54-40 OR FIGHT

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SYNOPSIS.

Senator John Calhoun is offered the portfolio of secretary of state in Tyler's cabinet. He declares that if he accepts it means that Texas and Oregon must be added to the Union. He plans to learn the intentions of England with regard to Mexico, through Baroness Von Ritz, secret spy and reputed mistress of the English ambassador, Pakenham. He sends his secretary, Nicholas Trist, to bring the baroness to his apartment. While searching for the baroness' home, a carriage drives up and he is invited to enter. The occupant is the baroness, who says she is being pursued. The pursuers are shaken off. The baroness consents to see Calhoun. Nicholas notes that she has lost a slipper. She gives Nicholas the remaining slipper as a pledge that she will tell Calhoun all, and, as security, Nicholas gives her a trinket he intended for his sweetheart, Elizabeth Churchill. Nicholas is ordered to leave at once for Montreal on state business, by Calhoun, who has become secretary of state, and plans to be married that night. Tyler warns Pakenham that interference by England in the affairs of this continent will not be tolerated. The west demands that the joint occupancy of Oregon with Great Britain cease, and has raised the cry of "Fifty-four, Forty or Fight." The baroness tells Nicholas she will do her best to prevent his marriage. She returns the trinket and he promises to return her slipper. Nicholas enlists the services of Congressman Dandridge, a rejected suitor of Elizabeth's, to assist in the arrangements for the wedding and entrusts him with the return of the slipper to the baroness. The congressman gets drunk and sends the slipper to Elizabeth. The wedding is declared off, and Nicholas is ordered from the house by Elizabeth's father. Nicholas is ordered to gain access to a meeting of the Hudson Bay directors in Montreal and learn England's intentions regarding Oregon. Nicholas sees the baroness leave the directors' meeting in Montreal, where he had failed to gain admission. She warns him that his life is in danger and he accepts an invitation to pass the night at her home. She quizzes him as to whether his wedding took place, and gets no satisfaction. She tells him that the slipper she gave him contained a message from the attache of Texas to the British ambassador, saying that if the United States did not annex Texas within 30 days, she would lose both Texas and Oregon. He decides to take the message to Calhoun.

CHAPTER XVII.—Continued.

He smiled. "It iss not a chance, but a certainty," he said. "It wass only agreed last night. England will march this summer 700 men up the Peace river. In the fall they will be across the Rockies. So! They can take boats easily down the streams to Oregon. You ask if there will be troubles. I tell you, yess."

"What time can England make with her brigades, west-bound, my friend?" I asked him casually. He answered with gratifying scientific precision.

"From Edmonton to Fort Colville, west of the Rockies, it hass been done in six weeks, and five days, by Sir George himself. From Fort Colville down it iss easy by boats. It takes the voyageur three months to cross, or four months. It would take troops twice that long, or more. For you in the states, you can go faster. And ah! my friend, it iss worth the race, that Oregon. Believe me, it iss full of bugs—of new bugs; 12 news species I haf discovered and named. It iss sometings of honor, iss it not?"

"What, you say interests me very much, sir," I said. "I am only an American trader, knocking around to see the world a little bit. You seem to have been engaged in some scientific pursuit in that country."

"Yess," he said. "Mein own government and mein own university, they send me to this country to do what hass not been done. I am insectologer. Shall I show you my bugs of Oregon? You shall see them yess? Come with me to my hotel. You shall see many bugs, such as science hass not yet known."

I was willing enough to go with him; and true to his word he did show me such quantities of carefully prepared and classified insects as I had not dreamed our own country offered.

"Twelve new species!" he said, with pride. "Mein own country will gif me honor for this. Five years I spend. Now I go back home.

"I shall not tell you what nickname they gif me in Oregon," he added, smiling; "but my real name iss Wolfram von Rittenhofen, Berlin, it wass last my home. Tell me, you go soon to Oregon?"

"That is very possible," I answered; and this time at least I spoke the truth. "We are bound in opposite directions, but if you are sailing for Europe this spring, you would save time and gain comfort by starting from New York. It would give us great pleasure if we could welcome so distinguished a scientist in Washington."

"No, I am not yet distinguished. Only shall I be distinguished when I have shown my 12 new species to mein own university."

"But it would give me pleasure also to show you Washington. You should see also the government of those backwoodsmen who are crowding out to Oregon. Would you not like to travel with me in America so far as that?"

He shook his head doubtfully. "Perhaps I make mistake to come by the St. Lawrence? It would be shorter to go by New York? Well, I haf no hurry. I think it over, yess."

"But tell me, where did you get that beetle thing?" he asked me again presently, taking up in his hand the Indian clasp.

"I traded for it among the Crow Indians."

"You know what it iss, eh?"

"No, except that it is Indian made."

He scanned the round disks carefully. "Wait!" he exclaimed. "I show you sometings."

He reached for my pencil, drew toward him a piece of paper, taking from his pocket meantime a bit of string. Using the latter for a radius, he drew a circle on the piece of paper.

"Now look what I do!" he said, as I bent over curiously. "See, I draw a straight line through the circle. I divide it in half, so. I divide it in half once more, and make a point. Now I shorten my string, one-half. On each side of my long line I make me a half circle—only half way round on the opposite sides. So, now, what I got, eh? You understand him?"

I shook my head. He pointed in turn to the rude ornamentation in the shell clasp. I declare that then I could see a resemblance between the two designs!

"It is curious," I said.

"Mein Gott! it iss more than curious. It iss vonderful! I haf two Amazonias collected by my own hands, and 12 species of my own discovery, yess, in butterflies alone. That iss much? Listen. It iss notings! Here iss the discovery!"

He took a pace or two excitedly, and came back to thump with his forefinger on the little desk.

"What you see before you iss the sign of the Great Monad! It iss known in China, in Burmah, in all Asia, in all Japan. It iss sign of the great One, of the great Two. In your hand iss the Tah Gook—the Oriental symbol for life, for sex. Myself, I haf seen that in Sitka on Chinese brasses; I haf seen it on Japanese signs, in one land and in another land. But here you show it to me made by the hand of some ignorant aborigine of this continent! On this continent, where it did not originate and does not belong! It iss a discovery! Science shall hear of it. It iss the link of Asia to America. It brings me fame!"

He put his hand into a pocket, and drew it out half filled with gold pieces and with raw gold in the form of nuggets, as though he would offer exchange. I waved him back. "No," said I; "you are welcome to one of these disks, if you please. If you wish, I will take one little bit of these. But tell me, where did you find these pieces of raw gold?"

"Those? They are notings; I recollect me I found these one day up on the Rogue river, not far from my cabin. I am pursuing a most beautiful moth, such as I haf not in all my collection. So, I fall on a log; I skin me my leg. In the moss I find some bits of rock. I recollect me not where, but believe it wass somewhere there. But what I find now, here, by a stranger—it iss worth more than gold! My friend; I thank you, I embrace you! I am favored by fate to meet you. Go with you to Washington? Yess, yess, I go!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

The Missing Slipper.

There will always remain something to be said of woman as long as there is one on earth.—Baufiers.

We passed the luncheon hour at the hostelry of my friend Jacques Bertillon; after which I suggested a stroll about the town for a time.

Before we started, I asked him to step to my room, where I had left my pipe. My eye fell on the commode's top, casually. I saw that it was bare. I recalled the strange warning of the baroness the evening previous. I was watched! My apartment had been entered in my absence. Property of mine had been taken.

My perturbation must have been discoverable in my face. "What iss it?" asked the old man. "You forget something?"

"No," said I, stammering. "It is nothing."

He looked at me dubiously. "Well," then." I admitted; "I miss something from my commode here. Some one has taken it."

"It iss of value, perhaps?" he inquired politely.

"Well, no; not of intrinsic value. 'Twas only a slipper—of white satin, made by Braun of Paris."

"One slipper? Of what use—"

"It belonged to a lady—I was about to return it," I said; but I fear my face showed me none too calm.

"Each man studies for himself his own specialty," mused the old man. "You haf perhaps studied the species of woman. Once, also I."

We walked, my friend musing and babbling, myself still anxious and uneasy. We turned out of narrow Notre Dame street, and into St. Lawrence Main street. As we strolled I noted without much interest the motley life about me, picturesque now with the activities of the advancing spring. Presently, however, my idle gaze was drawn to two young Englishmen whose bearing in some way gave me the impression that they belonged in official or military life, although they were in civilian garb.

"Yes," Commented My Old Scientist Calmly; "So Strange. They Go Together."

Presently the two halted, and separated. The taller kept on to the east, to the old French town. At length I saw him joined, as though by appointment, by another gentleman, one whose appearance at once gave me reason for a second look. He accosted my young Englishman, and without hesitation the two started off together. As they did so I gave an involuntary exclamation. The taller man I had seen once before, the shorter very many times—in Washington!

"Yess," commented my old scientist calmly "so strange! They go together."

"Ah, you know them!" I almost fell upon him.

"Yess—last night. The tall one iss Mr. Peel, a young Englishman; the other is Mexican, they said—Senor Yturrio, of Mexico. He spoke much. Me, I wass sleepy then. But also that other tall one we saw go back—that wass Capt. Parke, also of the British navy. His ship iss the war boat Modeste—a fine one. I see her often when I walk on the riffer front, there."

I turned to him and made some excuse, saying that presently I would join him again at the hotel. Dreamily as ever, he smiled and took his leave. For myself, I walked on rapidly after the two figures, then a block or so ahead of me.

I saw them turn into a street which was familiar to myself. They passed on, turning from time to time among the old houses of the French quarter. Presently they entered the short side street which I myself had seen for the first time the previous night. I pretended to busy myself with my pipe, as they turned in at the very gate which I knew, and knocked at the door which I had entered with my mysterious companion!

The door opened without delay; they both entered.

So, then, Helena von Ritz had other visitors! England and Mexico were indeed conferring here in Montreal. There were matters going forward here in which my government was concerned.

At the moment nothing better occurred to me than to return to my room and wait for a time. It would serve no purpose for me to disclose myself, either in or out of the apartments of the baroness, and it would not aid me to be seen idling about the neighborhood in a city where there was so much reason to suppose strangers were watched. I resolved to wait until the next morning, and to take my friend Von Rittenhofen with me. He need not know all that I knew, yet in case of any accident to myself or any sudden contretemps, he would serve both as a witness and as an excuse for disarming any suspicion which might be entertained regarding myself.

The next day he readily enough fell in with my suggestion of a morning stroll, and again we sallied forth, at about nine o'clock having by that time finished a dejeuner a la fourchette with Jacques Bertillon, which to my mind compared unfavorably with one certain other I had shared.

A sense of uneasiness began to oppress me, I knew not why, before I had gone half way down the little street from the corner where we turned. It was gloomy and dismal enough at the best, and on this morning an unusual apathy seemed to sit upon it, for few of the shutters were down, although the hour was now mid-morning. Something said to me that it would be as well for me to turn back.

I might as well have done so. We passed up the little walk, and I raised the knocker at the door; but even as it sounded I knew what would happen. There came to me that curious feeling which one experiences when one knocks at the door of a house which lacks human occupancy. Even more strongly I had that strange feeling now, because this sound was not merely that of unoccupied rooms—it came from rooms empty and echoing!

I tried the door. It was not locked. I flung it wide, and stepped within. At first I could not adjust my eyes to the dimness. Absolute silence reigned. I pushed open a shutter and looked about me. The rooms were not only unoccupied, but unfurnished! The walls and floors were utterly bare! Not a sign of human occupancy existed. I hastened out to the little walk, and looked up and down the street, to satisfy myself that I had made no mistake. No, this was the number—this was the place.

Followed by my wondering companion, I made such inquiry as I could in the little neighborhood. I could learn nothing.

"Sir," said I to my friend, at last; "I do not understand it. I have pursued, but it seems the butterfly has flown." So, both silent, myself morosely so, we turned and made our way back across the town.

Half an hour later we were on the docks at the river front, where we could look out over the varied shipping which lay there. My scientific friend counted one vessel after another, and at last pointed to a gap in the line.

"Yesterday I wass here," he said, "and I counted all the ships and their names. The steamer Modeste she lay there. Now she iss gone."

I pulled up suddenly. This was the ship which carried Capt. Parke and his friend Lieut. Peel of the British navy. The secret council at Montreal was, therefore, apparently ended! There would be an English land expedition, across Canada to Oregon. Would there be also an expedition by sea? At least my errand in Montreal, now finished, had not been in vain, even though it ended in a mystery and a query.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Accepting Misfortune.

There are many ways of accepting misfortune—as many, indeed, as there are generous feelings or thoughts to be found on the earth; and every one of those thoughts, every one of those feelings, has a magic wand that transforms on the threshold, the features and vestments of sorrow. Job would have said: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"; and Marcus Aurelius, perhaps, "If it be no longer allowed me to love those I loved high above all, it is doubtless that I may learn to love those whom I love not yet."—Maeterlinck.

A New Jersey judge says that a boy can "play hookey" twice a month. When a boy can, he won't want to.

PLEDGE POLICIES FOR LOANS

Imprudent Act That Really Means Man Is Borrowing From His Widow.

Many men, pressed for money, go to the life insurance company, deposit their policy as security and borrow as much as the company is willing to lend. That the practice is common is proved by the fact that most companies have loaned from a fourth to a third of the aggregate face value of their policies in this way. "Very few of these loans," says the annual report of the Connecticut Mutual—and this company's experience is typical—"are ever repaid to the company. The moneys . . . are swallowed up in business enterprises, in speculations . . . and the total result means embarrassment and distress in a great many cases, and poverty in the place of competence, when the claims mature and there is nothing left above the loans but a mere margin in cash on the policies for the protection of families or estates." Men who borrow on their policies are taking away protection from their families. It ought not to be done.—Collier's.

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What Mamma Said.

When the new minister, a handsome and unmarried man, made his first pastoral call at the Fosdicks, he took little Anna up in his arms and tried to kiss her. But the child refused to be kissed; she struggled loose and ran off into the next room, where her mother was putting a few finishing touches to her adornment before going into the drawing room to greet the clergyman.

"Mamma," the little girl whispered, "the man in the drawing room wanted me to kiss him."

"Well," replied mamma, "why didn't you let him? I would if I were you."

Thereupon Anna ran back into the drawing room, and the minister asked:

"Well, little lady, won't you kiss me now?"

"No, I won't," replied Anna promptly, "but mamma says she will."—Exchange.

Her Qualifications.

Pat and his little brown mare were familiar sights to the people of the town of Garry. The mare was lean, blind and lame, but by dint of much coaxing Pat kept her to the harness. One day while leading her to water he had to pass a corner where a crowd of would-be sports had congregated. Thinking to have some amusement at Pat's expense, one called out:

"Hullo, there, Pat. I'm looking for the real goods. How much is that mare of yours able to draw?"

"Begorra," said Pat, "I can't say exactly, but she seems to be able to drawh the attenshun of ivery fool in town."—The Housekeeper.

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