



CHAPTER I.

The Message in the Box.

Anticipating the possibility of my train arriving late, I had named the hour of my meeting with Cummings as three o'clock, and, in consequence of our reaching the city exactly on time, was compelled to loiter idly about the hotel for an hour. However, in passing through the corridor my attention was attracted by an unique curiosity shop occupying a small side room, and, merely to pass the time pleasantly, I entered and began examining the strange collection of wares on display.

There were several articles I lingered over, tempted to purchase, but drifted on, rather undecided, until my eyes perceived a very quaint lacquered jewel box, of a class of workmanship quite unusual. The proprietor, perceiving my interest, joined me.

"The jewel box attracts you," he said pleasantly, opening the case and bringing it forth. "You have love for such things?"

"A deep interest at least," I admitted, taking the article from his hand, "a collector in an amateur way. What is the workmanship—surely not Japanese?"

"No," smilingly. "Although positively I cannot answer as to its origin. The inscription, which can only be read with a microscope"—he traced with his finger—"is ancient Arabic, but no wild Arab ever did the lacquer."

"Yet so strange a curio must have a history, an imaginary one, at least. What is the story?"

"Positively none," he admitted regretfully. "The fact is, this article was found by a chambermaid in one of the hotel rooms, and turned in to the manager. He made every effort to trace the guests, only to learn that they, two men, by the way, had registered falsely, even advertised, but with no response, and finally, after thirty days, was persuaded to accept my offer for the article."

"You have put a price on this?"

"Yes, ridiculously low, no doubt, yet bringing me a good profit."

He named a price, and, still with the box in my hands, I yielded to the temptation, and bought it. The article was sufficiently small to find lodgment in an overcoat pocket, and, as Cummings appeared a little later, was soon forgotten in the earnestness of our conversation. We later had dinner together, and attended the theater in company, my mind so occupied with other matters that I scarcely once thought of the strange purchase I had made, which remained securely hidden. It was only after returning to my own room, then nearing midnight, that it was again recalled to memory.

Only an idle curiosity and a feeling of sleeplessness induced me to draw the article forth, and remove its wrappings, but the sight served immediately to increase my interest. It was certainly a wonderful find, artistically beautiful, and most unusual in design. There was a mystery that must have exercised a strange spell over my imagination, for I dreamed of the long-dead workman who fashioned it, forgetful of the passing night hours. A clock somewhere in the neighborhood struck, and I counted twelve, arousing myself. Perhaps I was already half sleeping, for as I turned to rise my sleeve struck the box at the edge of the table, and before I could prevent the fall, it lay upon the floor at my feet.

As I stooped hastily to recover the overturned box, I was astounded to discover the bottom slipped partially aside, as though some secret spring had been touched, revealing so narrow a receptacle that the ordinary eye would never suspect the possibility of its existence. Not only was there a false bottom, but the opening revealed a closely folded paper. I grasped this quickly, a thrill running through me. What ancient and long-buried message was about to be unfolded?

But no! This was plainly modern—a clean, white sheet, no folded parchment of old, but some mystery of yesterday. There was writing there, in Spanish, so faintly traced I could barely decipher the words, yet clearly revealed as of this day and generation. I know Spanish fairly well, having had a year in Mexico City, yet it required some time before I could puzzle out the message on this sheet. The paper had been torn, seemingly sundered from a much longer letter, and preserved merely because of the specific address and instructions it contained. Beyond doubt all else had been destroyed. What remained may have been sufficient guidance to the party who had the benefit of what went before in the original epistle, but was obscure to anyone else. Yet it was modern, something relating to this very time, a menace; something to be grasped and understood. This conviction

absolutely gripped me. I stared at the rather sinister words, blindly groping at what lay hidden behind them, instinctively scenting a conspiracy of evil which I could not determine. All unintentionally I had stumbled into a cleft which might lead to startling results, yet it seemingly gave me no hint of who was involved, or of its real nature. I put the words together, weighing each one with care as to its exact meaning, and read them over with increased bewilderment. The torn fragment began and ended abruptly; I could only guess at its meaning, yet the impression left upon my mind was both sinister and menacing. I wanted to know more.

108 called Saturday from Stockholm. Will deposit letter of credit with Krantz to your order. Amount ample all needs. See to this at once, and advise \$55 Gans, so as to be no delay. Two pairs, three—Cervantes. Waldron favors action this month; suggest Watonia. Can you be ready? Use South A code.

That this letter was authentic I had no doubt, nor was its meaning altogether obscure in the light of certain events. Several allusions were familiar to me and these were what caused my earlier suspicions to crystallize into probability. It bore all the earmarks of a plot, a revolutionary plot, and one not yet brought to consummation. To be sure the note was undated, and the box had been left at the hotel thirty days before. Yet the Watonia was certainly the name of a ship and to my memory suggested Central American trade. This did not necessarily imply that the conspirators had abandoned their purpose. More likely they were not quite ready in time to operate on the sailing date of that particular ship. Some delay had occurred, and, possibly, even now prompt action might overturn all their plans. I undressed and went to bed, but not to sleep, for the darkness brought new thoughts and suggestions for the morrow.

I was still in government employ, although unassigned, and felt this discovery to be a direct call upon my service. While my first inclination should naturally have been to turn the whole matter over to the proper bureau for investigation, two facts led me in another direction—I was sufficiently young to seek adventure, and I desired to verify my suspicions before creating any false alarm.

As I rested there, sleepless, staring up at the black ceiling, the words of the strange fragment of letter remained vividly before me. Little by little I dug at the truth, coming finally to this conclusion: "108" was, no doubt, the recognized number of some agent who had been dispatched to America on a special errand to the conspirators in this country. He had called Saturday, a month ago, or more, and must have long since arrived at some port, bringing with him instructions not to be intrusted to the mail, and sufficient money, in form of letter of credit, with which to finance whatever nefarious scheme of revolution might be contemplated. This money



Questioned Him Relative to the Mysterious Box.

was to be paid out to the authorized party through a man named Krantz. Who was Krantz? There was a well-known banking firm, Krantz & Co., in Wall Street, and it was quite probable these might prove the ones involved, although to my knowledge they had no outward junta connections of this nature. "Gans" was evidently a street, although I could recall none bearing so peculiar appellation, while the password was in itself proof almost positive as to the South or Central American sympathies of the conspirators.

These facts were fairly clear as I thus weaved them together, but they were rendered more damning by the other name mentioned—Waldron. If this was Ivan Waldron, I had good reason to know the fellow, and to connect his activities with any scheme destined to embarrass the government. He was a professional agitator of the most pronounced type, a socialist radical, who in the past had openly advocated opposition to all law and order. Moreover, the fellow had a large and desperate following, to whom he was a high-priest. He was reported to be a Russian by birth, but spoke English without an accent, and I felt no doubt but what a sufficient amount of money would engage his interest in any desperate cause. The desire to "get him" added zest to my interest in the affair. If he was actually at the head of these fellows, these plotters against the neutrality of the United States, the catch would be worth while.

As soon as possible next morning I sought out Burke, the manager of the hotel, with whom I had a speaking acquaintance, and, without confiding the extent of my discovery, questioned him relative to the mysterious box, and the guests who left it behind. Two men, he said, both well dressed, but with nothing particularly to distinguish them, had registered together late in the afternoon of Friday, September 27, and on request had been assigned to one room with twin beds and a bath. The larger man, who had inscribed himself as "P. S. Horner, Detroit," alone had a bag; his companion, known to the hotel as "Gustave Alva, Toledo, Ohio," being without baggage. The bill was paid the next morning by Horner, and the two departed together. It was an hour later when the chambermaid on that floor reported finding the box in the room vacated. After holding it for a day or two in expectation that it might be called for, no such inquiries being made, the hotel endeavored to trace the men, but to no avail. The fellows had either falsely registered, or were entirely unknown where they claimed residence. The first was the most probable condition. After thirty days, and having exhausted all reasonable efforts to find the rightful owner, the hotel felt legally justified in selling the trinket. That was all Burke knew of the matter, and his interest in it was not keen.

I am inclined to think now that I went at the problem without much system, and that any success achieved was through pure accident. During the forenoon I dropped in upon Clement Breckenridge, cashier of the Dover's National bank. We had been classmates at college, and I generally called on him when in the city. This time I led the conversation to Kulb, Krantz & Co., on the pretense that I had received mail from them relative to some recommended investment. Clement knew Krantz well and favorably, and my probing elicited the information that the man was Austrian by birth, but a naturalized citizen, rather deeply interested in political matters. If his sympathies were at all revolutionary he had carefully refrained from any such open expression. The firm had made a specialty of handling South American business, and had intimate financial connections in both Rio and Buenos Aires. The company ranked high in financial circles.

"The present war must have cost them a rather heavy loss," I hazarded.

"However, this is nothing to me. By the way, Clement, do you chance to know of a Gans street in this town?"

"Gans? That is a new one on me. Try the city directory—there on the edge of the desk."

The name was not to be found, nor any other approaching it in sound or spelling, and I finally drifted out onto the street, really no wiser than when I first entered. I made one more effort, however, telephoning to a detective sergeant whom I knew well, as to the present whereabouts of Ivan Waldron. The last heard of Waldron, he was in West Virginia, speaking of striking miners; that was less than a week ago; he had not been seen in the city since.

The whole affair looked hopeless. About all I could do would be to send the torn note to the proper authorities in Washington, with a statement of how it came into my possession, and let them dispose of the matter in any way they deemed best. I wrote such a letter carefully on hotel stationery, and went down to mail it in the lobby. Before disposing of it in the mailbox I encountered the manager, Burke, and stopped for a word. We were still talking when a bellboy came up hurriedly with a message. Burke turned.

"What is it, George?"

"That Gans street party is on the wire, sir."

"Oh, all right. Excuse me, Severn, but I've been trying to get connection for an hour."

"But wait a minute," my veins tingling. "Did he say Gans street? Where is that? There is no such name in the city directory."

"Gans! Why, over in Jersey. Yes, I'm coming."

I thrust the unmailed letter into my pocket, and sat down, staring at the crowd in the lobby, but entirely indifferent to their presence. Here at least was an opening, a chance—Gans street was in Jersey City. Then it was not all a dream. I would at least look over the ground before I gave up in despair, for I had stumbled upon a way out of the blind alley—Gans street, Jersey City.

CHAPTER II.

A Man and a Woman.

It was late in the afternoon, the day dark, with a chilly wind blowing off the river, when I reached Jersey City.

The first policeman encountered gave me all necessary directions, so that I alighted from a street car within a block of my destination. A saloon on the upper corner of the block furnished me the necessary claw, and, using it as a marker, I succeeded in tracing back until satisfied I had thus safely located "876." It was an abandoned factory, built of brick, two stories high, evidently extending over considerable ground at the rear, but with a frontage not to exceed forty feet. The lower windows were boarded up, a number of those in the second story broken, and the main entrance, large enough for the passage of a motor truck, was tightly secured by an immense iron bar. A smaller door to the right alone offered any possibility of entrance, although it was tightly closed.

To all outward appearances the place had been unoccupied for months, and perhaps years. From the sidewalk it was impossible to gain any glimpse within. Only one discovery served to convince me that I might be on the right track—that I had not been entirely deceived. A small sign, so covered with dust and dirt as to be almost unreadable, was nailed over the smaller door. In the growing dusk I was obliged to study it intently to decipher the words, but finally made them out letter by letter:

"OFFICE ALVA MALLEABLE IRON COMPANY."

Here was a strange coincidence, if nothing more, for Gustave Alva had been one of the names signed on the hotel register. Beyond doubt this old, abandoned iron foundry was his property, and what better spot could be selected in which to meet and concoct a scheme of crime? What a place to hide arms for shipment. Whatever doubt I may have felt regarding my venture vanished in the presence of that unusual name. This was unquestionably the place named in the letter as a rendezvous; here was where the recipient of that letter was to go and receive instructions; where he was to use the mysterious raps, and the countersign "Cervantes," in order to gain admittance. The knowledge that I was actually upon the threshold of such a discovery brought with it a determination not to lose the advantage. But what could I do? What further steps might be safely taken alone?

(To Be Continued.)

NOTICE OF SHERIFF'S SALE

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF THE STATE OF OREGON, FOR DESCHUTES COUNTY

GEORGE RENCHER, Plaintiff, vs. WILCE R. THOMAS and AMY THOMAS, his wife, Defendant.

By virtue of an execution, judgment order and decree and order of sale issued out of the above entitled court in the above entitled cause, to me directed and dated the 23rd day of September, 1921, upon a judgment and decree rendered and entered on the 21st day of September, 1921 in favor of the plaintiff in the sum of \$338.31 with interest thereon at the rate of eight per cent per annum from and after February 7, 1921, and the further sum of \$75.00 attorneys fees and for costs and disbursements taxed and allowed herein in the sum of \$16.59 and the costs on and upon said writ commanding me to make sale of the following described real property situate, lying and being in the county of Deschutes, State of Oregon and more particularly described as follows, to-wit:

Lots 27 and 28 in block 4, Aubrey Heights, according to the duly recorded map and plat thereof on file and of record in the office of the county clerk of said Deschutes county, State of Oregon.

NOW, THEREFORE, by virtue of said execution, judgment order, decree and order of sale and in compliance with the commands of said writ, I will on Monday the 24th day

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decree, interest, attorneys fees, costs and accruing costs. Dated at Bend, Oregon, this 23rd day of September, 1921. S. E. ROBERTS, Sheriff of Deschutes county, Oregon. Date of First publication September 24, 1921. Date of last publication, October 15, 1921. 94-100-106-112c.

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