

SIMON IFF IN AMERICA

- BY -

EDWARD KELLY

No. 12.

The Natural Thing to Do.

1.

The Boston 'Turkey-Buzzard', having promised Dolores Travis only such publicity as might come through 'legitimate channels, such as the Divorce Court', was genuinely delighted to offer her the hospitality of its columns five months after her marriage, on the occasion of her filing her petition. "Father was right!" she wrote to Simon Iff. "There was nothing there to keep me from the Cult of the Chortoid. Geoffrey, like most American men, if not all, is a neuter. They're lovely to look at - but oh! when you try them out! Thank you so much for sending me dear Alma; she has been more to me than any mere male thing, husband or not, could ever be; and I'm perfectly miserable at having to let her go to France. Of course I shall come down with her and see her safely on the boat.

"Yours - but my own first of all - truly,  
 Dolores Cass (for ever and ever, Amen)".

Simon Iff chuckled hugely over this letter.

"I knew that girl would find herself," said he. "It

was the natural thing to do."

And the same afternoon Dolores got another dose of legitimate publicity by being a yard away from a man who was shot dead in Washington Street by three men in an automobile. The bullet only missed her head by inches.

A week later Simon Iff gave the Godspeed dinner to Alma, whom he had finally adopted as his daughter. She had taken to civilization as a swan takes to water, but she still kept that haunting woodland wildness that stamped her as Overwoman, Kin to the Gods.

At three in the morning she did a dance in a leopard skin which brought the swirl of the Sahara sand about the guests.

Dolores Cass, drugged with excitement, beat time on a devil-dancers' drum from Ceylon.

Miss Mollie Madison, with her demure cat's smile, watched the face of the magician. He alone remain<sup>-ed</sup>/aloof; his eyes were inscrutable. But before the party broke up, he retired for a few minutes to his bedroom. He came back wearing a heavy tweed suit and a pair of rubber shoes.

"Sympathetic magick!" he gave as his excuse, "our nightingale flits on to greener woods. . . I must create in myself the atmosphere of travel, that I may play the Good Samaritan to our fair pilgrim."

Presently the guests were gone; only Dolores and Simon went to the wharf with Alma.

After the last waved handkerchief, Dolores turned to her master. "Do you know what I have in my pocket?"

"Pocket?" What will be the end of this Feminist agitation?"

"Silly! I've put my pride in it."

"High time!"

"I've been doing some rather curious work in statistics, and I can't get beyond a certain point. So I'm going to talk it over with you."

"I am glad of it," retorted Simon rather grimly.

"You will understand why when I show you what I, for my part, have in my pockets."

"Do you know what I'm talking about?"

"No, I don't. Nor do you."

"What do you mean?"

"Why do I take this quite absurd way home? Why did I dismiss the car?"

Dolores suddenly realized that they were passing through unfrequented and disreputable streets.

"In pocket No. 1, observe, a pair of spectacles." He adjusted them.

"But why is the left eye blocked up?"

"It enables me to see ....."

His intonation told Dolores that he was deliberately leaving the sentence unfinished, and it threw her into a brown

study which lasted several blocks.

"..... what is behind me," concluded Simon Iff. At the same moment he threw her bodily into a door-way, and completed the gesture by dropping to the ground, and opening fire with a pair of automatics upon the two ruffians whose bullets whistled past them.

The old man's eye was true, and his hand firm. The men dropped in their tracks before firing a second shot.

"Now," remarked Simon coolly to the astounded girl, "we can go across to the trolley."

"You have really surprised me at last," she said rather faintly. "I never thought you would condescend to use the weapons of the flesh."

"I do so," replied he, "only when escorting rash young ladies who put their heads into hornets' nests".

"I give up!"

"I took a chance on this walk in order to prove the nature of your recent work."

"But you don't know what that is."

"True, but I suspected that you (and not that harmless working tailor) were intended for the victim of those men in the auto, and I thought I would try it out. It was the natural thing to do. Here's Tenth Avenue. Jump on!"

## II.

When they got to a wealthier district they changed into

a taxi, and called at her hotel for her portfolio of papers before returning to the magician's apartment.

She spread them on the table.

"Exhibit A is a humorous article on the Crime Wave of the last few months. It teased me, and I thought I'd look it up. The statistics are quite peculiar in half a dozen ways.

"Firstly, the increase in crime is confined entirely to murder, manslaughter, and homicide. There is a parallel increase in fatal accidents, some of them described as suspicious.

"Secondly, the curve of increase springs with a single bound to its maximum, and remains there with only small fluctuations. This jump took place last October.

"Thirdly, the increase is confined to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Norfolk, Charleston, Savannah, New Orleans, Key West, and Galveston, though there is a similar increase of about half the amount in Newport News, San Francisco, and Seattle, and a third in Jacksonville, Tampa, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C.

"All this struck me as very strange. I constructed tables of the occupants of the victims, and found the increase to lie almost entirely with the educated classes. Professions seem fairly well distributed, however, even the clergy being proportionally represented.

"I next read up the reports of all violent deaths,

hoping to find some common factor for certain groups. Here again I was disappointed.

"I then chose six of the most mysterious cases at random, and made personal investigations on the spot. It was now that the most surprising circumstance of all disclosed itself. In four of my six cases I found it quite difficult to establish the details of the environment, for the reason that the friends of the dead man were themselves nearly all in some sort of trouble. Some had just died, others were in prison, others had left the state or the country quite suddenly, others were involved in lawsuits, others again in bankruptcy; some were being assailed by scandal, others were sick. It was as if the murderer were some very powerful demon whose malice struck not only the victim but his friends.

"I then took a seventh case, and struck oil at once. My investigation was shaping like a man's nervous system; ganglia here and there in the shape of murders, and fans of lesser misfortunes branching out from each, while a cord of graver troubles marked the direct links between the ganglia. But still I could find no common factor beyond the general obvious grounds of association between the parties concerned."

"So you decided to ask Papa. Very wise. But why didn't you mind what Papa told you about thinking it all out at home? You have gone hunting up these cases, and our 'very powerful demon' has put you on his list as a ganglion, for he

tries twice to get you potted. And what do you suppose he will do when he finds you are in with Simon Iff?"

"He will know that it will not take you long to find out the how and the why and the who, as you say. So he will be beforehand with you, if he can.

"Just so. Let's make haste - here are a few obvious points. One: the increase is confined to sea-ports, and varies (roughly speaking) with their importance. Exception: the District of Columbia, and there the victims seem to be people politically prominent, and for the most part connected with seaports, at that, to judge by the few names I happen to know. Luckily, I'm here on a special mission for the British Admiralty, so this is just my ground. Now most of these people are educated, that is, take active interest in politics, and, as residents of seaports, foreign politics concern them particularly. Then again, this campaign of murder - with lesser campaigns corresponding - begins quite suddenly and vigorously in October, as if it had been long prepared, and only awaited the signal. What happened in October? Nothing; on the contrary, things had just settled down after the fuss over Morocco.

"But here are all these educated people being put out of action by death, imprisonment, financial disaster, ill-health or social discredit, just at that moment. Could the link between them be hostility to a certain Personage who, baffled

in one quarter, turns immediately to another? But there is no hostility to that Personage. True, but suppose these people are banded together (informally perhaps) to do something apparently quite innocent which will hamper the plans of that Personage, if we only knew them. Suppose, for example, he didn't want America to have any ships? I don't mean warships only, I mean merchant ships. Suppose he wanted to cut off England from American supplies?"

"But how could he, with the British Navy as it is?"

"He may be thinking ten years ahead. But this is only a plausible guess. Come, look through our names: Take the most prominent people, skipping the small fry."

Iff picked up one of the lists.

Abbott, died suddenly. Banker in Baltimore. A noted financier of new shipping concerns.

"Abel, bankrupt. Congressman bitterly opposed to La Follette's Seamen's Bill.

"Abererombie, died of typhoid. I don't remember anything of him.

"Albright, Senator, killed in automobile accident. Was always advocating universal military service.

"Alford, naval engineer. Shot by injured husband, one Stenzel.

"Anthony, torpedo instructor to U.S. Navy. Sank with F.H.131. Cause of accident mysterious.

"Baffin, the 'fighting Parson'. Convicted of arson.



Your Demon's a poet, Dolores!

"Barlow, congressman. Implicated in Hulton frauds and crash. Personal friend of the Secretary of the Navy, and stumped the country constantly in the interests of more ships.

"Bowditch, cotton merchant. Free trade advocate. Shot down in street.

"Brooks, never heard of him. Natural death, I dare say.

"Butler, naval constructor. Caught in the act of adultery and disgraced. The partner of his crime was a Gretel von Bulow, or I'm mistaken. So much for two letters out of twenty-six!"

"But you are picking out the names!"

"Because I can't place the parasites. Most of these people are barnacles on the big ships, or, more politely, destroyer convoys. Their names mean nothing to me."

"I can agree, in any case, on practical grounds. There is certainly somebody at work ..... let me think!"

"Don't trouble. I know the culprit. It is the ghost of the late lamented James Monroe!"

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Dear child, when James Watts noticed the expulsive force of the steam of a kettle, the Monroe Doctrine got T.B. Your 'demon' is trying to keep it alive by the artificial prevention of ship building. Just look at this one name, Carstairs, shot in his office by a man named Schmidt (perhaps!)

who claimed to be his natural son. An evident plagiarism from the murder of William Whiteley in London. What did the death of Carstairs mean to shipbuilding? You would have done less harm by torpedoing half the ships in New York Harbour.

"Let me add one fact that you don't know: there have been five attempts on the life of Paul Foye in the last three weeks. It is you that I must thank for showing that the campaign is of such immense scope and ramification. We thought of a financial or political group; I am now certain that we are up against an organization with hundreds of millions of money, and thousands, perhaps tens of thousands, of men in its web. Dolores Cass, these statistics of yours will wake up even the White House!"

"This is very exciting. Let's go down right away in the car!"

"We shouldn't get far. I'm going to put the Secret Service on to this. We must get busy. I shall feel easier when it's through."

But no incident ruffled the day. The papers were duly delivered, with an explanation which did not particularly impress. The plot, it appeared, was 'politically unthinkable'. The official's car did have an accident at 42nd Street, where an elderly lady drove into him, luckily without upsetting him, but that was 'conclusively' proved to be the fault of the policeman in charge of the traffic.

If heard this story on the telephone with amiable pity.

People - most people - could never imagine other people acting differently from themselves. America had an army of fifty thousand men, used mostly for parades, therefore a nation which drilled fifteen million men must be exactly three hundred times as fond of parades as America. Also, just at that moment the U.S. was looking in quite a different direction - as if that were not precisely the reason for an unsuspected enemy to attack her.

Dolores Cass snorted in unison.

"What's to be done?" she said at last.

"What I'm afraid of is that our brother demon may have the sense to leave us alone - flat! Surely he will spare trust the political incapacity, the parochial vision, of Washington! But these plotters are easily scared. It's conscience that makes cowards of us all! Remember the effect of the announcement of Mr. Travis' engagement?"

Dolores Cass boxed his ears, good and hard. It was the sorest point in her life's history.

"Dios mio! what a fool I was!"

"We all have to learn by experience. I only hope (to return to the true subject of our talk) that America's lesson may not cost too much, or come - Too Late! Oh, child, the secret of success in life is to learn from little things! There is not a grain of dust in the whole universe which does not bear witness to the infinite Wisdom of God, and proclaim aloud His Glory. And there is not one trifle in the most

common life which should not make us partakers of that Wisdom and Glory, had we but the Wit and the Enthusiasm to comprehend it."

"Then let me contribute a Trifle to our problem. Your clock, which kept perfect time last night - more than we did! - has gained an hour and six months since this morning."

Iff walked over to the clock, a man-high affair of carved oak, worked by weights. He threw open the door.

"Very ingenious!"

A needle was attached to one of the weights by a piece of soft wax. Below, on the floor of the clock, was a bomb. The touch of the needle would complete an electrical circuit.

Dolores Cass made a rapid mental calculation.

"That would have gone off at about half past midnight, correct time."

"A warning to all those who go home to bed early."

He removed the bomb and the needle, and adjusted the clock.

"This warms the cockles of my heart. He is after me!"

"Aren't you going to inquire how that got there?"

"For shame, Dolores Cass! Will nothing ever teach you the folly of interfering with other people's business? Don't you see even now that this 'demon' of yours is an ass? He's trying to beat an economic law, which puts him in the class of intellect which plays systems at Monte Carlo. Upon that firm conviction let us base our campaign! And never let

us forget what I read in the newspaper this morning. It is in Chapter 69, "The Use of the Mysterious": "A master of the art of war has said: I do not dare to be the host; I prefer to be the guest. I do not dare to advance an inch; I prefer to retire a foot'. Let us further take comfort from that passage in Chapter 55, "The Mysterious Charm"; 'Whatever is contrary to the Tao soon ends'."

"I never could understand all that about accomplishing everything by doing nothing."

"It is quite easy. He will expect me to be pursuing him; I won't; I'll let him pursue me. I will even let him catch me; and he shall think that I am as great an ass as he is. It will all work out to the Appointed End, and our only error can come from a violation of the law of our own natures. We will therefore lay the train by doing the natural thing, getting very drunk at Melonico's. Will you bring Mollie Madison, I should like both of you to meet my good friend Lascelles, of the Royal Navy."

"All right!" She put on her furs. "But how can I help?"

"Oh, do as you like about it!" said Simon Iff, as if huffed.

Dolorce was amazed at the curt rudeness of his tone. She chilled instantly, and moved toward the door.

He got up and held it for her with an ironical bow, "Melonico's at seven, then."

"I will be there," she answered coldly. Outside the apartment she stopped suddenly. "There's something behind that," she murmured, and fell a-musing.

### III.

It was no idle word of Simon Iff that he meant to get very drunk; and therefore, let us hope, he will not have to give an account of it at the Day of Judgment. His behaviour scandalized most of the very high-class guests at that most select of all New York's restaurants. He took the most unpardonable liberties with Mollie Madison, and Lascelles was equally impudent with Dolores, making violent love to her, drinking her health in crazy toasts of doubtful taste, telling stories which would hardly have passed even Mr. Gatt's editorial staff, and roaring with laughter at nothing at all.

Simon Iff supplied the climax by pulling off Mollie's slipper, filling it with champagne, and draining it at a gulp. It was then that the manager came forward and requested the observation of common decency.

The shock sobered them for a while; but then Simon broke into a drunken torrent of boasting. He told everybody what a wonderful man he was, and what a lot of mysteries he had solved, and what mountains he had climbed, and what

animals he had shot, and what an important job he was holding down that very minute. Wouldn't everybody be surprised if they knew just what the British Government had sent him to do in America? If they knew what was in a certain paper at the bank, a casus belli, no less? But with whom? Aha - there was the secret! And wouldn't everybody be amazed if they knew just what he knew about a certain subject that he wouldn't mention, not he? The Silent Torb was a chatter-box compared with him!

The manager came forward again, and remonstrated about the loudness of his voice. This time the old man was angry and rude. He treated the man as a mere servant, said something about 'dirty Dagoes', threw down a hundred dollar bill, and told him to keep the change and buy a treatise of 'How to treat English Gentlemen' with it.

With that he flung drunkenly out of the room, followed by the others, who, though drunk themselves, were sober enough to see that he needed attention. "I'll see you home," said Lascelles, "when we've put the girls in a taxi."

"Home be damned," roared Simon, "the club. I'll play you a thousand up for a million dollars."

This sportsmanlike proposition was not fated to find immediate acceptance. Just outside the door of the dining-room was Mr. Commissioner Zeake. "Hello, old boy!" cackled Iff, "Come along to the Club!" He put out an unsteady hand.

But Teake did not respond. He laid his hand on the magician's shoulder, and spoke low, in a very formal and yet very embarrassed voice. "I'm sorry, Mr. Iff, but I am charged with the duty of arresting you for the murder of two men unknown; this morning, in Hell's Kitchen. Mrs. Travis, I must take you also as an accessory."

Simon toppled into Teake's arms. "Tha's ri', ol' top," he said. "Ish a fair cop. I did it. But don' you forget, they fired first. I shwear it." Teake warned him. Dolores broke into a storm of passionate protest. "Better go quietly," whispered Lascelles in her ear. Mollie Madison had broken into a fit of wild sobbing, and clung to Simon, as if she would tear him from his captors. Two other men stepped forward, and detached her. "We don't want a row here," said Lascelles: "the time to fight is when the case comes up. I'll get bail, if they'll allow it, anyhow."

"Bail be damned," said Simon Iff. "I've got a head bigger than the planet Saturn, and oh! such a lot more rings round it! Lemme sleep it off, tha's all I ask. Come on, Teake, ol' sport, only for God's sake stop at the drug store, and ge' me a bromo-seltzer."

They floundered off to the police wagon. A tall gentleman, who had dined at the next table and watched their antics with apparent disgust, threw off his lethargy, and, entering a fast car which was waiting for him, made all haste



to a small house on East 63rd Street, where he asked for Count von Weibheim.

This personage received him at once, without a word of greeting: sitting down at a desk, he opened a notebook by way of asking for news. The man from Melonico's, whose name was Berkeley, told the events of the evening. The contempt of von Weibheim had no effect on him. He was used to that sort of thing. Berkeley was an Englishman of excellent family, and had been intended for the bar. From Oxford he had been sent down, following a disgraceful attempt to cheat in Smalls. His people had got him into the army via the militia, but trouble with money-lenders, and a card scandal, had ended his career. He became a stockbroker, and again lost status through a doubtful transaction, after which he touted for a bucket-shop. This time he overstepped the law, and got himself into prison. When he came out, his father sent him to New York, with a weekly remittance of Twenty-Five Pounds, to be forfeited for ever should he communicate with his family or get into prison. A hundred and twenty dollars a week was beggary to a gentleman with the tastes of Mr. Berkeley, and he had eked it out in one shady way or another until von Weibheim, recognizing in him a great aptness for his particular work, by reason of extreme social amiability and tact coupled with complete unscrupulousness, had given him permanent and highly paid employment as a Spy.

"All well," said von Weibheim coldly as Berkeley finished his story. "You and the gang can get back on the Fowys business for the present."

"Aren't we to finish off Iff if a chance comes? Rinsberg is in the Tombs, you know."

"Do not you dare! I have my mind changed. I want Iff alive. Do not ask my orders, but obey them."

Berkeley nodded, and went away nonchalantly. No sooner had he gone than the Count sent for his butler.

It was a man of some sixty winters who entered the room, bowing profoundly. "Close the door!" ordered von Weibheim. As the old man did so, the Count rose and stood at attention, saluting, with a click of the heels. The old man gravely returned the salute, and then threw himself into an armchair and lighted a cigar. "Well, what is it?" he asked. "You may sit down."

Von Weibheim complied. He repeated Berkeley's story verbatim.

"What is your opinion?" asked the other.

"I humbly think, Prince, that it may suit Mr. Iff very well to be in prison for a while. He discovered the bomb in the clock, I hear. And this morning was a narrow escape. He is an old man, and must love life dearly. He has found a woman, too."

"You are a fool, Fritz. Yet it was wrong to attack his

life; he had knowledge which we must have. Ach! is not knowledge always better than life? But in this you are right, although your reason is wrong, that he wished to be arrested. Since it was not I who accused him to the police, it was himself. Then we must free him quickly. You will therefore detail a man to make confession of that shooting, and two men to confirm him as eye-witnesses. It must be impossible for them to hold him. He will then come out, also; he would know that to persist would show us his hand too clearly.

"Now listen, listen with care. We do not know what his true mission is, as he did in his drunkenness boast. We do not know what is that certain matter of which he is so proud - oh, he is so clever that he will not speak of it, even though he is drunk. But there is he so weak - that drink! He takes drugs also. I have many reports of this; it was not pretence to-night, therefore. Good: we shall get him. But he is very clever, yes; therefore he will make haste to do his mission. I have found that he plans to go to England by the Deutschland; that is in ten days more. He took a suite three weeks ago, that is long before this Cass woman put her nose into my business. So we know that all is nearly ready, and we will pick the fruit when it is ripe."

"I think, Highness, that he has discovered our plans, at least in part, from the woman."

"I tell you you are a fool, Fritz. This woman, what is

she? A hysteric, a degenerate, a sex-madwoman, desiring publicity, with good brains in analysis, but no energy in action, and no skill. Pah! I laugh at her. Nevertheless, I shall kill her, on general principles. But to our important man! Listen! He has learnt only our rough work; he thinks we are assassins. Therefore we will be not so unkind -- not until it is right. So we shall offer him one so dear problem, and thus lead him to Mother Meekins, the 'Murder Stable' our rough friends call it, do they not? and there I shall give him belladonna -- oh will not his eyes grow great and bright? -- and nitrous oxide and ether to breathe, so that he talks -- oh yes! he will talk! and I with my will-power and my skill in soul-science will pick every secret from him, and then, my friend, you will ask Mother Meeking to make everything quiet. For yes! he is a dangerous man, Mr. Simon Iff, too dangerous. Only he has too much ego; he values himself too much; he does not know about me, aha!"

The Prince rubbed his hands softly together with satisfaction.

"So you will please arrange with Mr. Berkeley to call here in the morning, and I will have my plan ready for him."

The two men exchanged salutes as before; then the Prince once again became the butler, and retired to the servants' hall with a tray of liqueurs.

#### IV.

Dolores, sitting in a prison cell, became a very

formidable person indeed. The absolute silence and solitude, the remoteness of humanity, the absence of any possible distraction, acted upon her brain as a most potent stimulus. She began to understand what Simon Iff had once told her about the advantages of a hermit's life, such as he himself adopted at such frequent intervals. She felt that a few months of it would enable her to solve the secret of the Universe, just as he had done. But for the moment the possibilities of mysticism did not interest her. She concentrated, naturally enough, upon the immediate problem.

In the first place, why prison? She felt pretty sure that her master was not there against his will. Perhaps he wanted just such facility for profound and undisturbed thought as she herself was enjoying. She had often heard him complain of the difficulty of concentration in New York City. Prison was a simple and ingenious substitute for a cloister! Also, it seemed probable that he feared for her life, after two, perhaps three, such narrow escapes.

Next. Why the great change in his manner towards her? He was going to expose the conspiracy; and he did not want her help. She was sure that he was not actuated by any ungenerous feeling. All she had to go on was the snub "Do as you like about it!"

But what was his plan? To let the enemy pursue him, catch him. He had said so. He had some device in his mind,

no doubt, for dealing with that situation; but then, why did he not want her to help? There could be only one answer: he was not perfectly sure of the result. He was going into danger, terrible danger, and he knew it. He would not tell her to go back to Boston, and throw up the case; he would know that would be the very word to make her insist upon continuing.

The more she thought over the situation the more she felt sure of the correctness of that conclusion. There was then only one course for her to take, and that was to watch over him. Whether his snub were due to scorn or to fatherly care, she would go on, either to show her mettle or to prove herself worthy of his loving thought, as the event might declare.

She next turned her thoughts to the enemy. Who was it? Somebody with immense resources, with a brain altogether Machiavellian, and a supreme talent for organisation. It must be some one highly placed in his own country, or he would not be trusted. Yet it could not be an accredited representative; the discovery of such a plot would mean war, and the events of the previous summer had proved conclusively that war was the one thing which that nation wished to avoid, even at the cost of humiliation in the face of the whole world. Who then would serve but a man who could be disowned? Was there no man of this sort available? Possibly there was some one who had been publicly disgraced, who was supposed even, it might be, to be

dead. Her mind ran back over the years. Had not her father told her something once - something that suggested such a personality? Of course. The cap fitted a certain Prince von Arnberg, a mathematician of the highest rank, a physiologist of extraordinary distinction and original views, who had become a specialist in psychotherapeutics. In 1901 he had been mixed up in an intrigue to manipulate the succession to a principality by driving the heir-apparent into insanity. The Emperor had interfered, the Prince was disgraced, and the report of his suicide in exile a year later had ended the scandal. She remembered, too, that her father had discredited the report at the time, saying that he was the last man in the world to kill himself, and a year or so afterwards had produced an anonymous monograph on the Binary Theorem of Fermat, published in Philadelphia as evidence of his survival. "It's as characteristic as a photograph or a thumb-print" had been his comment. Dolores thought that her own identification was more than a little more than guesswork; it was not likely that two men should so accurately fill the conditions demanded by her problem.

But her satisfaction was dimmed by the reflection that she had no evidence of his presence in America beyond her mere deduction, and that, even so, she had not the slightest idea where to begin to look for him.

The next morning she was freed, with apologies, and

her first thought was to communicate her idea to Simon Iff, who, they told her, had been released an hour before.

She telephoned his apartment: he had not returned. A second call an hour later met with equal ill-luck. She began to be alarmed. Already he had plunged into the abyss. He was in danger, she was sure of that; and she had lost track of him completely.

She began once more to analyze. Simon had told her that he meant to be caught, and that he would make the enemy think that he was an ass. Somehow, then, he was sure that they would no longer aim at his life, that they would try in some way to fool him. Simon's whole speech implied that he foresaw a personal interview, the most probable method of direct communication; and he intended to make no difficulty about this; he courted it. He must then be gone away on this business. But Dolores felt certain that the enemy -- she already thought of him as Joachim -- would terminate the interview, whatever its results, by the murder of her master. Of course, he might have taken some secret precautions; he might have arranged for some one to follow him, for instance, or for certain explosions to occur in case of his non-reappearance. She remembered with what unexpected foresight and resource he had acted on the morning Alma sailed.

But where was he? The Lord only knew! Oh no! came the swift antiphone. There are men who know, and they



can be made to tell.

But who?

V.

Simon Iff, returning with cheerful resignation to his apartment from the prison, had found Miss Nellie Madison waiting in the hall. There was also a gentleman, said the janitor, a Mr. Berkeley, on important business. Mr. Iff would be glad to speak with him.

Mr. Berkeley approached hastily. His very elegant dress was slightly disordered, and he bore other marks of extreme impatience and agitation.

"Shall we go upstairs?" asked Simon.

"If you would only come direct? Every second is precious, unspeakably precious."

"Certainly; I see your car is at the door. But what is the trouble?"

Berkeley handed a letter to the magician: at the same time he gave the Sign of Distress of the Royal Arch. The letter, moreover, was written in the secret cipher of that Companionship, with which Simon Iff was well acquainted. But even when rendered into English, it remained quite unintelligible.

"Three-one in Washington Square.

Station of Principal Sojourner.

Where was the Saviour born?

Fourth from the East.

I must die unless Companions rescue me."

"This letter means nothing to you, Companion Berkeley?"

"Nothing."

"It is quite plain to me. Imagine yourself in a great Chapter-Room, with the Arch of Washington Square to represent the East, where the Three-One sit. Then where would the station of the Principal Sojourner be? Just one street away, to one side of Fifth Avenue. Where was the Saviour born? In a stable. There are several stables in that street; it's the fourth, counting from the East. Let's be off and help him! Come along, Mollie!"

They got into Berkeley's car, and started on their journey.

"I am sure you would solve the puzzle," said the remittance man.

"I was sure you were sure, because you wanted me to hurry, before I had even seen it."

Berkeley looked a little confused.

"I won't ask you how you got the letter, or why our Excellent Companion did not appeal to the community at large in the terrible situation in which he finds himself. Quite otherwise. I will ask you which college you were at."

"Magdalen," answered Berkeley, with a sudden note of pain in his voice.

"Ah, Magdalen!" cried Iff, with enthusiasm. "I am Cambridge, of course, Trinity, but I had rooms there once, Lord Gorham's old rooms, do you remember? I was reading the Dee Manuscripts in the Bodder."

Iff took no notice of the devious route by which the chauffeur chose to approach Washington Square, of his sudden changes of speed, or of the interest he took in any car which came up behind them. He talked of Magdalen Tower, the Thames, Iffley, the Broad, the High, the Redcliffe Camera, Tom Tower, the Terpide, Carfax - everything that means everything to Oxford men. He made history itself vital and lyric.

Berkeley's interjections, at first mechanical, became gradually natural and enthusiastic.

Iff noticed it, and suddenly changed the subject. "This is Third Avenue, isn't it?" Berkeley went white. "Yes, Mr. Iff, it is," he said in a tone of lamentable sadness. There was a moment's pause.

"Mr. Iff, it has just struck me that the letter is some foolish hoax. Let's forget it, and go to lunch somewhere."

"A letter in our Ciphar?" cried Simon in assumed surprise. "Impossible!"

"I'm sure of it," answered Berkeley. "Now I come to

think, I believe it's in Cummings' writing, and he's a practical joker, if ever there was one."

"It is none the less our duty to investigate the matter. This is your car, of course; but we go to this stable, or Miss Madison and I get out and take a taxi."

Berkeley acquiesced with a groan.

"It is my first rule," continued the magician, "never to let anything interfere with plans once agreed upon. Think what would happen to the Solar System if the planet Jupiter suddenly decided to lunch at Delmonico's! The Way of the Tao is to allow everything to happen. It all comes right in the end."

Simon Iff, perceiving Washington Square in the distance, gave his directions through the speaking-tube.

There was no difficulty in finding the stable indicated in the letter. The party got out, and the magician rapped upon the door. It slowly opened.

The interior of the stable was very dark, but Mollie, who kept close to 'Cephas' while Berkeley shut the door, caught the glint of levelled pistols. She sprang impetuously in front of the mystic.

"Charming of you, child!" he said calmly. "But the revolvers are only for effect."

"For effect indeed!" boomed a sinister voice from the darkness.

"This is merely a pleasant talk between old friends. Is it not so, Prince Joachim?"

"You know me - so!"

"Who could forget that wonderful voice - the very incarnation of will-power? Didn't we meet at Munich in July of '84?"

"Very good, Mr. Iff. We may have light then for our pleasant talk!"

"Please do," said Simon. "I dislike to smoke in the dark." And as an electric bulb glowed overhead, he offered his case to the Prince. The latter took one thoughtfully, but did not light it.

"I do not quite understand your attitude, Mr. Iff," he said slowly.

"Exactly," replied the magician, very cordially, as he lighted his cigar. "That is why I have come here. Pray observe; our apparent antagonism is entirely on your side. We are both agents of the Great Purpose; but perhaps you do not understand so well as I do how this can be so."

"Ha!" said the Prince. "Do they keep something back from me in the Wilhelmstrasse?"

"Possibly," said Iff, with cool insolence.

"I do not like this," said Joachim heavily; "I do not like this at all; no, it is sure that I do not like this." He looked at his companion, who wore a black mask. The reply

was a shrug of the shoulders.

"Yes, there is something wrong," said the Prince.

"I know it is so because you think it is not so."

"Yes; von Weibheim always was a fool," chirped Simple Simon. "I recognize him by the shape of his chin and the very characteristic creases in his waistcoat."

"Hell!" said Prince Joachim, solidly and emphatically, "Hell!"

"True," said Iff.

"Berkeley," said the Prince, in swift incisive tones, "Mr. Iff made no attempt to communicate with anybody?"

"None. I can swear to it."

"And you were not followed?"

Bauerkeller is your own man. Can't you trust him?"

"I give you my word of honour as a gentleman that I took no precautions of any sort. If anybody knows where I am, it is you, not I, who have told. I was particularly careful for a very special reason, which you may learn later, to leave absolutely no clue to my movements." The prince knew enough not to doubt for a second that Iff was speaking the truth.

"Well, then, well. Perhaps Mr. Iff has learnt the bluff of these idiotic Yankees. It will not go with us. I have perhaps a little surprise for you, Mr. Magician. A little atropine in your veins, and a little ether and nitrous

oxide in your nostrils, and with my will-power and my soul-science you shall tell me in your delirium what I want to know."

"Why trouble yourself?" said Simple Simon. "I can't answer for the Wilhelmstrasse, but I have certainly no secrets from you. Come; how can I enlighten you?"

"There is something very wrong," mused the other; "very wrong. But we must just try it out. Please step to this side!"

He began his examination in a low voice. He was answered simply, fluently, convincingly, without the least attempt at concealment or equivocation. The magician revealed a dozen secrets, any one of them enough to shake the world. Prince Joachim positively gasped. Simon Iff, in twenty minutes' conversation, had made him one of the fifty most powerful statesmen in the world. But once again his scepticism stopped him.

"There is something wrong," he repeated ponderously, "there is something behind all this. Why do you so willingly tell me these things, Mr. Iff?"

"It is the Way of the Tao, Prince. You ask me, and I tell you. What can be more simple? Surely you can see that all the trouble in this world arises from not being natural, from raising artificial obstacles where none need exist!"

"Ah well, if it is mysticism, very good. Very good. That and the so much alcohol - and the drugs also - they have made the brain soft. I understand. Well, I know all now. What is the combination of your safe, please?"

"The word is Water. The strongest thing in the world, Prince, because it doesn't resist."

"And will you write me a letter, so that I may visit your bank? I must have that little paper, Mr. Iff."

"Certainly, with pleasure. I am always delighted to oblige."

He wrote the desired authorization, and handed it to the Prince with a low bow.

"It is ended, then," said the latter, with a change in his voice. "I suppose you think, Mr. Iff," he continued impressively, "that I am deceived by your foolish talk about the Tao. A fig! Rubbish! Rubbish! You say it to save your face, no, you know that you were in my power, and hoped to buy your life by servile obedience. But, Mr. Iff it will not do. I tell you that it will not do. If I let you go you might become dangerous again."

"Let me enlighten you on one more point before I die. I was never dangerous to you. The defect of such minds as your own is that you always look for danger in the wrong place."

"There is something very wrong," reiterated the Prince.



"But it can do no harm to hurry with our programme. Mr. Berkeley, you will please kill these good people, and we will go away and leave them to Mother Meakin to clean up."

"I'm damned if I do," answered Berkeley. "Mr. Iff has behaved like a gentleman. He has told you all you wanted to know, and I won't do your butchers' work. A girl into the bargain as well. No, I'm through."

"You see where you go wrong," said Simple Simon to the astounded Prince, who had expected anything rather than that such a well-tried tool should break in his hand. "A broken gentleman is still a gentleman, if <sup>you</sup> know how to remind him of it."

The Prince found his voice. "I must break my rule," he said hesitatingly, "and do it myself. And I shall include you, Mr. Berkeley, in the butchers' work. Keep them covered, von Weibheim; I will do what is necessary without noise."

The momentary silence that followed was broken by a resounding knock on the door. The Prince sprang to the situation.

"Throw away those silly guns, Fritz, you fool. We must open. I knew there was something wrong. Open, Mr. Berkeley. Will you try one of my cigars, Mr. Iff?"

"Thank you," said Simon, "I am sure they are better than mine."

As Berkeley lifted the latch the door was thrust violently inwards, and Mr. Commissioner Teake with six armed detectives burst into the stable.

Behind them, particularly cool and supercilious, sailed Dolores Cass.

The three conspirators made no resistance to the police.

"Ah, Dolores!" smiled Simon, "you must really let me introduce Prince Joachim von Arnberg."

"I feel already as if he were an old friend. My father used often to speak to me of him."

"So!" growled the captive.

"But that doesn't explain it at all," interjected Simon. "And I'm quite as anxious to know as the Prince is."

"Know what?" came the sinister voice.

"How this lady got here, of course."

"Why," said Dolores, "it was really very exciting. I had no idea whatever where to look for you. But I reasoned that if you had been lured away to be murdered by this very highly organized gang, it was probably to a place carefully prepared, with all the latest improvements for getting rid of bodies. But who knew where that was? The Prince was kind enough to provide me with a guide - the man who had just confessed to the shootings which I knew he didn't do. So he must have been a member of the gang. I went to Mr. Teake,

who has been very kind in every way, and gave me a free hand."

"So that swine squealed!"

"No, that swine did not squeal. I told him how we were on to the whole business; Mr. Teake promised to send him to the chair on his confession unless he came across; we tried everything. But he was absolutely confident in the power of these people to save him.

"So I just sat in Mr. Teake's car with him, and held his hand. His muscles told me when I was 'getting hot' or 'cold', as they say in the old game. At first it was rather difficult; but, when he saw that I was gradually getting nearer all the time, his nerves gave out, and he reacted splendidly."

"Magnificent," said Simon Iff.

And so say I," cried Teake heartily. "But I guess I had better take these men; see you later."

"Don't take Berkeley!" begged the mystic. He's all right; I want him to stay for a bit in a colony I founded for reformed Oxford men."

"Quite your old form!" cried Dolores, delighted.

For the first time the Prince uttered a protest.

"What am I charged with?" he asked, a gleam of cunning in his eyes.

"It hardly matters, does it? Just a lot of tedious formalities - a terrible fuss to make over electrocuting anybody!"

"What are you talking about?" roared von Arnberg.

"Is this more of your foolery? What have I done?"

"Well, there's one thing I know of, myself. You listened to all that I told you. Curiosity killed the cat, don't you know?"

The man's face broke into a cold sweat.

"My God, it's true," he cried in agony. "I wouldn't let any one live myself, who knew all that." His head fell hopelessly on his breast. They led him and von Weibheim away. Berkeley followed. "I'll call to-night," he said to the magician humbly and gratefully. Iff shook his hand, and he went out.

At that moment Mollie gave way; the reaction took her. She fell trembling on Simon's shoulder. He put an arm about her to support her. "Take it easy," he said, smiling. "Cophas means Rock, doesn't it?"

"Mr. Iff," said Dolores severely, "I am exceedingly angry with you. If I had not turned up, you would most certainly have been killed."

"But you did turn up," he protested mildly.

Something in his tone caught her ear. She shot a quick inquiring gaze, which grew fixed.

"She held him with her glittering eye, The wedding guest was still," laughed he. "It's very simple. As I told you before, the way to manage this business was just not

to interfere, to let everything happen quite, quite naturally."

"Dig on!"

"Yes, my child, I judged that it would be in your nature to want to follow me, and to be able to do so. I felt perfectly safe, thank you."

"You are a perfect Beast!" she cried angrily. "If I'd guessed that!"

"I thought you might have guessed at least that as it was your case originally, I should not want to rob you of the glory of it. It was the natural thing to do."

"Indeed, indeed, you are adorable!"

"Also, I am leaving America next week, and I wanted a final proof that the continent was in competent hands."

Mollie woke up. "What! you are going away?"

"On the Deutschland. It's the safest boat, by a strange paradox; it would never never do for me to have an accident just now. Crasingens iterabimus aequor."

"You're going away! You're going away!"

"The Deutschland is quite a large boat."

Dolores broke into a musical laugh. Mollie could only wail "You're going away!"

"We're going away." He put his other arm about her and held her tightly. "This little bunch of red mischief offered her life for mine just now, Dolores!" he said softly. "I'm really and truly puzzled for once; so we had better go away

for a little, and find out what it all means."

"You silly man," smiled Mollie demurely, perfectly herself again. "It's no puzzle at all to me. "It's the natural thing to do."

"Perhaps it is," said Simon Iff.

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