

Gibbs George

The Maker of Opportunities



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«Public Domain»

Gibbs G.

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CHAPTER I

It was two o'clock. Mr. Mortimer Crabb pushed back the chair from his breakfast tray and languidly took up the morning paper. He had a reputation (in which he delighted) of dwelling in a Castle of Indolence, and took particular pains that no act of his should belie it. There were persons who smiled at his affectations, for he had a studio over a stable in one of the cross streets up town, where he dawdled most of his days, supine in his easy chair. The age was running to athletics, so Mr. Crabb in public had become the apostle and high priest of flaccidity. He raised a supercilious eyebrow at tennis, drawled his disparagement of polo and racquets and recoiled at the mere mention of college football. But those highest in Crabb's favor knew that there were evenings when he met professional pugilists at this same shrine of æstheticism, who, at liberal compensation, matched their skill and heft to his.

Nor was he a mean antagonist in conversation. For Mr. Crabb had a slow and rather halting way of making the most trenchantly witty remarks, and a style exactly suited to the successful dinner table. And when a satiated society demanded something new it was to Crabb they turned for a suggestion. Mrs. Ryerson's Gainsborough ball, Jack Burrow's remarkable ushers' dinner, and the pet-dog tea at Mrs. Jennings' country place were fantasies of the mind of this Prester John of the effete. When to these remarkable talents is added a yacht and a hundred and fifty thousand a year, it is readily to be seen that Mr. Mortimer Crabb was a person of consequence, even in New York.

Mr. Crabb scanned the headlines of the *Sun*, while McFee fastened his boots. But his eye fell upon an item that made him sit up straight and drop his monocle.

"H – m!" he muttered in a strange tone. "So Dicky Bowles is coming home!"

He peered at the item again and read, frowning.

"Owing to the necessity for the immediate departure of the prospective groom for Europe, the marriage of Miss Juliet Hazard, daughter of Mr. Henry Hazard, to Mr. Carl Geltman will take place on Wednesday, June twentieth, instead of in October, the month at first selected."

Crabb's expression had suddenly undergone a startling change, unknown in the Platonic purloins of the Bachelors' Club. The brows tangled, the lower jaw protruded, while the feet which had languidly emerged from the dressing-room a few moments before, had partaken suddenly of the impulses which dominated the entire body. He rose abruptly and took a few rapid turns up and down the room.

"So! They didn't dare wait! Poor little Julie! There ought to be better things in store for her than that! And Dicky won't be here until Thursday morning! It's too evident – the haste."

He dropped into his chair, picked up the paper again, and re-read the item. June twentieth! And to-day was Sunday, June seventeenth! Geltman had taken no more chances than decency demanded. Crabb remembered the calamitous result of Hazard's ventures in Wall Street, and it was common gossip that, had it not been for Carl Geltman, the firm of Hazard and Company would long since have ceased to exist. It was easy to read between the lines of the newspaper paragraph. Between the ruin of her father's fortunes and her own, duty left Juliet Hazard no choice. And here was Dicky Bowles upon the ocean coming back to claim his own. It was monstrous.

Mr. Crabb laid aside the paper and paced the floor again. Then walked to the window and presently found himself smiling down upon the hansom tops.

“The very thing,” he said. “The very thing. It’s worth trying at any rate. Jepson will help. And what a lark!” And then aloud:

“McFee,” he called, “get me a hansom.”

Mr. Carl Geltman sat in his office of chamfered oak, and smiled up at a photograph upon his desk, conscious of nothing but the dull ecstasy which suffused his ample person and blinded him to everything but the contemplation of his approaching nuptials. The watch-chain stretched tightly between his waistcoat pockets somehow conveyed the impression of a tension of suppressed emotions, which threatened to burst their confines. His rubicund visage exuded delight, and his short fingers caressed his blond mustache. It was difficult for him to comprehend that all of his ambitions were to be realized at once. Money, of course, would buy almost anything in New York, but Mr. Geltman had hardly dared to dream of this. Until he had seen Miss Hazard he had never even thought of marriage. After he had seen her he had thought of nothing else.

After working late in his office, Geltman dined alone at a fashionable restaurant in a state of beatitude, then lit his cigar and walked forth into Broadway for a breath of air before going to bed. The sooner to sleep, the sooner would his wedding day dawn. But the glare of the lights distracted him, the bells jangled out of harmony with his mood, so he sought a side street and walked on toward the river, where he could continue his dreams in quiet, until the hurrying thoroughfare was far behind.

He had reached a spot between tall warehouses or factories when he felt himself seized from behind by strong arms, and before he could make an outcry something soft was thrust into his mouth and he had a dim sense of sudden darkness, of hands not too tender lifting him into a carriage, a brief whispered order, a hurried drive, more carrying, the sound of lapping water and ship’s bells, the throbbing of ferry paddles, the motion of a boat, and the damp night air of the river through his thin evening clothes.

When Geltman opened his eyes it was to fix them rather dully upon the deck-beams of a yacht. The rushing water alongside sent rapid reflections dancing along their polished surfaces. At first it occurred to him that he was on an ocean steamer. Had he been married, and was this – ? He looked around. No. He was a good sailor, but the vessel rolled and pitched sharply in a way to which he was unaccustomed. He arose to a sitting posture and tried to piece together the shattered remnants of his recollection. He felt strangely stupid and inert. How long had he been lying in the bunk? He remarked that he was attired very properly in pajamas – very fine pajamas they were, too, of silk such as he wore himself. Upon the leather-covered bench opposite was a suit of flannels carefully folded, white canvas shoes, stockings upon the deck, and other unfamiliar undergarments disposed upon hooks by the cabin door.

He rose suddenly, his mind dully trying to grasp the situation. He lurched to the porthole and looked out. It was a wilderness of amber-color and white, rather bewildering and terrifying seen so near at hand, for Geltman had been accustomed to look upon the ocean from the security of fifty feet of freeboard. Far away where the leaping wave crests met the line of sky, he could just distinguish the faint blue of the land. He was seized with a sudden terror and, turning, he ran to the cabin door and tried to open it. It was locked. He threw himself against it and cried aloud, but his voice was lost in the rush of wind and water without. His despairing eye at this moment lit upon a push-button by the side of the bunk. He touched it with his finger and anxiously waited. There was no sound. He sat upon the edge of the bunk, conscious of a cold wind blowing upon his bare toes and of a dull ache within which proclaimed the lack of food or drink, or both. He rang again and renewed his shouting. In a moment there was the sound of a key in the lock, the door opened, and a sober, smooth-shaven person in brass buttons stood in the door.

“Did you ring, sir?” said the man, respectfully.

“I did,” said Geltman, wrathfully.

“Yes, sir,” said the man. “Can I get you anything, sir?”

“Can you get me – ?” began the bewildered Geltman. “Is there anything you *can’t* get me? Get me some food – my own clothes – and get me – get me – out of this. Where am I? What am I doing here?”

“You were sleeping, sir,” said the man, imperturbably. “I thought you might not wish to be disturbed.”

Geltman looked around him again as though unwilling to credit the evidence of his senses. He saw that the man kept his hand upon the door and eyed him narrowly.

“I’ve been drugged and shanghaied. What boat is this? Where are we?”

“We’re at sea, sir,” said the man, quietly. “Off Fire Island, I believe, sir.”

“Fire Island,” he cried, “and this – ” as memory came back with a horrible rush – “what day is this?”

“Wednesday, June the twentieth,” replied the man, calmly.

Geltman raised his hands toward the deck beams and sank upon the bunk on the verge of collapse. He remembered now – it was his wedding day!

CHAPTER II

As the fog upon his memory still hung heavily he raised his head toward the man at the door of the cabin. That person was eyeing him rather pityingly and had come a step forward into the room.

“Shall I be getting you something, sir?” he was saying again.

Geltman sprang unsteadily to his feet.

“No,” he cried. “I’m going to get out of this.”

“In pajamas, sir?” said the man, reproachfully.

Geltman glanced down at the flimsy silk garment.

“Yes – in pajamas,” he cried, hotly. And with an imprecation he strode past the outraged servant and rushed through the saloon and up the companion. As he raised his head and shoulders above the deck he was immediately aware of a chill wind which was singing sharply through the rigging. A gentleman, in a double-breasted suit and yachting cap, was standing aft steadying a telescope toward a distant schooner. By his side was a short and very stocky man with a bushy red beard and brass buttons.

“What is the meaning of this outrage?” he cried, wildly addressing the man in the yachting cap. “Are you the owner of this yacht?”

The gentleman calmly lowered his telescope, passed it to the bearded man, turned mildly toward the tousled apparition and looked at him from top to toe while the sportive wind gleefully defined Geltman’s generous figure.

“I say, old man,” he said, smiling, “hadn’t you better get into some clothes?”

“C – clothes be – ” chattered Geltman. “I’ve been drugged, kidnapped, and shanghaied! Somebody’s going to smart for this. Who are you? What does it mean?”

The enraged brewer, with his arms waving, his slender garment flapping, his inflamed countenance and ruffled hair, presented the wildest appearance imaginable. The man in the yachting cap wore an expression of commiseration and exchanged a significant glance with the red-bearded man.

“There now,” said he, raising a protesting hand, “we’re all your friends aboard here. You’re in no danger at all, except – ” he smiled at the brewer’s costume – “except from a bad cold.”

“What does this outrage mean?” cried Geltman anew. “You’ll suffer for it. As long as I have a dollar left in the world – ”

“You really don’t mean that,” said the gentleman. “Go below now, that’s a good fellow, get breakfast and some clothes.”

“No, I’ll n – not,” said the brewer in chilly syncopation. “I’m Carl Geltman, of Henry Geltman and Company, and I want an explanation of this outrage.”

The two men exchanged another look, and the red-bearded one tapped his forehead twice with a blunt forefinger.

“I haven’t the least idea what you’re talking about, Mr. Fehrenbach,” said the man in the yachting cap, calmly.

“Fehrenbach!” cried the brewer. “My name isn’t Fehrenbach!” he screamed. “Otto Fehrenbach is on the East Side. I’m on the West. My name is Geltman, I tell you!”

The man in blue looked gravely down at the astonished brewer and pushed a bell on the side of the cabin skylight.

“That was one of the symptoms, Weckerly,” he said aside to the man with the red beard.

“Yes, Doctor,” said the other quizzically. “The sea air ought to do him a lot of good.”

Geltman, now bewildered, limp and very much alarmed, suffered himself to be led shivering below by the two blue-shirted sailor-men. There he found the steward in the cabin with a drink, and the blue flannels, and a boy laying a warm breakfast in the saloon. He dressed. At table he discovered

an appetite which even his troubled spirit had not abated. Hot coffee and a cigar completed his rehabilitation. His situation would have been an agreeable joke had it not been so tragic. He had learned enough to feel that he was powerless, that there had been some terrible mistake, and that the only way out of the difficulty was through the somewhat tortuous and sparsely buoyed channels of diplomacy.

But he walked out upon deck with renewed confidence. It was early yet. If he could persuade his host of his mistake there was still time to run in shore where the telegraph might set all things right. The man in the yachting cap was smoking a pipe in the lee of the after hatch.

“Will you please tell me your name?” began the brewer, constrainedly.

“With all the good will in the world,” said the other, rising. “I’m glad you’re feeling better. I’m Doctor Norman Woolf of New York, and this,” indicating the red-bearded man, “is Captain Weckerly of the *Pinta*. Captain Weckerly – Mr. Fehrenbach.”

Geltman started at the repetition of the name, but he gave no other sign.

“Would you mind,” said the brewer, “telling me how I came aboard your boat?”

“Not at all,” said Woolf, easily. “You see, when I cruise on the *Pinta* I make it a point to leave all thought of my cases behind. But sometimes I break my rule, and when they told me of yours I made up my mind I should like to study you under intimate and extraordinary conditions and so – ”

“Really, I don’t quite follow – ”

“And so I had to bring you out to the yacht on which I was just starting for a little run over to the Azores.”

“The Azores!”

Dr. Woolf was smiling benignly at the unhappy brewer.

“You know,” he continued, “these cases of aphasia have a peculiar interest for me. It seems such a little slipping of the cogs. What’s in a name, after all? Yours is an old and honored one. The Fehrenbachs have made beer for fifty years – ”

“It’s a lie,” shouted Geltman springing to his feet, unable longer to contain himself. “It’s only thirty – and the stuff isn’t fit to drink.”

“Pray be calm. Don’t you know that if this was to get abroad, it would hurt your business?”

“My business – the business of Geltman and Company – ”

“The business of Fehrenbach and Company,” interrupted Dr. Woolf sternly.

The unfortunate brewer with an effort contained himself. He knew that anger would avail him nothing. The only thing left was to listen patiently. He subsided again into his wicker chair and fastened his nervous gaze upon the distant horizon.

“It’s a pleasure to see you capable of self-control. If you can, I should like you to try and tell me how you happened to begin using the name of Geltman.”

How had he happened to use the name of Geltman!

“What would you say,” continued the Doctor, without awaiting the answer, “if I were to tell you that I was Christopher Columbus and that Captain Weckerly here was Francisco Pizarro or Hernandez Cortes? You’d say we were mistaken, wouldn’t you? Of course you would. When you say that you’re Geltman and we know you’re Fehrenbach – ”

“Stop!” roared the unhappy brewer, springing to his feet. “Stop, for the love of Heaven, and let me off this floating madhouse!”

“Calm yourself!”

“Calm myself! Can you not see that the whole thing is a terrible mistake? You have taken me for some one else. Last evening, I tell you, I was knocked down and drugged. Then I was carried to a boat and brought here. Look in my clothes, my handkerchiefs, my linen, you will see the monogram or initials C. G. Will not that be enough to satisfy you?”

“My dear sir, I assure you you were brought aboard in the very clothes you now wear. Even that cap was on your head. Can’t you remember coming up the gangway with Captain Weckerly?”

And then, half aloud, and with looks of misgivings toward the Captain, who was shaking his head, "He's worse than I supposed."

Geltman had taken off the yachting cap and there, perforated in the band, were the letters O. F. He searched his pockets and found a handkerchief with the same initials. As he did so he saw that the two men were looking at him with an expression of new interest and concern. His mind was still befogged. For the first time he really began to doubt himself, and the evidence of his belated memory. He had not heard that Otto Fehrenbach was mad. Was it possible that after all some dreadful misfortune had happened to him, Geltman? That a blow he had received in falling had turned his mind, and that his soul had migrated to the body of the hated Fehrenbach? And if so, did the soul of Fehrenbach occupy *his* body? Fehrenbach, sitting in *his* office, directing *his* business with the shoddy methods of the Fehrenbachs, driving *his* horses, and perhaps – could it be that he was at this moment marrying Juliet Hazard in his place? The thought of it made him sick. He was dimly conscious of some science which dealt with these things. He had once read a story of a happening of this kind at a German university. He looked at these strangers before him and found himself returning in kind their mysterious glances. Was he mad? Or were they? Or were they all mad together? He glanced aloft at the swaying masts. And the yacht, too? Was it real or was that, too, some fantasy of a diseased imagination? The *Fliegende Holländer* flitted playfully into his mind. Just forward of the cabin a group of sailors were standing looking at him and whispering. It was uncanny. Were they, too, in the same state as the others? It could not be. The vessel was real. Geltman or Fehrenbach – he, himself, was real. There must be some one aboard the accursed craft who would listen to him and understand. Bewildered, he walked forward. As he did so the group of sailor-men dissolved and each one hurried about some self-appointed task. He walked over to a man who was coiling a rope.

"I say, my man," he said, "are you from New York?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, but he looked over his shoulder to right and left as though seeking a mode of escape.

"Did you ever happen to drink any of Geltman's beer?"

The man gave the brewer one fleeting look, then dropped his coil and disappeared down the fo'c's'le hatch.

The brewer watched the retreating figure with some dismay. He walked toward another man who was shining some bright work around the galley stovepipe. But the man saw him coming and vanished as the other had done. An old man with a gray beard sat on a ditty box at the lee rail, sewing a pair of breeches. He was chewing tobacco and scowling, but did not move as the landsman approached.

"I say, my man," began the brewer again, "did you ever drink any of Geltman's beer?"

The old man eyed him from head to foot before he answered. But there was no fear in his face – only pity – naked and undisguised.

"Naw," he replied, spitting to leeward. "There ain't no beer in N' York fer me but Otto Fehrenbach's."

Geltman looked at him a moment and then turned despairingly aft. The yacht was bewitched and they were all bewitched with her.

CHAPTER III

"It's lucky Ollie Farquhar's fat," said Mortimer Crabb when Geltman was out of earshot. "It was neat, Jepson, beautifully neat. Did you ever see fish take the bait better? But he'll be coming to in a minute."

Captain Jepson was watching the bewildered brewer. "He won't get much information there," he grinned.

"It can't last much longer, though," said Crabb. "How much of a run is it to the coast?"

"About an hour, sir."

"Well, keep her on her course until eight bells. Then if he insists we'll run in and land him on the beach somewhere."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"It will soon be over now. He can't get in until to-morrow and then" – Crabb beamed with satisfaction – "and then it'll be too late. Stow your smile, Jepson. He's coming back."

Not even this complete chain of circumstantial evidence could long avail against the brisk air and sunlight. In the broad expanse between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand Geltman noted the blue of some youthful tattooing. As he saw the familiar letters doubt took flight. He *was* himself. There was no doubt of that. As he went aft again he smiled triumphantly.

"Let's be done with nonsense, Dr. Woolf," he growled. "Look at that," holding his hand before Crabb's eyes. "If I'm Otto Fehrenbach how is it that the letters C. G. are marked in my hand?"

Crabb, his arms akimbo, stood looking him steadily in the eyes.

"So," he said calmly, "you're awake at last!"

He looked at Crabb and the Captain with eyes which saw not. What he had thought of saying and doing remained unsaid and undone. With no other word he lurched heavily forward and down the companion.

"There'll be a hurricane in that quarter, Jepson, or I'm not weather wise," laughed Crabb. "We'd better run in now. There isn't much sea and the wind is offshore. We'll land him at Quogue or Westhampton. In the meanwhile, keep the tarpaulin over the for'ard boat so that he can't see the name on her. We'll use the gig. If he tries to peep over the stern we'll clap him in the stateroom. It will mean five years at least for me if he learns the name of the *Blue Wing*. So look sharp, Jepson, and keep an eye on him."

"Never fear," said the Captain with a grin, and walked forward.

Crabb walked the deck in high jubilation. He looked at his watch. Three o'clock! If McFee had followed his instructions Dicky Bowles and Juliet Hazard were man and wife. He had nicely figured his chances. To Geltman he was Dr. Woolf. To his crew he was Mr. Crabb taking an unfortunate relative for an airing; to Dicky Bowles he was the rescuer of forlorn damsels and the trump of good fellows.

Crabb was fully prepared to carry the villainy through to the end. Of one thing he was certain, the sooner his guest was off the *Blue Wing* and safely landed the better.

And so, when at last Geltman came on deck with the watchful Weckerly at his heels, Crabb noted the chastened expression upon the brewer's face with singular satisfaction.

"I'll go ashore, if you please," he said, quietly.

Crabb affected disappointed surprise.

"Here? Now?" he said. "We're pretty far down the coast. That's Quogue in there. I can't very well run back to New York, but –"

"Put me ashore, sir," said Geltman sulkily.

When the gig was lowered, Crabb bowed the brewer over the side, his evening clothes tied in a paper package.

“Good-by,” said Crabb. “When you’re done with the flannels, Mr. Geltman, send ’em to Fehrenbach.”

But Geltman had no reply. He had folded his arms and was gazing stolidly toward the shore. The last glimpse Crabb had of him was when the *Blue Wing* drew offshore leaving him gesticulating wildly upon the beach in the glow of the setting sun.

When the figure was but a speck in the distance Mortimer Crabb turned away and threw himself wearily in his wicker chair.

“Where to now, sir?” asked Jepson.

“Oh, anywhere you like.”

“Sandy Hook, sir?”

“Oh, yes,” he sighed, “as well go there as anywhere else. New York, Jepson.”

Poor Crabb! In twenty-four hours he was, if anything, more bored than ever. The sight of the joyous faces of Dicky Bowles and his bride had done something to relieve the *tedium vitae*, but he knew that their joy was of themselves and not of him, and so he gave them a “God bless you” and his country place on Long Island for a few weeks of honeymooning. He had even had the presumption to offer them the *Blue Wing*, but Dicky, whose new responsibilities had developed a vein of prudence, refused point blank. Crabb shrugged his shoulders.

“Suit yourselves,” he laughed. “It’s yours if you want it.”

“And have Geltman putting you in jail?”

“Oh, *he* won’t trouble me.”

“How do you know?”

“I’ve made some inquiries. He’s dropped the thing.”

“Are you sure?”

“Oh, yes. He’s not so thick-skinned as he looks. That story wouldn’t look well in print, you know.”

With an outburst of friendship, Dicky threw his arms around Crabb’s shoulders and gave him a bear hug.

“I’ll never forget it, Mort, never! You’re the salt of the earth – ”

“There, there, Dicky. Salt should be taken in pinches, not by the spoonful, and you’ve mussed my cravat! Be off with you and don’t come back here until matrimony has sobered you into a proper sense of your new responsibilities to your Creator.”

From the window of his apartment Crabb watched Dicky’s taxi spin up the avenue in the direction of the modest boarding-house which sheltered the waiting bride, then turned with a heavy sigh and rang for McFee. Love like that never comes to the very rich. He, Mortimer Crabb, was not a sentient being, but only a chattel, an animated bank account upon which designing matrons cast envious eyes and for which ambitious daughters laid their pretty snares. No, love like that was not for him – or ever would be, it seemed.

His toilet made, Crabb strolled out for the air, wondering as he often did how the people on the street could smile their way through life, while he —

A hansom passed, turned just beyond and drew up at the curb beside him, and a voice addressed him.

“Crabb! Mortimer Crabb! By all that’s lucky!”

“Ross Burnett!” said Crabb, gladly. “I thought that you were dead. Have you dropped from heaven, man?”

“No,” laughed Ross, “not so far, only from China.”

Burnett dismissed the hansom at once and together they went to the Bachelors’ Club near by, where, over a friendly glass, they gathered up the loose ends of their friendship. Crabb listened with new interest as his old friend gave him an account of what had happened in the five years which had

intervened since they had last met, recalling piece by piece the unfortunate events which had led to his departure from New York, and Burnett, glad of receptive ears, rehearsed it for him.

The boy had squandered his patrimony in Wall Street. Then by the grace of one of the senators from New York he obtained from the President an appointment as consular clerk, an office, which if it paid but little at home carried with it some dignity, a little authority, and certain appreciable perquisites in foreign ports.

He had chosen wisely. At Cairo, where he had been sent to fill a temporary vacancy caused by the death of the consul general and subsequent illness of his deputy, he found himself suddenly in charge of the consular office in the fullest press of business, with diplomatic functions requiring both ingenuity and discretion.

After all, it was very simple. The business of a consulate was child's play, and the usual phases in the life of a diplomat were to be requisitely met by the usages of gentility – a quality Burnett discovered was not too amply possessed by those political gentlemen who sat abroad in the posts of honor to represent the great republic.

He thought that if he could get a post, however small, with plenary powers, he would be happy. But, alas! He had been away from home so long that he didn't even know whether his senator was dead or alive, and when he reached Washington, a month or so after the inauguration, he realized how small were his chances for preferment.

The President and Secretary of State were besieged daily by powerful politicians, and one by one the posts coveted, even the smallest of them, were taken by frock-coated, soft-hatted, flowing-tied gentlemen, whom he had noticed lounging and chewing tobacco in the Willard Hotel lobby. It was apparently with such persons that power took preferment. His roseate dreams vanished. Ross Burnett was a mere State Department drudge again at twelve hundred a year!

He told Crabb that he had spoken to the chief of the diplomatic bureau in despair.

"Isn't there any way, Crowthers?" he had asked. "Can't a fellow ever get any higher?"

"If he had a pull, he might – but a consular clerk –" The shake of Crowthers' head was eloquent.

"Isn't there anything a fellow – even a consular clerk – could do to win promotion in this service?" he continued.

Crowthers had looked at him quizzically.

"Yes, there's one thing. If you could do that, you might ask the Secretary for anything you wanted."

"And that –"

"Get the text of the treaty between Germany and China from Baron Arnim."

Crowthers had chuckled. Crabb chuckled, too. He thought it a very good joke. Baron Arnim had been the special envoy of Germany to China, accredited to the court of the Eastern potentate with the special mission of formulating a new and secret treaty between these monarchs. He was now returning home carrying a copy of this document in his baggage.

Burnett had laughed. It *was* a good joke.

"You'd better send me out again," Burnett had said, hopelessly. "Anything from Arakan to Zanzibar will do for me."

Crabb listened to the story with renewed marks of appreciation.

"So you've been out and doing in the world, after all?" he said, languidly, "while we —*eheu jam satis!*— have glutted ourselves with the stale and unprofitable. How I envy you!"

Burnett smoked silently. It was very easy to envy from the comfortable vantage ground of a hundred and fifty thousand a year.

"Why, man, if you knew how sick of it all I am," sighed Crabb, "you'd thank your stars for the lucky dispensation that took you out of it. Rasselas was right. I've been pursuing the phantoms of hope for thirty years, and I'm still hopeless. There have been a few bright spots" – Crabb smiled at his cigar ash – "a very few, and far between."

“Bored as ever, Crabb?”

“Immitigably. To live in the thick of things and see nothing but the pale drabs and grays. No red anywhere. Oh, for a passion that would burn and sear – love, hate, fear! I’m forever courting them all. And here I am still cool, colorless and unscarred. Only once” – his gray eyes lit up marvelously – “only once did I learn the true relation of life to death, Burnett; only once. That was when the *Blue Wing* struggled six days in a hurricane with Hatteras under her lee. It was glorious. They may talk of love and hate as they will; fear, I tell you, is the Titan of passions.”

Burnett was surprised at this unmasking.

“You should try big game,” he said, carelessly.

“I have,” said the other; “both beasts and men – and here I am in flannels and a red tie! I’ve skinned the one and been skinned by the other – to what end?”

“You’ve bought experience.”

“Cheap at any cost. You can’t buy fear. Love comes in varieties at the market values. Hate can be bought for a song; but fear, genuine and amazing, is priceless – a gem which only opportunity can provide; and how seldom opportunity knocks at any man’s door!”

“Crabb the original – the esoteric!”

“Yes. The same. The very same. And you, how different! How sober and rounded!”

There was a silence, contemplative, retrospective on both their parts. Crabb broke it.

“Tell me, old man,” he said, “about your position. Isn’t there any chance?”

Burnett smiled a little bitterly.

“I’m a consular clerk at twelve hundred a year during good behavior. When I’ve said that, I’ve said it all.”

“But your future?”

“I’m not in line of promotion.”

“Impossible! Politics?”

“Exactly. I’ve no pull to speak of.”

“But your service?”

“I’ve been paid for that.”

“Isn’t there any other way?”

“Oh, yes,” Burnett laughed, “that treaty. I happened to know something about it when I was out there. It has to do with neutrality, trade ports and coaling stations; but just what, the devil only knows, and his deputy, Baron Arnim, won’t tell. Arnim is now in Washington, ostensibly sight-seeing, but really to confer with Von Schlichter, the ambassador there, about it. You see, we’ve got rather more closely into the Eastern question than we really like, and a knowledge of Germany’s attitude is immensely important to us.”

“Pray go on,” drawled Crabb.

“That’s all there is. The rest was a joke. Crowthers wants me to get the text of that treaty from Baron Arnim’s dispatch-box.”

“Entertaining!” said Crabb, with clouding brow. And then, after a pause, with all the seriousness in the world: “And aren’t you going to?”

Burnett turned to look at him in surprise.

“What?”

“Get it. The treaty.”

“The treaty! From Baron Arnim! You don’t know much of diplomacy, Crabb.”

“You misunderstood me,” he said, coolly; and then, with lowered voice:

“Not from Baron Arnim – from Baron Arnim’s dispatch-box.”

Burnett looked at his acquaintance in a maze. Crabb had been thought a mystery in the old days. He was an enigma now.

“Surely you’re jesting.”

“Why? It oughtn’t to be difficult.”

Burnett looked fearfully around the room at their distant neighbors. “But it’s burglary. Worse than that. If I, in my connection with the State Department, were discovered tampering with the papers of a foreign government, it would lead to endless complications and, perhaps, the disruption of diplomatic relations. Such a thing is impossible. Its very impossibility was the one thing which prompted Crowthers’ suggestion. Can’t you understand that?”

Crabb was stroking his chin and contemplating his well-shaped boot.

“Admit that it’s impossible,” he said calmly. “Do you think, if by some chance you were enabled to give the Secretary of State this information, you’d better your condition?”

“What is the use, Crabb?” began Burnett.

“It can’t do any harm to answer me.”

“Well – yes, I suppose so. If we weren’t plunged immediately into war with Emperor William.”

“Oh!” Crabb was deep in thought. It was several moments before he went on, and then, as though dismissing the subject.

“What are your plans, Ross? Have you a week to spare? How about a cruise on the *Blue Wing*? There’s a lot I know that you don’t, and a lot you know that I’d like to. I’ll take you up to Washington whenever you’re bored. What do you say?”

Ross Burnett accepted with alacrity. He remembered the *Blue Wing*, Jepson and Valentin’s dinners. He had longed for them many times when he was eating spaghetti at Gabri’s little restaurant in Genoa.

When they parted it was with a consciousness on the part of Burnett that the affair of Baron Arnim had not been dismissed. The very thought had been madness. Was it only a little pleasantry of Crabb’s? If not, what wild plan had entered his head? It was unlike the Mortimer Crabb he remembered.

And yet there had been a deeper current flowing below his placid surface that gave a suggestion of desperate intent which nothing could explain away. And how illimitable were the possibilities if some plan could be devised by which the information could be obtained without resort to violent measures! It meant for him at least a post at the helm somewhere, or, perhaps, a secretaryship on one of the big commissions.

The idea of burglary, flagrant and nefarious, he dismissed at a thought. Would there not be some way – an unguarded moment – a faithless servant – to give the thing the aspect of possible achievement? As he dressed he found himself thinking of the matter with more seriousness than it deserved.

CHAPTER IV

A week had passed since the two friends had met, and the *Blue Wing* now lay in the Potomac near the Seventh Street wharf. It was night and the men had dined.

Valentin's dinners were a distinct achievement. They were of the kind which made conclusive the assumption of an especial heaven for cooks. After coffee and over a cigar, which made all things complete, Mortimer Crabb chose his psychological moment.

"Burnett," he said, "you must see that treaty and copy it."

Burnett looked at him squarely. Crabb's glance never wavered.

"So you *did* mean it?" said Burnett.

"Every word. You must have it. I'm going to help."

"It's hopeless."

"Perhaps. But the game is worth the candle."

"A bribe to a servant?"

"Leave that to me. Come, come, Ross, it's the chance of your life. Arnim, Von Schlichter and all the rest of them dine at the British embassy to-night. There's to be a ball afterward. They won't be back until late. We must get into Arnim's rooms at the German embassy. Those rooms are in the rear of the house. There's a rain spout and a back building. You can climb?"

"To-night?" Burnett gasped. "You found out these things to-day?"

"Since I left you. I saw Denton Thorpe at the British embassy."

"And you were so sure I'd agree! Don't you think, old man –"

"Hang it all, Burnett! I'm not easily deceived. You're down on your luck; that's plain. But you're not beaten. Any man who can buck the market down to his last thousand the way you did doesn't lack sand. The end isn't an ignoble one. You'll be doing the Administration a service – and yourself. Why, how can you pause?"

Burnett looked around at the familiar fittings of the saloon, at the Braun prints let into the woodwork, at the flying teal set in the azure above the wainscoting, at his immaculate host and at his own conventional black. Was this to be indeed a setting for Machiavellian conspiracy?

Crabb got up from the table and opened the doors of a large locker under the companion. Burnett watched him curiously.

Garment after garment he pulled out upon the deck under the glare of the cabin lamp; shoes, hats and caps, overcoats and clothing of all sizes and shapes from the braided gray of the coster to the velvet and sash of the Niçois.

He selected a soft hat and a cap and two long, tattered coats of ancient cut and style and threw them over the back of a chair. Then he went to his stateroom and brought out a large square box of tin and placed it on the table.

He first wrapped a handkerchief around his neck, then seated himself deliberately before the box, opened the lid and took out a tray filled with make-up sticks. These he put aside while he drew forth from the deeper recesses mustachios, whiskers and beards of all shapes and complexions. He worked rapidly and silently, watching his changing image in the little mirror set in the box lid.

Burnett, fascinated, followed his skillful fingers as they moved back and forth, lining here, shading there, not as the actor does for an effect by the calcium, but carefully, delicately, with the skill of the art anatomist who knows the bone structure of the face and the pull of the aging muscles.

In twenty minutes Mortimer Crabb had aged as many years, and now bore the phiz of a shaggy rum-sot. The long coat, soft hat and rough bandanna completed the character. The fever of the adventure had mounted in Burnett's veins. He sprang to his feet with a reckless gesture of final resolution.

"Give me my part!" he exclaimed. "I'll play it!"

The aged intemperate smiled approval. "Good lad!" he said. "I thought you'd be game. If you hadn't been I was going alone. It's lucky you're clean shaved. Come and be transfigured."

And as he rapidly worked on Burnett's face he completed the details of his plan. Like a good general, Crabb disposed his plans for failure as well as for success.

They would wear their disguises over their evening clothes. Then, if the worst came, vaseline and a wipe of the bandannas would quickly remove all guilty signs from their faces, they could discard their tatters, and resume the garb of convention.

Ross Burnett at last rose swarthy and darkly mustached, lacking only the rings in his ears to be old Gabri himself. He was fully awakened to the possibilities of the adventure. Whatever misgivings he had had were speedily dissipated by the blithe optimism of his companion.

Crabb reached over for the brandy decanter.

"One drink," he said, "and we must be off."

The night was thick. A mist which had been gathering since sunset now turned to a soft drizzle of rain. Crabb, hands in pockets and shoulders bent, walked with a rapid and shambling gait up the street.

"We can't risk the cars or a cab in this," muttered Crabb. "We might do it, but it's not worth the risk. Can you walk? It's not over three miles."

It was after one o'clock before they reached Highland Terrace. Without stopping they examined the German embassy at long range from the distant side of Massachusetts Avenue. A gas lamp sputtered dimly under the *porte-cochère*. Another light gleamed far up in the slanting roof. Crabb led the way around and into the alley in the rear. It was long, badly lighted and ran the entire length of the block.

"I got the details in the city plot-book from a real-estate man this afternoon. He thinks I'm going to buy next door. I wanted to be particular about the alleys and back entrances." Crabb chuckled.

Burnett looked along the backs of the row of N Street houses. They were all as stolid as sphinxes. Several lights at wide intervals burned dimly. The night was chill for the season, and all the windows were down. The occasion was propitious. The rear of the embassy was dark, except for a dim glow in a window on the second floor.

"That should be Arnim's room," said Crabb.

He tried the back gate. It was unlocked. Noiselessly they entered, closing it after them. There was a rain spout, which Crabb eyed hopefully; but they found better luck in the shape of a thirty-foot ladder along the fence.

"A positive invitation," whispered Crabb, joyfully. "Here, Ross; in the shadow. Once on the back building the deed is done. Quiet, now. You hold it and I'll go up."

Burnett did not falter. But his hands were cold, and he was trembling from top to toe with excitement. He could not but admire Crabb's composure as he went firmly up the rungs.

He saw him reach the roof and draw himself over the coping, and in a moment Burnett, less noiselessly but safely, had joined his fellow criminal by the window. There they waited a moment, listening. A cab clattered down Fifteenth Street, and the gongs on the car line clanged in reply, but that was all.

Crabb stealthily arose and peered into the lighted window. It was a study. The light came from a lamp with a green shade. Under its glow upon the desk were maps and documents in profusion. And in the corner he could make out the lines of an iron-bound chest or box. They had made no mistake. Unless in the possession of Von Schlichter it was here that the Chinese treaty would be found.

"All right," whispered Crabb. "An old-fashioned padlock, too."

Crabb tried the window. It was locked. He took something from one of the pockets of his coat and reached up to the middle of the sash. There was a sound like the quick shearing of linen which sent the blood back to Burnett's heart. In the still night it seemed to come back manifold from the

wings of the buildings opposite. They paused again. A slight crackling of broken glass, and Crabb's long fingers reached through the hole and turned the catch. In a moment they were in the room.

The intangible and Quixotic had become a latter-day reality. Burnett's spirits rose. He did not lack courage, and here was a situation which spurred him to the utmost.

Instinctively he closed the inside shutters behind him. From the alley the pair would not have presented an appearance which accorded with the quiet splendor of the room. He found himself peering around, his ears straining for the slightest sound.

A glance revealed the dispatch-box, heavy, squat and phlegmatic, like its owner. Crabb had tiptoed over to the door of the adjoining room. Burnett saw the eyes dilate and the warning finger to his lips.

From the inner apartment, slowly and regularly, came the sound of heavy breathing. There, in a broad armchair by the foot of the bed, sprawled the baron's valet, in stertorous sleep. His mouth was wide open, his limbs relaxed. He had heard nothing.

"Quick," whispered Crabb; "your bandanna around his legs."

Burnett surprised himself by the rapidity and intelligence of his collaboration. A handkerchief was slipped into the man's mouth, and before his eyes were fairly opened he was gagged and bound hand and foot by the cord from the baron's own dressing gown.

From a pocket Crabb had produced a revolver, which he flourished significantly under the nose of the terrified man, who recoiled before the dark look which accompanied it.

Crabb seemed to have planned exactly what to do. He took a bath towel and tied it over the man's ears and under his chin. From the bed he took the baron's sheets and blankets, enswathing the unfortunate servant until nothing but the tip of his nose was visible. A rope of suspenders and cravats completed the job.

The Baron Arnim's valet, to all the purposes of usefulness in life, was a bundled mummy.

"Phew!" said Crabb, when it was done. "Poor devil! But it can't be helped. He mustn't see or know. And now for it."

Crabb produced a bunch of skeleton keys and an electric bull's-eye. He tried the keys rapidly. In a moment the dispatch-box was opened and its contents exposed to view.

"Carefully now," whispered Crabb. "What should it look like?"

"A foolscap-shaped thing in silk covers with dangling cords," said Ross. "There, under your hand."

In a moment they had it out and between them on the desk. There it was, in all truth, written in two columns, Chinese on the one side, French on the other.

"Are you sure?" said Crabb.

"Sure! Sure as I'm a thief in the night!"

"Then sit and write, man. Write as you never wrote before. I'll listen and watch Rameses the Second."

In the twenty minutes during which Burnett fearfully wrote, Crabb stood listening at the doors and windows for sounds of servants or approaching carriages. The man swaddled in the sheets made a few futile struggles and then subsided. Burnett's eyes gleamed. Other eyes than his would gleam at what he saw and wrote. When he finished he closed the document, removed all traces of his work, replaced it in the iron box and shut the lid. He dropped the precious sheets into an inner pocket and was moving toward the window when Crabb seized him by the arm. There was a step in the hallway without, and the door opened. There, stout and grizzled, his walrus mustache bristling with surprise, in all the distinction of gold lace and orders, stood Baron Arnim.

CHAPTER V

For a moment there was no sound. The burglars looked at the Baron and the Baron looked at the burglars, mouths and eyes open alike. Then, even before Crabb could display his intimidating revolver, the German had disappeared through the door screaming at the top of his lungs.

“Quick! Out of the window!” said Crabb, helping Burnett over the sill. “Down you go – I’ll follow. Don’t fall. If you miss your footing, we’re ruined.”

Burnett scrambled out, over the coping and down the ladder, Crabb almost on his fingers. But they reached the yard in safety and were out in the alley running in the shadow of the fence before a venturesome head stuck forth from the open window and a revolver blazed into the vacant air.

“The devil!” said Crabb. “They’ll have every copper in the city on us in a minute. This way.” He turned into a narrow alley at right angles to the other. “Off with the coat as you go – now, the mustache and grease paint. Take your time. Into this sewer with the coats. So!”

Two gentlemen in light topcoats, one in a cap, the other in a hat, walked up N street arm in arm, thickly singing. Their shirt fronts and hair were rumpled, their legs were not too steady, and they clung affectionately to each other for support and sang thickly.

A window flew up and a tousled head appeared.

“Hey!” yelled a voice. “Burglars in the alley!”

“Burglars!” said one of the singers; and then: “Go to bed. You’re drunk.”

More sounds of windows, the blowing of night whistles and hurrying feet.

Still the revelers sang on.

A stout policeman, clamorous and bellicose, broke in.

“Did you see ’em? Did you see ’em?” he cried, glaring into their faces. Bleary eyes returned his look.

“W-who?” said the voices in unison.

“Burglars,” roared the copper. “If I wasn’t busy I’d run ye in.” And he was off at full speed on his vagrant mission.

“Lucky you’re busy, old chap,” muttered Crabb to the departing figure. “Do sober up a little, Ross, or we’ll never get away. And don’t jostle me so, for I clank like a bellwether.”

Slowly the pair made their way to Thomas Circle and Vermont Avenue, where the sounds of commotion were lost in the noises of the night.

At L Street Burnett straightened up. “Lord!” he gasped. “But that was close.”

“Not as close as it looked,” said Crabb, coolly. “A white shirt-front does wonders with a copper. It was better than a knock on the head and a run for it. In the meanwhile, Ross, for the love of Heaven, help me with some of the bric-à-brac.” And with that he handed Burnett a gold pin tray, a silver box and a watch fob.

Burnett soberly examined the spoils. “I only wish we could have done without that.”

“And had Arnim know what we were driving for? Never, Ross. I’ll pawn them in New York for as little as I can and send von Schlichter the tickets. Won’t that do?”

“I suppose it must,” said Burnett, dubiously.

By three o’clock they were on the *Blue Wing* again, Burnett with mingled feelings of doubt and satisfaction, Crabb afire with the achievement.

“Rasselas was a fool, Ross, a malcontent – a *fainéant*. Life is amazing, bewitching, consummate.” And then, gayly: “Here’s a health, boy – a long life to the new ambassador to the Court of St. James!”

But Ross did not go to the Court of St. James. In the following winter, to the surprise of many, the President gave him a special mission to prepare a trade treaty with Peru. Baron Arnim, in due course, recovered his bric-à-brac. Meanwhile Emperor William, mystified at the amazing sagacity of

the Secretary of State in the Eastern question, continues the building of a mighty navy in the fear that one day the upstart nation across the ocean will bring the questions complicating them to an issue.

But life was no longer amusing, bewitching or consummate to Crabb. The flavor of an adventure gone from his mouth, the commonplace became more flat and tasteless than before. Life was all pale drabs and grays again. To make matters worse he had been obliged to make a business visit in Philadelphia, and this filled the cup of insipidity to the brim. He was almost ready to wish that his benighted forbears had never owned the coal mines in Pennsylvania to which he had fallen heir, for it seemed there were many matters to be settled, contracts to be signed and leases to be drawn by his attorney in the sleepy city, and it would be several days, he discovered, before he could get off to Newport. Not even the *Blue Wing* was at his disposal, for an accident in the engine room had laid her out of commission for two weeks at least.

So he resigned himself to the inevitable, and took a room at a hotel, grimly determined to see the matter through, conscious meanwhile of a fervid hope that the unusual might happen – the lightning might strike. Hate he had known and fear, but love had so far eluded him. Why, he did not know, save that he had never been willing to perceive that emotion when offered in conventional forms – and since no other forms were possible, he had simply ceased to consider the matter. Yet marry some day, he must, of course. But whom? Little he dreamed how soon he would know. Little did Miss Patricia Wharton think that she had anything to do with it. In fact, Patricia's thoughts at that time were far from matrimony. Patricia was bored. For a month while Wharton père boiled out his gout at the sulphur springs, Patricia had dutifully sat and rocked, tapping a small foot impatiently, looking hourly less a monument of Patience and smiling not at all.

At last they were in Philadelphia. Wilson had opened two rooms at the house and a speedy termination of David Wharton's business would have seen them soon at Bar Harbor. But something went wrong at the office in Chestnut Street, and Patricia, once a lamb and now a sheep of sacrifice, found herself at this particular moment doomed to another weary week of waiting.

To make matters worse not a girl Patricia knew was in town, or if there were any the telephone refused to discover them. Her aunt's place was at Haverford, but she knew that an invitation to dinner there meant aged Quaker cousins and that kind of creaky informality which shows a need of oil at the joints. That lubricant Patricia had no intention of supplying. She had rather be bored alone than bored in company. She found herself sighing for Bar Harbor as she had never sighed before. She pictured the cottage, cool and gray among the rocks, the blue bowl of the sea with its rim just at her window-ledge, the clamoring surf, and the briny smell with its faint suggestion of things cool and curious which came up newly breathed from the heart of the deep. She could hear "Country Girl" whinnying impatience from the stable when Jack Masters on "Kentucky" rode down from "The Pinnacle" to inquire.

Indeed, as she walked out into the Square in the afternoon she found herself relapsing into a minute and somewhat sordid introspection. It was the weather, perhaps. Surely the dog-days had settled upon the sleepy city in earnest. No breath stirred the famishing trees, the smell of hot asphalt was in the air, locusts buzzed vigorously everywhere, trolley bells clanged out of tune, and the sun was leaving a blood-hot trail across the sky in angry augury for the morrow.

Patricia sank upon a bench, and poked viciously at the walk with her parasol. She experienced a certain grim satisfaction in being more than usually alone. Poor Patricia! who at the crooking of a finger, could have summoned to her side any one of five estimable scions of stupid, distinguished families. Only something new, something difficult and extraordinary would lift her from the hopeless slough of despond into which she had found herself precipitated.

Andromeda awaiting Perseus on a bench in Rittenhouse Square! She smiled widely and unrestrainedly up and precisely into the face of Mr. Mortimer Crabb.

CHAPTER VI

A pleasant face it was, upon which, to her surprise, a smile very suddenly grew into being as though in response to her own. Patricia's eyes dropped quickly – sedately, as became those of a decorous woman, and yet in that brief second in which the eyes of the tall young man met hers, she had noticed that they were gray, as though sun-bleached, but very clear and sparkling. And when she raised her own to look quite through and beyond the opposite bench, her conscience refused to deny that she had enjoyed the looking. Were the eyes smiling *at*, or *with* her? In that distinction lay a question in morals. Was their sparkle quizzical or intrusive? She would have vowed that good humor, benevolence (if benevolence may be found in the eyes of two and thirty), and a certain polite interest were its actual ingredients. It was all very interesting. She surprised herself in a not unlively curiosity as to his life and calling, and in a lack of any sort of misgiving at the *contretemps*.

The shadows beneath the wilted trees grew deeper. The sun swept down into the west and suddenly vanished with all his train of gold and purple. Patricia stole a furtive look at her neighbor. Triumphant she confirmed her diagnosis. The man was lost in the glow of the sunset. Importunity and he were miles asunder.

It may have been that Patricia's eyes were more potent than the sunset, or that her triumphant deduction was based upon a false premise, or that the young man had been watching her all the while from the tail of his benevolent eye; for without the slightest warning, his head turned suddenly to find the eyes of the unfortunate Patricia again fixed upon his. However quickly she might turn aside, the glance exchanged was long enough to disclose the fact that the sparkle was still there and to excite a suspicion that it had never been dispelled. Nor did the character of the smile reassure her. She was not at all certain now that he was not smiling both *with* and *at* her.

The quickly averted head, the toss of the chin, seemed all too inadequate to the situation; yet she availed herself of those bulwarks of maiden modesty in virtuous effort to refute the unconscious testimony of her unlucky eyes. Instinct suggested immediate flight. But Patricia moved not. Here indeed was a case where flight meant confession. She felt rather than saw his gaze search her from head to foot, and struggle as she might against it, the warm color raced to her cheek and brow. If she had enjoyed the situation a moment before, the impertinence, so suddenly born, filled her with dismay. By some subtle feminine process of reasoning, she succeeded in eliminating her share in the trifling adventure and now saw only the sin of the offending male. At last she arose, the very presentment of injured and scornful dignity and walked, looking neither to the left hand nor to the right.

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