched singsong tongue that is so well adapted to the purpose of concealing thought—from the white race, at least—and then one of the others stepped forward.

"I must see Big Sam," I said in a determined tone. "You can tell him first, or I'll go in without it, just as you please."

Before he could speak there was a shout and a scream behind me, and I turned to see a Chinese girl running out of the fruit and variety store across the way. She was probably fifteen years old and had that clear, brilliant, creamy complexion that is sometimes seen in Chinese women. Though her round flat face was not beautiful to the western eye, it represented one of the highest types of oriental attractiveness. Even the clumsy garments in which the Chinese dress their women, with their long sleeves and armless coat and baggy trousers, were not able to conceal the fact that she was graceful and well formed. I noted these details more in memory than in the moment when she clattered into view, her clumsy Chinese shoes beating a tattoo on the boards. She had hardly reached the sidewalk when a half-dozen blue-bloused heathen surrounded her. She gave a scream, but she was seized by two of the band, a cloth was thrown over her head, and her cries were silenced. If I had taken time for thought, I should have sought the police instead of the center of disturbance, for I understood how little chance I should have in a contest with a band of highbinders. But I could not see murder or kidnapping done before my eyes without lifting a hand, and I raised a cry and started across the way.

The street suddenly became alive with shouts and screams, and a hundred Chinamen came running, all with hands under their blouses, chattering ferociously as they pressed toward the struggling group. Before I could reach the other side of the way the girl and her captors had mysteriously disappeared, whisked through some of the doors that looked blankly upon the street, and in their place was a mob of Chinamen, shouting, gesticulating, and blowing police whistles, while threats of slaughter flashed from their ugly faces. Two policemen appeared on the run and there was a sudden melting away of the crowd. Hands came out from under the blouses and from inside the long roomy sleeves. Threats and hatred faded out of the faces of the quarreling men, and in their place came the stolid mask of the "no sabby."

"What's the matter here?" panted one of the policemen, while the other hustled the Chinese from one side of the walk to the other with gruff orders to "move on."

I told of what I had seen.

"Highbinders," said the policeman. "I thought it was time they was breakin' out again. Oh, murther, but there'll be killin' over this before the day's at an end. Hullo! what's this?"

An old Chinaman came forward at this moment, wringing his hands and chattering like a monkey. His face was stricken with signs of heart-breaking woe.

"He says it was his daughter," said the other policeman.

"Yes—all same daughtah—my gell—you sabby?" wailed the old man. "She go down store one minute all 'long boy—all same my boy—you sabby? One man come, say 'you come 'long me.' She heap cly. Boy heap cly. Two men come 'long—catch gell—so. One man hit boy 'long side head. Tlee, fo' men thlow cloth over gell's head—she no cly no mo'. Tlee, fo', fi' men take gell. Boy lun home. All same I sabby no mo'. Gell all steal." And the old man wrung his hands with mournful cries.

"H-m! the old girl-stealing trick of the highbinders," said the first policeman, whom I took to be a sergeant of the force.

"Does he suspect anybody?" I asked.

The old man caught the idea.

"Maybe—I no know," he cried. "One day two men come. All same they say heap like my gell. I say no got gell. One man say all same give me t'ousand dolla'. I say I no want t'ousand dolla'. Othe' man he say twel' hund' dolla'. I say all same I no want twel' hund' dolla'. Two men say bad word, all same Clistian, you sabby?"

"What men were they?" asked the sergeant.

"You sabby Suey Sing men?" said the old man. "Two men all same Suey Sing."

"The Suey Sing Tong—I'll bet he's lying," said the sergeant. "It's more like the Sare Bo Tong. Well, go along with him and get the boy's story. Maybe the kid can't lie so fast. I'll go down to the hall and send up a squad. There's like to be trouble over this."

"Do you think there will be a fight?" I asked.

"There was a lot of the Hop Sings about as we came up," said the officer, "and I reckon the old man belongs to 'em. The others was mostly Sare Bos. There's bad blood between 'em, anyhow, and I look for some killing out of it. Are you walking down?"

"No, I've a bit of business here." And I turned back to the door that had barred the way to the rooms of Big Sam.

As I reached the threshold I drew back before the advance of a party of Chinese, who filed out of the shop one by one to the number of a dozen or more. Their stolid faces showed no interest in me or anything else, and half of them turned to the south, half to the north, and they followed the uncompanionable Chinese habit of straggling in single file. A tall stout Chinaman, dressed in baggy trousers and a padded Chinese coat of fine blue cloth, stood just inside the door and watched them narrowly as they went out. As the last coolie passed I stepped forward and into the doorway.

The tall Chinaman looked at me blandly.

"Were you not a little indiscreet to think of interfering in one of our family quarrels?" he said, with a ghost of a smile on his full smooth face. He spoke English fluently, with just a trace of the Chinese intonation. The "r" that is the despair of the Chinese tongue rolled full and clear from his lips. I had been on the point of addressing him in the "pidgin English" considered necessary in communicating with the heathen intelligence, and was stricken with surprise.

"I—I didn't think of interfering," I replied.

"One would not have suspected you of so much discretion to see you running across the street," he said, with the same bland look. "The next time you think of taking part in such an entertainment, I beg of you to reflect that half the men in the crowd carried something like this." And with a smile he drew back the Chinese jacket and touched the handle of a big navy six-shooter. The weapon was eighteen inches long and would carry a forty-four caliber bullet for a hundred yards. "If he didn't have that he probably had something of this sort about him." He gave his voluminous sleeve a shake, and a big knife with a ten-inch blade was in his hand. "These pleasant little parties are not always what they seem," he continued, "and it is just as well to watch them from a distance."

"Thank you," I said. "I'd prefer not to be on close acquaintance with anything of the kind you are hinting at. That wasn't what I came for."

"I understand that you were looking for me, Mr.—"

"Hampden," I supplied the name. "I believe I am speaking to—" Then I hesitated. I really did not know his name, and it struck me as something of an absurdity to call the dignified and forceful man before me by the nickname that was on the tip of my tongue.

He smiled.

"Sometimes I am known as Kwan Sam Suey," he said, "but your people call me 'Big Sam.' Won't you step this way?"

He turned back into the dingy shop, passed into a dingy hallway, and led to a dingy stairway beyond. It was something worse than shabby. I reflected with wonder that one of the richest of the

Chinese, and by report the most powerful man in Chinatown, should be content to dwell in such a barn. On the third floor Big Sam opened a door and stood aside bowing me to enter.

"My office," said he.

As I passed the threshold I was overwhelmed with amazement. Instead of the bare walls and dingy cobwebbed den the entrance had led me to expect, I was ushered into a room fitted up with a wealth of decoration and discomfort that was thoroughly oriental. The walls were covered with woven tapestry, grotesque in figures and bright with colors. Dark cabinets, rich with carving, stood about the room; the desk and chairs showed the patient handicraft of the Ancient Empire; the floor was inlaid with varied woods, and beaten brass and copper were freely used for decorative effect. To the western mind the colors and the ornamentation were garish, yet I could see that the fittings were costly and a striking example of Chinese artistic taste.

Big Sam waved me to a seat and took his place at the desk.

"I assume, Mr. Hampden, that you did not come here out of idle curiosity?"

"That depends," said I, repressing with difficulty the instinct to address him in the "pidgin" dialect. "You might call it curiosity, and idle at that; but it is of some concern to me."

"I can believe it," he said politely.

"But before I enter on the errand that brings me here, I should present you with my credentials." And I handed him the card from Kendrick.

He scarcely glanced at it.

"Any friend of Mr. Kendrick's is welcome to any service in my power to give," he said, with a bow.

"I have a paper written in your tongue that I should like explained to me," I said, bringing forth the sheet and unfolding it.

Big Sam leaned across the desk to receive it. I put it in his hand and kept one eye on his face, the other on the sheet of paper.

There was no trace of surprise on the bronze mask of the Oriental. For an instant I thought I could detect a shadow of the stolid "no-sabby" look of the coolie, but it was gone with the dropping of an eyelid. There was before me only the grave, impassive face of the Chinese merchant.

"What is the difficulty?" he asked with a polite smile, after he had glanced over the paper.

"The difficulty is that none of your countrymen seems to be able to translate it."

"I can not believe it."

"I have asked a dozen."

"They were very busy." The voice was a combination of assertion and inquiry, but my ear warned me of something mocking in it, too.

"They concealed it most successfully, if they were," I retorted.

Big Sam smiled again, and took up the paper. It slipped from his hand and fluttered to the floor.

"Excuse my clumsiness," he said, diving after it.

I sprang around the corner of the desk to assist in recovering it, and dropped to one knee.

"I beg your pardon," I said, catching at the paper that Big Sam was stowing away in his capacious sleeve. "I believe this is the document." And I held it up.

"I think not," said Big Sam, straightening up and looking me blandly in the eye. "I believe this is it." And he handed me another paper with a bewildering maze of Chinese characters straggling across it.

I was puzzled and rose, looking first at the sheets of paper and then at Big Sam. There was a flash of triumph in his eye that made me suspect that neither sheet was mine, after all. I cursed my ill-luck in not knowing something of Chinese writing.

"Allow me to assist you," said Big Sam politely. "This is your paper." And he indicated one of the two in my hand with his long brown finger.

I saw that I was beaten. The clever Oriental had been one too many for me. I raged inwardly as I looked at that bland, courteous, impassive face before me, and for an instant thought of attempting to search him by force. The thought was gone as soon as it came. Even with a fair field the result of a personal encounter between us would have been in doubt. Big Sam was a well-built, powerful man, able to give a good account of himself in a rough-and-tumble fight. But in that den it would have been madness to raise a finger against him. I should but add another to the long list of mysterious disappearances. I swallowed my discomfiture and said as blandly as Big Sam himself:

"If you have no objections I'll take a translation of both documents."

Big Sam paid my request the tribute of a smile. I read in the turn of his lips a confirmation of my suspicion that neither paper was the one I had brought.

"Certainly," he said. "I will read them both to you. After that you can say more wisely which is yours."

He reached out his hand to take one of the papers, when a triple rap sounded at one of the panels. He straightened up and looked at me gravely.

"If you have no objections, Mr. Hampden, I shall do a little business. Can you spare the time for the interruption?"

"Certainly. When shall I come back?" said I, rising.

"Don't move," said the Oriental courteously. "It will be but a few minutes, and it may interest you." He rapped on the desk before him, the door swung open, and in filed a dozen or more Chinese.

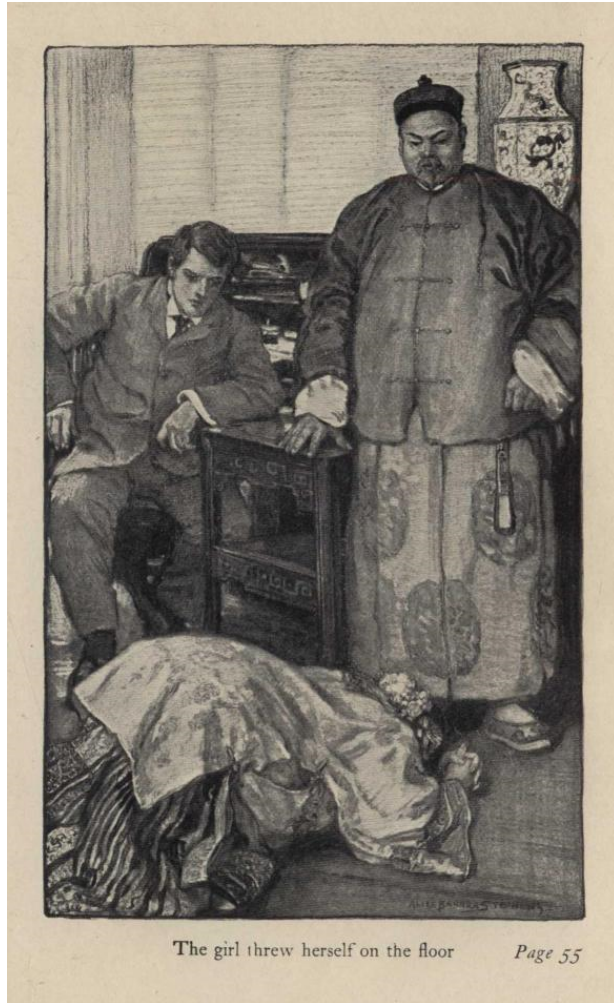
In the midst of the band were two men whose coarse dark faces stirred a ripple of memory. Where had I seen them? For a moment I could not recall them, searching too far back in time to cross their trail. Then it came to me that these were the two villains who had seized the Chinese girl across the way but a few minutes before. Their stolid faces were hardly more expressive than a mask, yet under the "no-sabby" look there was an indefinable trace of fear. In the rear of the band was the old man whose girl had been stolen. None of them paid the slightest attention to my presence, yet I felt well assured that not a detail of my appearance was lost to them, as they huddled about the desk before Big Sam.

The face of Big Sam had changed. In place of the bland and courteous diplomat was the stern judge and ruler. In his eye was the anger that he could not wholly conceal. His voice gave no sign of emotion. He spoke in even tones, yet there was a force behind them that made every word a threat.

It might all have been in dumb show for the understanding I got of it. On the one side was accusation and reproach. On the other was sullen excuse and defense. I could see that the anger of Big Sam grew as he spoke. Then at some denial or evasion of the men before him he clapped his hands, a door opened and the young girl whose abduction I had witnessed stepped in. She gave a cry as she saw the two men who had seized her, and would have shrunk back.

The old man, who had been standing in dejection in the rear of the crowd, made an inarticulate sound of satisfaction and started toward her.

Big Sam jumped to his feet; the rage in his eyes overflowed into his face, and his voice rang out sharply. The girl ran to Big Sam and clasped her hands, then threw herself on the floor before him.



The girl threw herself on the floor

At the sound of Big Sam's words the old man stepped back mumbling. Big Sam waved his hand, the abductors and the old man were led away, and the girl, with hands clasped, lay bowed to the floor beside me.

The rage slowly faded out of the face of Big Sam. With a word he raised the girl to her feet, motioned her to a chair and seated himself.

"Of what use is it to hold the power of life and death over men, when folly and greed are more powerful than your will?"

Big Sam spoke with a smile, but there was a bitterness in his tone.

"Neither money nor fear can put brains into the head of a fool," he continued, with the same acrid savor to his words. "I suppose you have hardly understood what has gone on, Mr. Hampden."

"I confess I am much in the dark."

"Necessarily, as you do not understand our language. You saw the beginning of the trouble. You have seen what followed. I wish you could tell me the end."

"I'm sorry," I answered, "that I'm not a prophet—"

"It would be worth something to me—to both of us—if you were."

He paused a moment and turned to his charge before he continued: "This girl, as you may suppose, is a valuable piece of property."

"I had not looked at her in that light."

"A defect of your western training, Mr. Hampden. She belongs to one of our tongs—or to the leading men of that tong, which amounts to the same thing. Another tong has been most anxious to

secure her, and has offered as high as three thousand dollars for her possession. It was refused and four thousand demanded. I interfered so far as to order that the girl should be reserved until some man offered to make her his wife. She is pretty—very pretty, to our notions—and I have interested myself so much in her welfare as to think that she would grace a home. I suppose I do not need to tell you that the leaders of the two tongs have no such destiny in view for her."

"Well, no, if rumor does them no injustice," I assented.

"It was promised that I should be obeyed. I have been obeyed for many months. Yet just at this moment, when it is of the utmost importance that we should be a peaceful, united body, these dogs of the gutter start a war between the tongs."

"You have shown your power to end it," I said.

"You are too flattering, I fear," said the King of Chinatown. "Fire in flax, you say. It is so much easier to keep fire out of flax than to stamp it out after it starts. It is in my power to punish these men, but I fear that it is beyond my power to smother their enmity. In the code of the tongs blood or blood-money must pay for this." He mused for a little and seemed to be speaking to himself as much as to me. "That this should happen at such a time, when everything depends on our self-control! It is shameful—shameful—a reproach to our race."

"At such a time? I do not understand you," I ventured. The hint in his words was too plain to miss.

He looked at me sharply.

"You do not know what is going on in your own city, Mr. Hampden," he said politely.

"I confess to a lack of information on the point you mention."

"It will be brought to your attention later," said Big Sam dryly. "But I am detaining you with matters of no interest. You wished a translation of these papers?"

His face was bland and impassive, yet I had the impression that he felt he had said too much.

"It has been deeply interesting," I said. "But I am imposing on your good nature." It was of no use to seek to learn from Big Sam anything that he thought fit to conceal, and I placed the slips before him.

He read them off gravely. One was a polite note of invitation to dinner. The other a memorandum of goods bought, or to be bought.

I thanked him and raged inwardly that I should have been outwitted.

Big Sam smiled blandly. "It is nothing in the way of treason, whichever paper you may choose."

"Quite innocent," I said, looking in his half veiled eyes. I read that he was under no delusion that he had deceived me. I rose to go.

"One moment, Mr. Hampden," he said. "You have asked a trifling favor of me. May I ask a much greater one of you?"

"Certainly."

"This girl—I am perplexed to know what to do with her."

"Is there a more proper custodian than her father?"

"Father?"

"The old man—you know."

Big Sam laughed—a most unpleasant laugh, too.

"Quite as near a relation as yourself, Mr. Hampden. He is merely the custodian for his tong."

"Then his pitiful tale to the police—"

"Oh, we do not want for the inventive faculty."

"Then what better guardian could you suggest than yourself," I said, "or what better place than in your own home—or one of your homes?" Big Sam was reported to have one white wife and two Chinese wives, and it seemed to me that he might provide for her safety with one of the three, in case he did not wish to add to his matrimonial blessings.

"I have thought of that, but there are difficulties," he said, as a man considering. "I shall excite less enmity if I can provide for her safety in another way."

"The Mission—" I suggested.

"I should have both tongs at my throat at once," he laughed. "She must be where she can be returned at my will. And it is best that she should be with some good white woman."

"I'm afraid that the good white woman you have in mind would not care to take her in charge on those terms," I said.

Big Sam looked at the girl thoughtfully.

"Well, then, I must let my benevolent plans for her welfare go. It is a pity, too. I do not often indulge in such a luxury. But there are more important matters at stake than the life of a girl."

I looked at the girl and remembered a painted face that had grinned at me from behind a wicket a little while before. At the thought of what it meant to her, I took a sudden resolve.

"If I can be of service, I shall be happy."

"I don't think you will regret it," said Big Sam. "Can you arrange it by this evening?"

"I can not promise. The conditions make a difficulty."

"True. But they are imperative. I must trust to your honor to carry them out. But I hope that you will remember that I stake my life on it."

I looked my surprise.

"It is quite true," he said simply. "My people are not troubled with scruples in the matter, and I must be security that the girl will be returned when the conditions I make are complied with."

"And these are—"

"That a worthy man of her race wishes to make her his wife, and is willing to settle the claims of the two tongs."

"The two tongs?"

"Yes. He must pay the price demanded by the one, and the—the—"

"Blackmail," I suggested, as Big Sam hesitated for a word.

"Well, yes—not a pleasant word, I believe, but accurate—the blackmail demanded by the other."

"I will do my best to find a guardian who will meet your conditions."

"Can you make it convenient to bring your word this evening?"

"That is short notice."

"It is important. I shall be here from nine to twelve."

"I shall do my best."

"I shall be deeply in your debt," he said.

I looked at him closely.

"You can cancel it readily."

"I shall be most happy. How?"

I hesitated a moment and rose.

"By telling me what is the business of your communications with Mr. Peter Bolton."

We had come to such confidential terms on the matter of the maiden that Big Sam allowed himself to be surprised. His discomposure flashed in his eyes for but an instant, and was gone.

"I do not understand you," he said politely, rising in his turn.

"The memorandum that I brought might remind you," I said dryly.

I could see that I had risen a notch in Big Sam's estimation; and he was uncertain how much more I knew than was on the surface.

"You have the advantage of me," he said. "I furnished Mr. Bolton a thousand men three months ago, but we have had no transactions since. I wish you good morning. I shall expect you to-night between nine o'clock and midnight."

And he bowed me out.

CHAPTER V

MISS KENDRICK'S PLEASURE

"I suppose it's my uncle you want to see, so I'll be going," said Miss Kendrick in her piquant voice. She had been reading as I was ushered into the library, and now stood, book in hand, in a graceful attitude of meditated flight.

"If you please," I said, "it's not your uncle I want to see. I want to ask a favor of you."

"A favor? Of me? Well, I hope it has nothing to do with the Bellinger ball, for I'm trying to invent an excuse for not going." And Miss Kendrick tilted her nose and looked defiantly at me.

"I had no idea such an atrocity was in contemplation," I said. "What I want is some advice."

"Oh, how delightful!" cried Miss Kendrick, sinking into her chair and motioning me to a seat. "I always did dearly love to give advice. It's such fun, for nobody ever follows it, and I can always tell them how much better things would have turned out if they had. But I never had anybody come and ask for it before." There was a sarcastic note in her piquant voice that made me wonder, after all, whether I liked it.

"Now you are making sport of me," I said.

"Not at all. I am quite serious, and shall listen with all my ears. Who is she, and what is the difficulty?"

"*Cherchez la femme*--I see you have learned your proverbs. She's a little heathen and I forgot to ask her name, and--"

"You're a heathen yourself, then. Why don't you tell your story straight?"

"You interrupted me. She's a Chinese girl--"

"Oh," cried Miss Kendrick, "I don't want to criticize, but if she isn't prettier than the ones I've seen, it's due my conscience to tell you that I don't admire your taste. And you might at least have inquired her name."

"Good heavens!" I gasped. "It's not a love affair."

"How disappointing!" she sighed, with an affectation of addressing the bust of Homer that frowned from the top of the bookcase. "I thought he was going to be interesting. Well, if it isn't a love affair, I don't see what you want my advice for; but if you'll have the goodness to explain the matter, I'll do my best for you."

Thereupon I told her the story of my morning's adventure, or so much as concerned the Chinese maiden, and set forth the wish of Big Sam to have the girl in the hands of a white woman who would surrender her on demand.

"Now, I've gone to three ladies I thought might be willing to undertake the charge," I concluded, "but they would hear nothing of it unless she was to be converted and stay with the whites, or with Christian Chinese. That is out of the question. I'm at the end of my list, and I'm looking for another; so I've come to you."

Miss Kendrick listened with absorbed interest. Whatever of raillery or affectation there had been in her manner was gone.

"I'm not wise about such matters," she said soberly, "but I think you have done what you ought. I've heard of this dreadful slavery from the girls who teach at the Mission, but I can hardly believe it. I'm sure we must do what we can to save this girl." She was silent for a little, and then went on. "I'm afraid my list is the Mission list. And you're quite certain the Mission list won't do?"

"Quite certain."

She counted her small fingers with an inaudible moving of the lips, and I watched her with the pleasure that one takes in watching a pretty child. She was so small it seemed impossible that

she was seriously considering one of the serious problems of life. She gave a little sigh as the last finger was reached.

"I'm afraid I don't know her," she said regretfully. "All my ladies are very religious ladies, and I don't think they would approve your bargain at all. I'm not sure, on mature consideration, that I approve it myself."

"It is that or nothing."

"Isn't there a law, or a habeas corpus writ, or a policeman, or something?" said Miss Kendrick anxiously.

"I'm afraid," said I, smiling grimly at the recollection of Big Sam and his power, "that the law doesn't afford us much encouragement. We should never find her if we tried that policy."

"Well, I suppose you know best about that. So I don't see anything to do but to take her in here."

"Why, Miss Kendrick!" I exclaimed. "I didn't think of such a thing as that. What would your uncle say?"

"Uncle might be a little explosive," admitted Miss Kendrick with a smile, "but it's just possible that he could be managed."

I was perplexed to know what to do. I could see vague, unformed reasons against accepting her offer, yet it might prove that there was no other resource, if I was not to abandon the Chinese girl to her fate. I was turning over in my mind what to say when a servant appeared and announced:

"Mr. Baldwin to see you, Miss."

Miss Kendrick blushed very prettily at the name, and I felt a sudden dislike of any man who should be so far in her favor that his name should call the color to her face.

"Here's the man who can help us," she said. "He's sure to know somebody who will do."

This confidence in Mr. Baldwin gave me a most unpleasant shock, nor were my unchristian feelings softened by the air of confidential proprietorship with which Mr. Baldwin took Miss Kendrick's hand and replied to Miss Kendrick's greeting.

Mr. Baldwin proved to be a tall, big-faced young man, with a black mustache and a pair of snapping black eyes. He accepted an introduction with such frigid politeness that it was only an access of internal resentment that prevented me from being frozen.

"I believe we have not met," he said coldly.

"I believe not," I replied cheerfully, "though I saw you in the last trial of Merwin against Bolton."

He bowed in a superior way at the compliment of the recollection, though as junior member of the firm of Hunter, Fessenden and Baldwin he had played in court what the actors know as a "thinking part" as the guardian of a stack of law books from which his more celebrated partners drew their inspiration.

"For the defense," admitted Mr. Baldwin. "A very interesting case."

"Oh, don't get him started on that, Mr. Hampden," said Miss Kendrick. "I've lectured him on the wickedness of being in the hire of that awful Peter Bolton, but he's quite incorrigible. I've something much more important to talk to him about."

"I am all ears," said Mr. Baldwin, unbending graciously. It was marvelous to note the difference in his manner of addressing us.

"Not so bad as that!" said Miss Kendrick. "Well, it's a case of knight-errantry that Mr. Hampden has engaged in, and your help is needed."

"Oh," said Mr. Baldwin, "my services are tendered only to beauty in distress."

"That's exactly the case," said Miss Kendrick. "It isn't Mr. Hampden who is to be rescued. It's a lady fair. She's locked up in the ogre's castle and I want her taken out."

"Very good," said Mr. Baldwin. "Would any particular time suit you? It lacks three hours yet of midnight."

"Oh, it must be done right away," said Miss Kendrick.

"Well," I said, "Mr. Baldwin should be enlightened as to the chief difficulty. There's no trouble in getting the lady in the case. The principal thing is to know what to do with her after she's rescued." I began to hope that Mr. Baldwin might know of some proper custodian for the Chinese girl.

"Why, Mr. Hampden is to marry her out of hand, I suppose," said he. "That's the way it used to run in the old story-books."

"Thank you, no," I laughed. "I resign my claim to Mr. Baldwin in advance."

"I don't think it would do," said Miss Kendrick, shaking her head sagely. "Besides, there are other conditions to be fulfilled. But I truly want your counsel, Mr. Baldwin."

"At your service. Let me hear the case."

Thereupon Miss Kendrick stated the problem of the Chinese girl.

"Now," she continued, "unless you can suggest some better way, I want her brought here."

"Well, my advice, since you have asked it, is to have nothing to do with the affair," said Mr. Baldwin.

"Oh, that wasn't the part I wanted to ask you about," said Miss Kendrick composedly. "I want to find if you know anybody better fitted than I am to take charge of her under the conditions—some older person, you know, for I'm not so venerable as I'm afraid I shall be some day."

Mr. Baldwin appeared to be no better pleased than I with the idea of having Miss Kendrick take charge of the girl.

"These are not the sort of people you should have to do with," he began, when she stopped him.

"Were you going to say that you knew of somebody who can do it better than I? Because if you weren't, the sooner you and Mr. Hampden start on your expedition the sooner you'll be coming back."

I was not so sure that I cared for the company of Mr. Baldwin in my visit to Big Sam, but I could see no way to decline it.

"I think," said Mr. Baldwin with sudden brightening, "that we want Mercy Fillmore. She isn't so old a person as you might like, Miss Kendrick, but she has taken to charity work and is used to dealing with this sort of people. Except for her liking for that kind of work, she's a reasonable creature and doesn't make conversion to a church the sole object of her life. I don't see why she has gone in for it, but as she has decided to waste her life in that way she might as well waste it on this young person as on any other."

"I remember her," said Miss Kendrick, nodding her shapely head. "She was one of the 'big girls' when I started to school. She was very good to us youngsters and I believe the other big girls used to call her 'a little queer.' I used to think her quite grown up, for she was fifteen when I was ten. But I dare say she wouldn't seem so venerable now. I'm sure she would be just the one—if she'll do it."

"I can answer for her, I think," said Mr. Baldwin.

"Well, you can't see her to-night," said Miss Kendrick, "so you had better go with Mr. Hampden and bring the girl here. Then you can arrange with Miss Fillmore to-morrow."

Mr. Baldwin looked appealingly at me.

"Why wouldn't it be better," I said, "to leave the girl where she is till to-morrow? I shall tell Big Sam what we have decided and he can keep her safe."

Mr. Baldwin nodded approval.

"I see," said Miss Kendrick, "that you have oceans of confidence in Big Sam and those murderous highbinders. But I'm not a man, and I haven't. I don't know what will happen before morning. Now, if you'll put on your hats and coats and go, you'll relieve my mind."

I rose reluctantly.

"If you don't like to go alone," said Miss Kendrick, with a saucy shake of the head and a very determined look about the mouth, "I'll ask you to be my escort."

"But, I was about to ask—what will your uncle say?"

"Say?" cried the hearty voice of Wharton Kendrick, as his big frame filled the doorway and his ruddy face shone in the light. "Why, shovels and scissors, gentlemen, he would say just what she told him to. What's it about?"

Miss Kendrick had risen, and with an emphatic nod of the head at this indorsement of a blank check in her favor, looked at us steadily.

"In that case, we'd best be going," said Mr. Baldwin. "Miss Kendrick can explain the case better than we."

"I shall expect you back in an hour," she said.

CHAPTER VI

BIG SAM'S DIPLOMACY

We walked down the street in silence, and I could feel Mr. Baldwin's chilling disapproval of our errand radiating from him at every step.

"We had better take the Clay Street car down to the City Hall, and get a hack at the Plaza," I said at last.

"I suppose that will be the best way," he assented coldly. "Since we are in for this unfortunate business, the less notice we attract, the better."

His tone roused a flash of temper in me, and I replied tartly:

"If the business is so distasteful to you, there are plenty of streets that lead in the other direction."

"Very true," he said with a shrug. But his steady footstep told me that he had no thought of turning back. We fell into silence, and so continued until we reached the Plaza.

"What's this?" I exclaimed, for at the corner of Clay and Kearny Streets a crowd was gathered, and a cheer, or rather a confusion of vocal applause, broke out as we approached.

A man mounted on a cart was shouting fiercely to several hundred men who had gathered about him, and I could hear such words as "leprous heathen," "cursed Mongols," and other phrases of denunciation roll from his lips.

I looked at him more closely. He was tall and broad-shouldered, and his coarse, florid features brought in a flash of memory the scene in the House of Blazes when the bleeding policeman had been rescued from his hoodlum assailants.

"Why, that's Kearney!" I cried.

"A friend of yours?" asked Mr. Baldwin sarcastically.

"I met him once."

"Perhaps you'd like to renew your acquaintance," said Mr. Baldwin, as we paused in curiosity on the edge of the crowd. "He seems to have an education in classical history."

We caught some reference to the labor troubles of Rome, and the fate of the freeman under the slave system that destroyed the ancient republic.

"I hadn't suspected it from a moment's speech with him," I said. "He has a good voice for this sort of work."

The crowd again broke out into tumultuous shouts at some bit of pleasing denunciation.

"Where are the police?" said Mr. Baldwin. "They ought to stop this."

I pointed to three or four members of the force who were standing near the speaker, apparently indifferent to his language.

"That's a scandalous neglect of duty," said Mr. Baldwin. "But we had better go about our unfortunate errand."

We had gone but two steps, however, before a hand grasped me by the shoulder.

"Glad to see you, Hampden. Glad to see you interested in the cause of the people. Welcome to our reception!"

It was the voice of Parks, giving boisterous greeting as he shook me by the hand.

"Isn't he great?" he continued rapidly. "What do you think of his speech?"

There was pride of authorship in his inquiry, and every movement testified to the excitement and pleasure that thrilled him.

"Is this your first performance?" I asked.

"No," he said. "We've been trying it on the street corners at odd times. Now we are ready to begin in earnest. What do you think of it?"

"I think you are rash to begin your agitation so near the police station. Your man will probably find himself in jail before he gets through his speech."

"The very thing!" said Parks explosively. "The best advertisement we could have. Here's our motto: 'The Chinese must go.' You can see it stirs 'em. Listen to that cheer. What could rouse the men of the city faster than to have Kearney thrown into jail for expressing their sentiments? Sir, if you think otherwise, you do not understand the people."

Parks gave an emphatic shake to his head and another to his warning forefinger that was held before me, and the wild look of the enthusiast glowed in his face.

"Doubtless you are right," I admitted. "But I must keep an engagement that will deprive me of the privilege of listening to your orator."

"You will have to listen to him some day," said Parks, shaking his finger at us once more. "The day of the people is coming."

Mr. Baldwin had been watching us with some interest.

"Your friend appears to be very much in earnest," he said as we went our way.

"There's a man who's very likely to be hanged because he thinks he has an idea," I replied.

"I should say he was more likely to end his days in the violent ward at Stockton," returned Mr. Baldwin.

"Perhaps you are the better guesser," I admitted. "It will depend on his opportunities."

We had come among the hackmen at the other end of Portsmouth Square, and I picked out one with courage in his face and a good span of horses to his hack.

"This will do, I think," I said.

"Very good," replied Mr. Baldwin, stepping into the hack. "Have you arranged any plan of proceeding? I suppose you know the condition of affairs better than I." This last an evident apology for deferring to my judgment.

"Yes," said I, as we lurched around the corner and rolled up Washington Street. "You had better remain with the hack across the street and a door or two from Big Sam's. I shall run up-stairs and tell him our plans. If he approves of them we will bring the girl down, bundle her into the hack and get her out of here as quick as the fates will let us."

"You are certain you would not like company when you go up the stairs to see Big Sam?" inquired Mr. Baldwin carelessly.

"I don't think it necessary," I replied.

"Are you armed?" he asked.

"I have a revolver."

"Very good. I have nothing but a penknife. It is hardly customary to carry firearms when making a social call."

"I do not make a habit of it," I said coldly. "I expected to come here to-night, and I did not foresee that I was to have company."

He made no reply to this, and the hack drew up near Big Sam's door as I had directed.

I stepped out and Mr. Baldwin followed.

"I think you had better remain here," I said.

"Perhaps," he replied. "But if you have no objection I'll stop at the foot of the stairs. You might have occasion to call to me and I should hear you better there."

"I think there is no danger."

"Big Sam is not as scrupulous as you may think. It has been said that men have gone up those stairs who never came down."

I remembered Big Sam's judgment hall, and the power he had apparently exercised over the warring tongs, and thought it quite likely that judgments had been executed as well as passed within its walls.

"Suit yourself," I said. "But as you are not armed you can do nothing but raise an alarm if the need comes. And you may be in more danger than I."

"Perhaps the hackman has a pistol," said Mr. Baldwin coolly. "I may be able to get a loan."

The hackman proved to be supplied with a fire-arm and he surrendered it cheerfully to Mr. Baldwin.

"Oh, the place has a bad name, but I've been through it for tin year and niver fired a shot," said he, laughing at the apprehension of the two innocent strangers he supposed us to be. And we crossed the street and opened the door of the shop that made the entrance to Big Sam's lodgings.

Four or five Chinese lounged about the place and one took my name to Big Sam. The others watched us furtively, and one made some comment upon us that caused his companions to give us a quick look and grim smile.

The action was not lost on Mr. Baldwin.

"Our friend's body-guard do not seem to anticipate the same ending to the affair that you do, Mr. Hampden," said he, with a shrug of the shoulder.

"I do not suppose they are in his confidence in the matter," said I. Then as the messenger returned with word that I was to "come up," I continued: "Keep near the door in yonder corner where you can not be taken from behind. If anything happens, get to the police station as soon as you can. I shall probably be back inside of ten minutes."

Mr. Baldwin bowed as his reply to this injunction, and spoke affably to the shopman who had paused from the swift reckoning of his accounts on an abacus, and was watching us furtively with the innocent pretense of casting up sums in his mind.

I mounted the rough stairs and in another minute was ushered into Big Sam's office.

The softer lights of the night that came from the gas-jets brought out the richness of the apartment far more effectively than the coarse light of day. The carvings and painted ornaments showed to more advantage, and the colors were softened into harmony with the western eye. In spite of the preoccupation of my errand, I could not repress an exclamation of pleasure at the sight.

Big Sam sat at his desk as he had sat when I left him in the morning, and looked at me with bland impassiveness.

"Good evening, Mr. Hampden," he said politely. "Can I serve you again?"

"No," I said, a little taken aback at this greeting. "It is on your business I have come."

"And your companion down-stairs?" he said, looking at me out of half-closed oriental eyes.

"He may be of service in case—"

Big Sam raised his hand to check my speech and spoke in Chinese. At his words there was the soft sound of the closing of a door somewhere behind the screens.

"A prudent precaution," he said. "You have found a place for the girl?"

"Yes," I replied. "I must say I do not fully approve of what I am going to do. But it is not on account of your ward. Nothing could be better for her than what I have to offer."

Then I explained with some detail the plans that had been approved by Miss Kendrick. He listened with studious attention.

"Miss Kendrick is too kind," said Big Sam diplomatically. "She is young, I believe?"

I bowed.

"And Miss Fillmore also?"

I bowed again.

"And you do not approve?"

"I do not."

"I see your reasons. Perhaps you are right. Do you wish to abandon the girl to her fate?"

"Oh, not at all. But with more time—"

"There is no more time."

"Not to-morrow?"

"The tongs are even now in session. I have word that before morning there will be a demand for the girl, and if she is not surrendered there will be the reward of blood."

"You are more powerful than they," said I, remembering the scene of the morning.

"I have passed the limits of my power," said Big Sam placidly. "What is it you say of Russia? 'Despotism tempered by assassination?' Well, I am but little of a despot, and the assassin has so much the better opportunity."

"And by to-morrow you would give her up?" I asked.

"To be frank with you, I would give her up to-night, Mr. Hampden, if it would purchase peace and safety."

I looked sharply at Big Sam, but the oriental mask gave back the record of nothing but bland and child-like simplicity.

"Then why not?" I asked.

"There is but one girl. There are two tongs," said Big Sam.

"That makes a difficulty," I admitted. "Yet only one tong owns the girl."

"I fear I could not explain to you the attitude and customs of the tongs in this matter," said Big Sam with a smile. "One tong demands the delivery of the girl, or five thousand dollars. That is the one you would perhaps call the owner of the girl. The other demands the girl, or twenty-five hundred dollars."

"Seventy-five hundred dollars for a girl—that is a little expensive."

"I believe some of your countrymen have paid more. Though the bargain has not been made in so simple a fashion."

Big Sam allowed himself to smile.

"I don't see how we are to help you then," I said. "But if you think it will put the tongs in better humor to have the girl in our custody, we are at your service."

"This evening," said Big Sam, "I saw three dogs quarreling over a bone. A fourth dog much larger came by and snatched it. The three dogs ceased to quarrel and started in chase of the fourth."

"A cheerful augury," I said. "I wish no quarrel with assassins, and least of all would I wish to bring them upon Mr. Kendrick's household."

"The fourth dog," continued Big Sam, "was larger—much larger—than the three put together. They ceased the chase before it was fairly begun, and joined in mourning their loss."

"You put me in doubt," said I. "I must not bring danger to others."

"I can guarantee their safety, Mr. Hampden," said Big Sam. "Your police have impressed it thoroughly on the minds of our people that the white race is not to be meddled with by any but white men."

I hesitated, still fearful of the dangers that might follow the custody of the girl.

"There is then no resource but to turn the girl into the street," said Big Sam decisively. "I can not risk my plans merely to secure her safety."

"Nor your life," I retorted.

"Oh, a man will die when he dies. Life, death, riches, poverty—they are man's fate. But my plans—they are much to me and my people."

Big Sam then pulled a cord that swung behind him. The door opened and the Chinese girl, frightened and tearful, was pushed in.

"The decision is for you, Mr. Hampden," he said.

I looked upon her and thought what the decision meant to her.

"Does she go with you, or with the tongs?" he asked.

"I have decided. I will take her," I said with sudden resolution.

"On the conditions I mentioned this morning?"

"It is late to bargain," said I.

"On the contrary," he said, "it is necessary. It is only with these conditions of compromise that I can hope to make my peace with the tongs."

"You have my promise," I said, rising.

"One moment," said Big Sam. "I believe you are a brave man, Mr. Hampden."

"I really don't know," I replied.

"At least you do not mind hearing a few revolver shots?"

"Not at all."

"They will serve to amuse some of our friends who are on the watch."

The implied information that we were spied upon by sentinels of the tongs startled me for a moment, though I might have known that they would not neglect so obvious a precaution.

"If you and your friend wouldn't mind breaking a window and smashing something and firing a shot or two yourselves and making a good deal of noise before you carry off the girl, it would oblige me."

"Why should we attract so much attention? Is it not better to slip out quietly?"

"Do you think to avoid the eyes that are watching?" said Big Sam. "The bold course is the best. We make sound as of a fight. The watchers of the two tongs will each believe that the other has made an attack. They will hasten to the meeting places to summon help. For a minute the road will be clear. Then you must run for it."

This was more of an enterprise than I had bargained for, and if I had had time to think I should have got out of Big Sam's net and left him to carry out his plans through some other agency. But I did not stop to reflect and acted at the urging of the wily Oriental.

"Take the girl," he said, and spoke to her in brief command. "My men will assist you to disturb things down-stairs."

I picked my way down the steps, and the soft clack of the Chinese shoe sounded behind me as the girl followed. Big Sam accompanied me to the lower floor, and, after making sure that our hack was where we had left it, he gave orders to his men. I hastily explained the situation to Mr. Baldwin.

"Ah—a comedy performance," he said with affected carelessness. But I could see that he cursed himself for a fool for being drawn into the affair.

"Draw your revolver, but don't fire more than one shot," I said.

Big Sam gave a shout, and in an instant the place was filled with a medley of voices raised in tones of anger and alarm. A table was overturned, boxes were flung about, cries of men rose, a dozen revolver shots followed in quick succession, a woman's scream pierced the air, and there was an excellent imitation of a highbinder affray on a small scale. I fired one shot into the breast of a mandarin, whose painted outlines ornamented a chest, and providently reserved the rest of my bullets for possible need. Then two of the Chinese lifted a heavy box and flung it at the closed doors. There was a crash of wood, a jingle of breaking glass, and the door fell outward.

"Well, I should judge it was time to go," said Mr. Baldwin.

"Come on," I said, seizing the Chinese girl. And we started on the run for the hack as the lights were extinguished.

We had just reached it when two or three more shots were fired and a bullet sang uncomfortably close to my head.

"In there, quick!" I said to Mr. Baldwin, as I lifted the girl to her seat "This place is getting too hot for us."

"Aren't you coming in?" he asked, with a trace of anxiety in his tone.

"No. I'll ride with the driver." I slammed the door and was climbing to the box when two breathless Chinese ran to the side of the hack and wrenched open the door with angry exclamations. There was a howl as one of them staggered back from a blow from Mr. Baldwin's revolver. I gave the other a kick alongside the head that sent him in a heap on his fellow.

It was all done in a second.

"Now!" I said to the driver; and with a cut at his horses we dashed away as cries and shouts and sounds of police whistles began to rise behind us.

As we lurched around the corner of Sacramento Street, I could see three policemen turning into Waverly Place from Clay Street and hurrying to the scene of disturbance. A crowd of shouting Chinese had already gathered about the entrance to Big Sam's store, and a man was waving his arm and pointing after us, while half a dozen Chinese had started on the run in pursuit. Then, the corner turned, the sight was shut out, and we went down the street on the flying gallop.

We slackened speed as we neared Kearny Street, for a policeman stood on the corner. If the sounds of battle had reached him he must certainly have suspected and stopped us. But if he heard anything of the uproar we had raised he had doubtless placed it to the credit of the leather-lunged orator and his clamorous hearers who held forth but a block away. He scarce looked at us, and we swung into Kearny Street on a swift trot, and were soon in the quiet precincts of the shopping district.

The hackman had been silent, heeding only my directions; but now he said:

"I don't know what you've been a-doin', an' it's none of my business. But I'll want pay for this night's work."

"Make yourself easy," I replied. "We've done nothing against the law."

"Oh, it's not the law I'm botherin' about. There's little law for a Chaynese; an' it's not me that would be hollerin' murther if you've sent a dozen of 'em to sup with the divil to-night. But you might have damaged the hack, an' ye'll pay for that."

I promised him a liberal reward, and we rolled rapidly out Sutter Street to Van Ness Avenue, and in a few minutes more had drawn up before Wharton Kendrick's house.

"I am afraid," said Mr. Baldwin as I opened the door to the hack, "that our charge is hurt. She has been groaning for a while, and now I think she has fainted."

My nerves had served me without flinching through the dangers of the escape. But at the apprehension that all our efforts had been in vain, and that death, not we, had been the rescuer, I fell a-trembling.

"I hope not," I cried. "Perhaps she is only scared. Let us carry her into the house."

As I put my hand to the girl, however, my fears received a fresh provocation, for the back of her dress was wet with the sticky wetness of coagulating blood. We lifted her between us, and carried her up the steps. We had scarce reached the upper landing when the door was flung open, and Miss Kendrick peered out.

"Have you brought her?" she cried.

"She is here," I replied, "but—"

"Oh, what is the matter?" interrupted Miss Kendrick in a voice of alarm, as she saw that we carried a senseless burden.

"She is hurt," I explained as we laid our charge down upon a hall seat. "There was a row over her, and she got one of the bullets that was meant for us."

Miss Kendrick grew white, and I looked to see her follow the Chinese girl by falling in a faint. But her small figure straightened as though in rebound from a physical shock, and in a moment she was directing servants to carry the girl to the room that had been prepared for her, ordering hot water, hot blankets, lint and bandages, and sending me on the run for the nearest doctor.

CHAPTER VII IN THE CURRENT

The Chinese girl's wound proved a desperate matter, and for days she hung between life and death, dependent for the flickering vital spark upon the ceaseless ministrations of her self-appointed nurses. Mercy Fillmore was brought to the house by Mr. Baldwin at an early hour of the morning that followed the rescue, and took her place as naturally and unostentatiously as though she had always been one of the family.

"She's a thousand times lovelier than I had expected," confessed Laura Kendrick, "and when you see her you're to be very nice to her. I'm sure you owe her that much, after making her all this trouble."

I promised to use all gentleness and courtesy toward Miss Fillmore, but the full significance of my debt to the young lady did not appear to me till later. Eventually I found that by some inexplicable freak of logic I was supposed to be chiefly in fault for the Chinese girl's wound. I had bungled the enterprise, it seemed; otherwise she must have been brought safely off. The sense of my delinquency was finally stirred within me by overhearing the comment of two indignant servants, which ran something like this:

"Those two big men without ever a scratch on them, and that poor heathen creature bleeding to death between 'em—that's what I call a shame."

Below stairs, it thus appeared that I shared equally with Mr. Baldwin in the discredit of the outcome. In my lady's chamber it was different. I learned that in those sacred realms I had all the blame for my very own. Mr. Baldwin appeared to be regarded, like the gallant army of Bazaine or Mack, as merely the unfortunate victim of an incompetent leader. Nothing of this judgment came to me directly. But it was conveyed delicately, imperceptibly, intangibly, through the days when the girl's life hung in suspense, mingled with an unspoken assurance that as I didn't appear to know any better I should ultimately be forgiven.

All this was galling enough, but it was nothing compared to the afflictions I suffered from the sight of Mr. Baldwin's airs. He was possessed of a cold and haughty nature, but the situation roused in him something approaching an enthusiasm. For my sorrow he was endowed with an odious gift of competency, and no false modesty restrained him from exhibiting it to the fullest measure. Whenever I offered to perform a service, I found that he had already performed it, or was then engaged upon it, or was just about to perform it, until I was consumed with regret that the highbinder bullet had not found its billet with Mr. Baldwin, instead of with the Chinese girl.

I should not go so far as to assert that any one of the self-sufficiency of Mr. Baldwin would be at a loss for an excuse for following his own inclinations; yet it struck me that he carried the pretense of devotion to the interests of the Chinese girl to an extent altogether indecorous. The prosperity of the firm of Hunter, Fessenden and Baldwin had never before appealed to my fears or my sympathies, but I was at this period distressed to observe that its law business appeared to be at a low ebb. Either that, or the junior partner was grossly neglecting his duties. Whatever time of day or night I called at the Kendrick house to seek news of the Chinese girl, and incidentally to enjoy the society of the ladies, I was sure to find Mr. Baldwin there, or to learn that he had just gone or was presently expected, until I grew to resent the sound of his name. Furthermore, his air of proprietorship in Laura Kendrick and her affairs, which had disturbed me on our first meeting, appeared to grow more marked. If Miss Kendrick, her uncle, and all things beneath the roof had been turned over to him in fee simple, the sense of ownership could not have been shown more clearly in his manner. And, worst of all, I could not see that his attitude roused resentment in any breast but my own. Miss Kendrick smiled on him,

called him by his first name, and discussed the theory and practice of surgery with him in a manner most confidential.

At this day I can confess with freedom that my dislike of Mr. Baldwin found its root in the fertile soil of jealousy and envy. At the time, however, I stoutly maintained to myself that I hated him for his faults alone. In the light of later experience, I am willing to concede that men are not hated for their faults, or even for their virtues. Had Mr. Baldwin been an angel of light, instead of a cold and supercilious young attorney who was receiving an undeserved amount of favor, I should have disliked him none the less heartily.

Mr. Baldwin returned my dislike with acridity. Whenever possible, he affected to have forgotten me, had to be assisted to my name when compelled to speak to me; and when he did decide to remember me, was so patronizing in his condescensions that I longed to throw him through the window.

Miss Kendrick was not long in discovering this suppressed hostility; and at first alarmed by it, she presently found it a source of amusement. Then she appeared to derive a certain pleasure in blowing the smoldering coals into a blaze; for she would, with the most innocent air imaginable, bring forward topics of discussion that served to range us in hostile argument. As we held opposite views on almost every question of politics, law, sociology, and the arts, she had usually more difficulty to close the argument than to inspire it. Yet she handled the situation with a skill that would have been the admiration of a diplomat, and had a tact in diversion that enabled us both to retire from the heat of battle in good order with the conviction that we had each won a substantial victory.

In the anxious days through which the Chinese girl's life hung by a thread, I learned that Laura Kendrick's characterization of Mercy Fillmore was no example of feminine exaggeration. Miss Fillmore proved to be a young woman of about twenty-five, a little above the average height, a little fuller in outline than was demanded by the rules of proportion, a little slow in her movements. Her face was round, and though lacking in color gave a distinct impression of prettiness. But her chief characteristic was a certain calm sweetness in expression and manner, a certain gentle tact that made her presence as soothing as a strain of sweet music. It was on the evening following the rescue that Miss Kendrick introduced us.

"I am glad to meet you," she said in a voice that was low and melodious. "I am glad to find a man who is not afraid to do the right thing because somebody is going to laugh at him."

Miss Fillmore gave me her hand, and I found that her touch had the same soothing quality that was manifest in her voice and presence.

I professed myself gratified at her approval, and murmured that any one would have done the same in the circumstances.

"No, indeed," said Miss Fillmore earnestly. "It isn't every one who would have followed Mr. Baldwin to that den and risked his life to rescue a poor Chinese slave girl."

Mr. Baldwin's part in the affair had evidently lost nothing in Mr. Baldwin's telling of it, and Miss Fillmore's imagination had filled out the blanks in his narrative in a way to make him the promoter of the enterprise.

He was quick to see the peril of his situation, and said stiffly:

"Oh, if there's any credit to the affair, it belongs to Mr. Hampden alone. He discovered the distressed damsel, and is entitled to all the rewards."

Laura Kendrick gave him a pleased look and a gracious nod, which afflicted me with a pang of unwarranted resentment.

"I claim all the credit myself," she said, with a little air of importance. "I seem to remember two rather reluctant knights who were anything but pleased to be sent out to storm the ogre's castle at the call of beauty in distress."

"It was well done, whoever was responsible for it," said Miss Fillmore gently. "It is a noble thing to have rescued Moon Ying."

"Moon Ying!" cried Mr. Baldwin. "Is that the creature's name?"

"I never thought to ask it," I said.

"So like a man!" sighed Miss Kendrick.

"I want you to tell me," said Mercy Fillmore, "how you came to find Moon Ying, and be interested in her. How long have you known her?"

"She's a very recent acquaintance. I first saw her yesterday morning." And then I gave in detail the story of my visit to Chinatown, and the adventures that came of it.

"And that is all you know about her?" asked Miss Fillmore, in a voice that imported disappointment. "I had hoped that you knew more. She is so much above the type of Chinese girls that we meet at the Mission that she has interested me particularly."

"Big Sam gave me the idea that except for her beauty, which I understand to be of a sort highly considered among her countrymen, she is not above the girls you find at the Mission."

"Well, then, it's only another romance spoiled," said Miss Fillmore.

"Oh, you needn't despair. Big Sam appeared to be dealing frankly with me, but that proves nothing. Big Sam is an accomplished diplomat and would tell any story that suited his purpose, and tell it so neatly that you couldn't distinguish it from the truth. For all I know, she may be the daughter of the Empress of China."

"Nothing so interesting, I fear," said Miss Fillmore, with a sober shake of the head.

"Well, then, let's make believe. She shall be a princess of the blood royal, and shall have a story suited to her dignity."

Miss Fillmore smiled dubiously, as though she were not quite certain whether I was in jest or earnest.

"It isn't necessary," she said, her practical mind refusing to descend to frivolity. "Whatever her origin, we must see that she has a better fate than the one that threatens her."

"Yes, so far as it can be done within the conditions laid down by Big Sam."

Miss Fillmore's forehead drew into a knot of lines in which could be read a mingling of disapproval and anxiety.

"I have been thinking," she said, with an apologetic reproach in her voice, "that you didn't do quite right to make those conditions. Can't they be—" she was going to say "evaded" but after a moment's debate with a feminine conscience changed it to "modified."

"I'm afraid I didn't make myself clear," I said. "Those were the only conditions on which the girl could have the opportunity to escape. Unless Big Sam can arrange better terms with the tongs, we have no choice but to live up to them."

Miss Fillmore was silent at this, and I wondered whether I had not, on my side, given too strong an emphasis to the reminder that we were discussing a question of good faith.

"Well," said Miss Kendrick with decision, "we'll leave all that till Moon Ying is quite well, and then I'll see Big Sam and the highbinders myself, if Mr. Hampden can't get them to listen to decency and reason."

"Good heavens!" cried Mr. Baldwin, with chilling protest in his tone. "You surely can't mean to do anything of that sort. You don't suppose that those creatures are open to reason and decency, do you?"

"Oh, indeed," said Miss Kendrick, straightening her small figure and tip-tilting her small nose, "I consider Big Sam an interesting man, and I'm sure I should like to talk with him. And as for reason, I have no doubt he's quite as open to conviction as the rest of his sex. I shan't have the slightest hesitation in appealing to him, or even to those explosive highbinders, if it's necessary to Moon Ying's interests."

"Why, my dear young lady," protested Mr. Baldwin in his most superior manner, "you surely can't be thinking of going down to Chinatown and talking to those fellows. It's altogether absurd."

"Well, if you consider it absurd to try to save a girl's life or happiness, I don't," said Miss Kendrick tartly. And for the rest of the evening Mr. Baldwin sat under a cloud, and I enjoyed a brief period of sunshine.

CHAPTER VIII

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAUSE

I confess that, despite all discouragements, I spent as much time as I could spare from my duties in haunting the Kendrick house; yet I found the pursuit of Peter Bolton, and the oversight of the Council of Nine, a more exacting task than I had expected.

On Peter Bolton's ultimate purposes I could secure no direct light whatever. For the time he appeared to have suspended relations with the Council of Nine, yet his activities in conferring with bankers, brokers, merchants, lawyers, and men of no classification, were so various and bewildering that I was compelled to keep watch in many directions. Twice Parks and Waldorf, the president of the Council of Nine, visited his office, and were turned away without seeing him, though on at least one of these visits he was within. His plans appeared to have taken another direction than the schemes of the Council, yet there was nothing in his movements that revealed whatever designs he might have against Wharton Kendrick's property or life.

Nevertheless I took the precaution to station a number of watchmen about Wharton Kendrick's house, masqueraded as gardeners and stable-men. The episode of the spy had shown plainly that Peter Bolton's emissaries had no scruples about invading the premises. Furthermore, Big Sam's assurance that the highbinders would never dare to attack the white man's place, confirmed as it was by the history of San Francisco's Chinese population, did not justify me in neglecting precautions. Even a highbinder might have an exception to his rules, especially when more than one tong was interested in the recovery of Moon Ying. Therefore I kept two men on guard in the daytime and four at night.

One effect of Peter Bolton's activities was easy to discover. His contribution to the cause had inspired a marvelous activity among the agents of the Council of Nine. Clubs were organized, a few for the propagation of radical ideas, but most of them for the ostensible purpose of driving the Chinese from the city. The intent of the Council was to make the revolutionary clubs the main strength of their organization, but it soon became evident that the anti-Chinese movement had outrun their plans. "The Chinese Must Go," was so popular a cry that it was taken up by elements over which the Council had no control. But outwardly the Council was prospering, and the meetings inaugurated by Parks and Kearney down by the Old City Hall soon attracted such crowds that they were encouraged to seek a larger forum on the sand-lots by the New City Hall. The plans for driving out the Chinese were seized upon eagerly by the thousands of unemployed workmen, as well as by the disorderly elements of the city's population. Multitudes attended the meetings that were held nightly and on Sundays, and sporadic outbreaks of hoodlums, who beat Chinamen and plundered wash-houses, were frequently reported. The newspapers began to pay attention to the meetings, and as a genuine interest was shown in them by the working-men of the city, there was soon a hot rivalry to see which paper should attract the largest sales by the fullest accounts of the speeches and the most extended reports of the growth of the anti-Chinese propaganda. Under the stimulus of publicity the movement spread with startling rapidity, the politicians began to count upon it as a force to be reckoned with, and serious-minded citizens were shaking their heads over the possibilities of disorder that it covered.

These possibilities were increased by the threatening condition of affairs in the eastern States. There was a rapidly increasing tension in the relations between capital and labor, and a railroad strike was organizing that would paralyze industry from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. It was felt that the spark of Eastern example might furnish the torch for San Francisco.

With matters in this state, Clark came to me one day with every mark of perturbation and alarm.

"The Council of Nine is in funds," he gasped.

"That's an enviable situation," I replied. "Where did they get them, and what are they going to do with them? Hold a smoker at the House of Blazes?"

Clark looked a little vexed at the bantering tone.

"They've bought guns with them, sir."

"Bought guns?" I said. "How many? A dozen?"

"Guess again," said Clark, with an aggrieved air at my declination to take his information seriously. "If you'd say a thousand you'd come nearer to it."

"A thousand!" I cried, rousing at last to the gravity of his information. "How could they do that?"

"Easy enough," said Clark. "They got thirty thousand dollars night before last, and yesterday they cleaned out all the gun stores in town."

"Thirty thousand dollars!" I exclaimed. "Whew! Is this old Bolton's second contribution?"

"I reckon he's the one that give it," said Clark, "but I can't be sure. There ain't any one else with that much money that's interested in the cause. Habernicht was trying to tell me that it came from the International Treasury, but I'm willing to bet my boots that the International Treasury never had thirty thousand cents in it, let alone thirty thousand dollars."

It was Peter Bolton, beyond doubt, who had taken the role of fairy godfather for the Council of Nine, and I raked my imagination in vain to conceive the purpose that had inspired this amazing generosity.

"I reckon," continued Clark, "that they've got a corner on everything that'll shoot, except what's in the arsenals, and they're counting on getting those when the time comes to rise."

"Well," said I, "I don't see just how this affects Colonel Kendrick, for they could get him with one rifle just as well as with a thousand. But whatever the game is, we can block it right now. Just give me the number of the building where they have stored those guns, and I'll see the Chief of Police."

"Good God!" cried Clark, seizing my arm. "Do you want to get me killed?"

"Why," I argued, "you aren't the only man who knows about them. There must be dozens if not hundreds of men in the scheme, and there would be no more reason to put the blame on you than on the others."

Clark shook his head, and his white face showed the fierce grip of terror.

"I'm a dead man if you go to the police," he said huskily, gulping down the lump that rose in his dry throat. And no repetition or variation of my argument could move him. So at last I promised to keep the information from the police, and sought Wharton Kendrick's office to lay this perplexing information before my client.

Kendrick was not at his desk.

"He went out some time ago, Mr. Hampden," said a clerk.

"Where would I be likely to find him? It's quite important."

"He didn't say, and I got the idea that he wasn't likely to be back to-day."

I wrote a note giving information of the armament, and leaving it on his desk, turned to go, when the door opened and General Wilson bustled in. His round red face glowed in the frame of his short, yellow-gray side-whiskers even more fiercely by day than by night, and his self-importance was even more scintillant than when he had bustled into Kendrick's library.

"What! Kendrick not in?" he cried explosively. "Why, I don't see how you San Franciscans do any business. I haven't found a man in his office this morning. Why, God bless me, is this you, Ham-Hamfer—"

"Hampden," I said, assisting him to the name. "I'm glad to see you, General Wilson."

"Exactly-Hampden-Hampden," said the general, shaking hands. "I never forget a name or a face. It's a trick you ought to cultivate, my boy. You'll find it of more importance than half your legal learning, when it comes to the practical business of the law. There's nothing better in managing clients and jurors and court officials. It's likely to be worth anything to you to come on a man you haven't met for twenty years and call him by his name. The beggar always beams with satisfaction—"

thinks you've been doing nothing all those years but carry his name and face in your mind, and is ready to do you a good turn if it comes his way."

"Very true," I said, as General Wilson paused for breath.

"Now I remember," he continued, with a wave of his arm, "that I won one of my hardest fought cases by that little talent of being able to call a man's name after I have once heard it. 'Twas when the Rockland and Western was suing the R. D. & G. about the right of way into St. Louis. The matter was worth a trifle of two or three million dollars, and we had a jury trial, and it was a damned ticklish business. 'It's two to one on the other side,' said the president of the Rockland and Western, 'and if you pull us out, Wilson, you're a wonder.' 'God knows what a jury will do,' I told him, 'but if it's in the power of mortal man I'll get you out with honors.' I talked to cheer him up, but I didn't feel half as hopeful as I let on to be. My unprofessional opinion was that we were in for a licking. I'll bet you the price of this building, Hampden, that we would have had to take our medicine if it hadn't been for an old acquaintance of mine. I used to know him when we were young fellows in Ohio. He was clerking in a grocery store while I was dusting the books in Lawyer Boker's office. Now, what was his name? Oh,—ah—yes, I remember—Westlake, or something like that. Well, as he came into the court, I saw him, and by the look on his face I was sure he was called in the case. I knew him in an instant and I hurried up to him, shook him by the hand, and said 'Westburn'—yes, it was Westburn, not Westlake—I said 'Westburn, God bless you, it's thirty-five years since the night we dropped that watermelon, and I haven't got over mourning the loss of it yet.' By Jove, Hampden, you ought to have seen the fellow beam to think that the big lawyer from Chicago had remembered him all that time, and we had a five-minute chat that turned out to be worth everything to my clients. He got on the jury, and there wasn't a point or an argument I made that was lost on him. He told me afterward that he never heard a speech to beat the one I delivered in closing for my side. Well, the jury was out nearly two days, but on the strength of that speech my old friend talked the last of them over and we got judgment. So there, my boy, you see what it's worth to call up names. It's one of the tricks of trade that we share with statesmen and kings."

"And hotel clerks," I added irreverently, with something of envy for the general's talent at finding cause for self-congratulation.

General Wilson flushed a little deeper red, and looked at me doubtfully. I hastened to add an expression of complete agreement with the conclusions he had announced.

"Well, God bless us," he cried, "I can't be waiting here all day for Kendrick. I want to talk over that tule land proposition with him, but as he isn't here I'm going over to talk on the same business with a miserly old curmudgeon named Bolton. As it concerns Kendrick, in a way, maybe you'd like to come along as his representative." And with a commanding gesture General Wilson intimated his desire for my company, and linked arms with me in the affectation of deepest confidence.

I had for several days been meditating on the problem of an interview with Peter Bolton, and, accepting General Wilson's offer of a convoy as a gift of benignant chance, was soon climbing the stair to the curmudgeon's office to the boom-boom of General Wilson's gasconades, and wondering how I might surprise the secret of Peter Bolton's plans.

CHAPTER IX

PETER BOLTON

Peter Bolton's office conformed to the first principles of art. It supplied an appropriate frame for Peter Bolton himself. The outer room presented to the eye of the visitor four bare and grimy walls that had once been white, a bare and worn board floor, two kitchen chairs and a rickety desk. There was, however, nothing shrinking or apologetic about this meager display of furnishing. It smacked not of poverty, but of an inclement disposition in its owner. In the inner room the walls and floor were as bare and grimy as those of the outer office, but the furnishing was a little less disregarding of personal comfort, for it held five solid chairs, a solid safe that made a show of bidding defiance to burglars, and a solid desk, behind which sat Peter Bolton himself.

The outer office was empty, save for the uninviting chairs and the rickety desk, and General Wilson, with a quick jerk, opened the inner door and bustled into the room.

"Ha-ha, Bolton!" he cried, "I catch you with your washee-washee man, eh? That's right, that's right. Cleanliness next to godliness, you know—though you can't always be sure that the Chinese washman is to be recommended on either count. Hey, John, you trot along now. I want to talk to Mr. Bolton."

Glancing over General Wilson's head I saw the thin, sour face of Peter Bolton, and behind the mask of its dry expression I thought I recognized a passing flash of mental disturbance that suggested fear, or even consternation. Then a sardonic smile tightened and drew down the corners of the mouth, and his hard, nasal voice twanged out a grudging word of recognition.

At the same moment the "washee-washee" man stepped to the doorway, and I was startled to find myself looking into the face of Big Sam. He was dressed in the coarse blue jeans and trousers of the Chinese working-man, his hat was drawn down over his eyes, and his face was of a darker hue than I remembered it. But the man shone through his disguise as plainly as the sun shines through colored glass.

I recovered from my surprise in an instant, and halted him in the outer room.

"This is a lucky meeting," I said. "I have been wondering whether I ought to report to you about your ward. She is badly hurt, but is now out of danger."

The man glanced at me with expressionless eye.

"I no sabby you," he said with the true coolie accent. "What you wan'?"

"Oh," I returned, repressing my amusement at this preposterous attempt to deceive me, "if Kwan Sam Suey, sometimes known as Big Sam, doesn't want to hear what I have to say, I am in no hurry to say it."

"No sabby Big Sam," said the Chinaman gruffly.

"And I should really like to know," I said, lowering my voice, "what Big Sam is doing with Mr. Bolton."

"I no sabby Missah Bolton," growled the Oriental.

"You don't 'sabby' the man you've just been talking with?"

"I no sabby him name. I no sabby you' name. I sabby him one man—I sabby you 'nothe' man. I come sell him lotte'y ticket. You likee buy lotte'y ticket?"

This appeared to be an excellent chance to trap the wily Oriental. I replied that I would risk twenty-five cents on his game, and waited with a smile for the excuse that would be invented to put me off. But Big Sam had made up for his part with more attention to detail than I had supposed. At my word he calmly drew forth from his capacious sleeve a blank ticket and a marking brush.

"I make you good ticket," he said gravely, marking ten of the squares. "You sabby Kwan Luey?"

"Yes, I sabby Kwan Luey." He was one of the big merchants of Chinatown, and among other things did a brisk banking and lottery business among his countrymen.

"Dlawing to-mollow," said the Chinaman. "You take 'em ticket Kwan Luey you get 'em heap big money." And with a brusks nod he was gone.

I stared after him in perplexity. My eyes were never more certain of anything than of the identity of this man with Big Sam. And yet he had carried off his imposture with such assurance that, for a moment after he had disappeared, I was shaken in my conviction. But it was only for a moment. With a glance at the paper in my hand and with a recollection of his parting words, certainty returned, and I was convinced that the ticket was an order on Kwan Luey for money. Was Big Sam trying to bribe me, or was he attempting thus to provide for the expenses of the Chinese girl? Nothing had been said on the delicate point of meeting her charges for food, care and lodging. Possibly he had chosen this eccentric way of putting the money in my hands.

There was, however, another question more perplexing than that of money. What were the relations between Bolton and Big Sam? Here for the second time I had evidence that they were in secret alliance. The business of supplying coolie workmen was not of such disrepute that it had to be conducted in disguise. Could it be possible that Big Sam was one of Bolton's agents in the plot to overthrow Wharton Kendrick? And if so, was the Chinese girl brought under the Kendrick roof as a part of Peter Bolton's tortuous policy?

As there was no answer to my questions to be had by studying the ticket Big Sam had given me, I thrust it into my pocket and followed General Wilson into Peter Bolton's private den.

There are certain natures whose approach brings an access of mental or physical repulsion. A man may conform to all the sanitary laws, and yet appeal quite as objectionably to the inner spirit as the Eskimo reeking of spoiled blubber appeals to the physical senses.

To approach Peter Bolton was like putting your hand on the spider to which current metaphor compared him. If you liked spiders, he was doubtless a pleasant enough companion. But as for me, I share the popular prejudice against the arachnidæ, and found myself at once in mental antagonism to Mr. Bolton.

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