

The SABLE By HORACE HAZELTINE LORCHA

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"Oh, no. Dr. Massey left directions that he was to give some nourishment—a raw egg and milk—and then another powder to make him sleep. He turned on his side after that, and in less than three minutes was in a deep slumber once more."

I was annoyed that I had not been called. I let myself hope that sight of me might possibly have stirred his memory even though the familiar objects of his bedchamber failed. I said as much to the short, broad-shouldered nurse, whose twinkling eyes were in violent contrast with his thin-lipped, grave, determined mouth.

"Dr. Massey's orders were that for twelve hours no one should be admitted to the room," was his unanswerable rejoinder.

"Which means not until after five o'clock, this evening?" "Exactly, sir. But I shall report to you everything he says, as nearly as possible in his own words."

"Very well," I said. "I shall spend the day here." My tone conveyed dismay and I fear it still smacked of annoyance. Mr. Bryan, however, gave no sign of resentment. His mouth still inspired reverence. He turned towards the door, saying:

"He'll probably sleep four hours at least, Mr. Clyde. If you wish to go out, there's no reason why you shouldn't."

I meant to reply. My lips were already framing a sentence, when a tableau checked me.

Evelyn Grayson was standing in the doorway. She wore a clinging house gown of pale blue, cut low at the throat, and bordered with a deep collar of Irish lace. The rose flush of youth and health tinted the cream of her complexion and a shaft of sunlight from a near window made a glittering golden nimbus of her hair. With wide, startled eyes she was gazing at Bryan, or, to be more exact, at the snowy linen duck in which he was clad, and which must have held her a perplexing significance.

The nurse had halted, deferentially standing aside at sight of the girl whose young beauty seemed to dazzle him.

For a moment the stillness and silence were absolute. Then Evelyn turning her gaze upon me advanced quickly, with a little questioning cry: "Philip!"

"You're surprised to find me here," I interpreted, with hands outstretched. "And to—" she began, laying her fingers against my palms.

"To find a nurse here, as well," I finished for her. "Let me introduce Mr. Bryan." But when I would have presented him he had already gone.

"But who is he?" she questioned in nervous haste. "What?" "It were well, I thought, to have the revelation over and done with as speedily as possible."

"Your uncle. I brought him home at two o'clock this morning."

I do not know what I expected, but I am sure I was not prepared for what ensued. Her fingers, suddenly releasing themselves from my fond but feeble support, clutched wildly at the lapels of my coat for support, as she burst into a passion of sobs. In vain I made efforts to comfort and quiet her. She became hysterical. She laughed and cried by turns, while I, making bold to regard her as a sorrowing child rather than the woman she was, held her close and murmured all the soothing, encouraging words and phrases I could conjure.

"I—I am so glad," she whispered at last, her big liquid blue eyes swimming, her fair face wet with the torrent of her emotion. "I—I am so happy."

the-ness, the practicability of her proposition. But to her next proposal I must needs interpose the obstructive truth.

"Come," she commanded, brushing back from her temples with both hands the encroaching golden halo, with the gesture of one who prepares for conquest, wiping away, as it were, the last clinging vestiges of her emotional weakness. "Come, let us go to him, together."

She was on her feet before I could restrain her.

"Not now, Evelyn," I said, quietly, and, at the risk of seeming rudeness, sat still.

"But, why?" And there was a hint of suspicion in the look she gave me. "He is asleep," I told her. And when she had relaxed into the great chair again, I added, temporizing, "Mr. Bryan will let us know when he awakens."

Her disappointment was undisguised, and in secret I sympathized with her. She was experiencing something of that which had come to me when Bryan had refused me converse with his patient. But it were better to divert than to commiserate, and so I said:

"This is the day I am to hear from Miss Clement."

"Is it?" she asked, differently, the disappointment still rankling. "I didn't know."

"She has promised me important information before three o'clock. If she keeps her word, this whole perplexing mystery may very shortly be cleared up."

"Isn't that what you would call supererogatory?" she asked, smiling. "I should think Uncle Robert could tell all that is needed, now, himself."

I was at a loss for a moment how to answer her; and in that moment the telephone broke in, and did away with the necessity of response.

The instrument was on the writing table at my elbow, and with a "Shall I?" to Evelyn, I took the receiver from the hook and bent to the transmitter.

"Yes," I said, "Miss Grayson is here. Who is it, please?" I thought I recognized Miss Clement's voice, and I was not wrong. But, after all, it was I she wanted. She had called up my rooms and my office, and unable to get me at either place, had taken the chance that Evelyn might aid her to my discovery.

"You have learned something?" I asked, disguising as well as I could my burning interest. If possible, I would keep from Evelyn the least suggestion of how vitally important I regarded the news I hoped for.

"I hardly know how to explain it to you," came Miss Clement's reply. "I was on the verge of what I am sure was a most pregnant revelation. I was to be given names and dates and circumstances. I had been promised these by one in whom I put the greatest reliance. And now I am asked to wait another twenty-four hours. Something has happened, my confidant tells me; something puzzling and utterly unexpected, and those who know most of the matter are now most at sea."

Evelyn must have seen me smile. It was quite evident to me that Miss Clement was in touch with some one well informed, but it was not that which provoked the smile. I smiled because I felt that Cameron in some way had outwitted his captors and gained his freedom. This was the unexpected happening which had thrown the villainous slant-eyed camp into confusion, and I rejoiced at my friend's intrepidity.

"And so," I said to Miss Clement, "you wish me to wait another day?" "I think it would be worth while," she answered.

"And I do, too," I told her. "I don't suppose you've seen an afternoon paper, have you?" I went on. "Well, they contain some news of interest. They say that Mr. Cameron came home last night, and for once, at least, they tell what is very nearly the truth."

If sincerity ever carried over a wire it carried then in Miss Clement's congratulations, and there was something almost divine in her forbearance to ask for particulars. She congratulated Evelyn, too, and promised to come to see her, soon; and then once more she assured me that she would yet learn everything we could possibly care to know.

"The Chinese," she added, "are a deliberate race, Mr. Clyde. They refuse to be hurried. But eventually we shall have our answers."

With Evelyn beside me the hours no longer dragged. We talked unceasingly; reviewing everything from the receipt of the first letter; conjecturing on each of the score of little problems making up the one great mystery, but arriving at nothing definite; adding, if changing conditions at all, to our own confusion.

And if, in passing, at intervals, where opportunity offered, I spoke tender words and pleaded for a definite, or at least a closer, more intimate understanding between us, who shall say that I was to blame? She was never more lovely, never more appealing than she was that morning; and I

begged for an admission of a sentiment above and beyond the mere sisterly regard to which hitherto she had persisted in limiting her expressed affection for me.

More than once I had read in her eyes—without unseemly conceit, I trust I may be permitted this assertion—what I now asked in lip avowal. But there seemed to be with her a notion that the occasion was ill-suited to my plea.

"Philip," she said, "dear Philip, I care for you very much; almost as much as I care for Uncle Robert. You have been very good to me, and very good to him, and if I could tell you that I love you in the way you ask, I— And there she hesitated a shade of a second. "Even if I could tell you," she corrected, "I wouldn't tell you now. It is not stubbornness, Philip. It is just a woman's way. Ask me again, when Uncle Robert is well, and all this horrible nightmare has passed. Promise me that you will ask me again!"

"Never fear," I returned, "I'll ask you."

"And promise me, too," she added, "that until all the skies are clear once more, you will not mention the subject."

I was on the verge of promising; not because it would be an easy promise to keep, for I knew it would be very difficult; but because I could deny her nothing. I was on the verge, I say, when the library door opened, and Louis, pale and excited, and so in haste that he had not paused to knock, was exclaiming:

"Monsieur Cameron! Pardon! Mais, enfin, c'este vous prete?"

A score of fears springing instantly to birth within us, Evelyn and I were on our feet before the speech, rapidly delivered as it was, was finished. Were we ready? We evidenced our readiness in no such voiceless thing as words.

Louis stood aside for us to pass, and as I went by him, I asked, under my breath:

"What is it, Louis?" "Ah!" he whispered. "Monsieur Cameron is talking in the strange tongue which neither Monsieur Bryan nor I myself can understand."

I think, suspicious of his purpose, no turned, suddenly, swiftly, and alighted from beneath the bed clothes to the floor where he stood erect, with arms upraised and tensed, shouting in shrill, strident key what seemed to be orders, directed not at one but at a horde.

The great bed separated him from both Bryan and myself, but we skirted it in haste, and came upon him before he had taken more than a single step. As we confronted him, his arms lowered and his clenched fists shot forward threateningly. But a far more startling happening at this juncture was his abandonment of his jargon, and his adoption of intelligible English.

"Below!" he yelled, fiercely. "Below! you yellow dog! Below, I say! Every cur's son of you! Below!"

Despite this truculence he was not difficult to master. Together Bryan and I grappled him; in another moment we had him flat on his bed once more, and the nurse was pressing home the piston of that little shining instrument of glass and silver which I had so recently seen him take up from the medicine table.

For a moment the patient rolled about, restlessly, muttering strange oaths, mingled with suppliant murmurs. And to me this was the most sadly trying part of the incident. I would gladly have retreated, but Evelyn begged me to wait.

"Just until he is quiet," she pleaded; "just until he falls asleep."

At length he lay quite still and we thought from his regular breathing he had succumbed to the narcotic, and as we were about to go, when he started up with a little feeble cry, low-voiced, but clearly distinct.

"No, no, for God's sake, not that! I didn't kill them. I swear I didn't kill them. It was an accident. She stoves on a rock. I—I—didn't, I say! I didn't—I—"

His voice trailed into silence. He dropped back, heavily, upon the pillows. He slept.

It is one thing to have your faith in a friend shaken. That is serious enough in all conscience. But your faith may tremble, and sway and rock, and still there is always the possibility of its being restated and made firm again by explanation—by extenuation even. It is quite another thing to have your faith toppled headlong, by the snatching away of the last vestige of support, the last sliver of underpinning. That is more than serious. It is calamitous; it is catastrophic; it is tragic.

Back in the library again, I set to pacing the floor. I think Evelyn resumed her seat in the big leather chair. I am sure. For a time I was not conscious that she was in the room. That it was inconsiderate of me, I admit. It was, perhaps, unpardonable. And yet it was not wilful. Frankly, I had forgotten her, absolutely, in the stress of the emotional tempest raised by that revelation in the darkened bedchamber.

Back and forth, I strode from bookcase to bookcase, over the soft, neutral-tinted Persian rug; and all the while there echoed those repeated details of Cameron's that he had ever been in China. "Never nearer than Yokohama," he had said. "Once I ate chop suey in a Chicago Chinese restaurant." "I have always been interested in China and the Chinese, but I know only what I have read." And the words of his quondam friend came back to me now, too, with redoubled emphasis: "He refused to admit what I knew to be the truth."

Nevertheless I had chosen to believe that Cameron, should he ever return to us, would be able to clarify this turbid stream of circumstance, and prove the fallibility of appearances.

The illusion to which I had clung, however, was now in shreds. Cameron, returning, with body enfeebled and brain confused, had spoken in his unguarded delirium. The mask was dropped, the screen thrown down, and barefaced and stark he stood revealed, a woeful figure in the impartial glare of truth.

At the moment I could see no extenuation. He was a liar and he was a coward; and all the sympathy, all the friendship I ever felt for him died utterly, as I thought how, probably, every untoward incident of the past month, with its chain of vexations and consequences, might have been avoided had he been brave to the point of confession.

It was now plain enough for the least astute to see that at some time he had committed an act which had aroused certain of the Chinese to retaliation. It was this which I had feared from the first. It was this which he had chosen to hide.

As I paced to and fro, his craven words rang once more in my ears: "No, no, for God's sake, not that! I didn't kill them! I swear I didn't kill them! It was an accident!" And I knew that he was lying. The very tone of his disclaimer convinced me of his guilt. He had killed, and he covered before the avengers.

Disgust, abhorrence, anger, all were mine in turn.

At length I paused before a window, and remained there, with my back to the room, looking down on the withered garden behind the house, yet seeing nothing but the red of my own passion.

A touch upon my shoulder aroused me to a realization of my surroundings, and informed me that I was not alone. Startled as one awakened abruptly from a dream, I turned, and turning, there came a revulsion. Every surcharging emotion that had held and bound me gave way instantly to a violent self-reproach, excited by the pathos of Evelyn's sad, questioning eyes and sadder, quivering mouth.

My impulse was to take her in my arms—and pacifying, to plead pardon for what must have seemed to her an inexcusable childishness. But the conditions which so recently she had set upon me forbidding the coveted embrace, I compromised on a hand-clasp.

"My dear child," I began, earnestly, "I'm sorry. But then you must know how what we just saw and heard distressed me. I think I have been mad since we left that room. I hardly know what I have been doing. To see him so unstrung, demented, raving. To hear him—"

But she would not allow me to finish.

"Philip!" she cried, passionately. "Oh, Philip! Can't you see? Don't you understand? It is a mistake, an awful nightmare of a mistake. That creature over there is not my uncle. I am convinced that he is not my Uncle Robert."

CHAPTER XX.

An Enigma and Its Solution.

To my amazement I found that Evelyn meant more than I fancied. My interpretation of her words was that Cameron was not in his right mind—that he was not her Uncle Robert, as she had known him. But in a very brief moment she disabused me.

"It is not he, at all," she declared, with emphasis. "There is a resemblance, yes. But the man you found in the street is not Robert Cameron; I am sure of that."

The idea that I had brought there, not my friend, but my friend's double, seemed to me too preposterous for a moment's entertainment. I fear I suspected, just then, that Evelyn's reason had been warped a trifle by the racking scene of which we had been witnesses.

"I would to God, my dear child," I said, sympathetically, "that you were right. But there can be no question as to the identity of the sick man. Every one who has seen him recognized him at once—Checkabeedy, Louis, Stephen, Dr. Massey, No, no, Evelyn, you must not be misled by his ravings." And at this point there occurred to me a tentative explanation—one in which I did not in the least believe, but which, at all events, was worth trying; one which, indeed, I prayed would serve.

"Cameron, you must remember, has been with his Chinese captors for four weeks. In that time he must have picked up something of their language. It is only natural that he should. So, you see, to hear him use a few words of pidgin-English in his insane gibberish is not so remarkable, after all. And as for that spirited denial just before he dropped off to sleep, it is very evident that they accused him of something with which he had no connection, though quite cognizant of the facts."

But the girl would have none of it. Tolerantly she listened, and tolerantly she smiled when I had finished.

"No, no, Philip," she insisted, "I see it all quite clearly. Whatever crime was committed, the creature lying there committed it. But he is not my uncle. Others mistook the resemblance for identity, just as you did, only the situation was reversed. Those who abducted Uncle Robert thought they were abducting that villain we are now housing."

It was an ingenious notion, but of course it was not possible. However, I saw that it would be idle to continue to dispute with her.

"What would you suggest, then? Shall we send our invalid to a hospital?" I asked, in pretended seriousness.

But very sagely she shook her head.

"Oh, no," she returned. "We must keep him. He is very valuable to us. Perhaps we can do as contending armies do—arrange an exchange of prisoners."

In spite of my wretchedness, I suppressed a smile. It was all very amusing; and yet the feat that she was suffering aberration due to hysteria, tempered pitifully the humor of it.

When, later in the afternoon, Dr. Massey called, I told him everything, including this hallucination of Evelyn's.

"You did perfectly right," he said, in tone of cordial approval. "The malady with which Cameron is afflicted has a tendency to distort certain lineaments. Especially at times of excitement his face changes, so that Miss Grayson is justified in fancying that this is not the Robert Cameron she knew. I have noticed the dissimilarity myself, but it is due, of course, entirely to distorted expression. In a couple of days, at most, he will be fully restored, and then he himself will be the best one to rectify her error. Meanwhile, if I were you, I would not dispute her. She has gone through a great deal, and gone through it bravely; indeed with a courage that is quite phenomenal, and she is entitled to any little consolatory beliefs that she chooses to entertain."

And then, as if such advice were not wholly superfluous, he added: "Be kind to her, Clyde! be good to her. She is a wonderful young woman."

Whereat I grasped his hand, and promised him, lifting him a notch in my estimation because of his perspicacity. And all the while a lump kept rising in my throat and threatening my tear ducts.

On the following day I heard nothing from Miss Clement, which somewhat surprised me, though she had told me that her prospective informants were likely to take their own time. Early, on the second morning, however, I had a note from her, the enigmatic character of which impelled me to speculation.

"Dear Mr. Clyde," she wrote, "I hope you can make it convenient to visit me this evening, at the Mission. I want to talk with Ling Fo, an exceptionally well-educated young Chinaman, who tells me that his people are much mystified over a recent event; and if

what he says to be true—and I never knew him to lie—a new complexion is placed upon this whole matter. Come about nine-thirty, after our service is over."

As Dr. Massey's orders forbidding any one save Mr. Bryan to enter Cameron's room, issued immediately after our hideous experience, had not yet been rescinded, our knowledge of his condition was, perforce, gleaned entirely through physician and nurse. Both now assured me that he was progressing satisfactorily, and that there had been no return of the dementia.

Evelyn still persisted in her notion that the patient was not her uncle, but his double, and following the doctor's directions I refrained from trying to convince her of the truth; even going so far as to pretend that I believed as she did, and planning to begin negotiations through Miss Clement and her Chinese confidants for an exchange of captives as soon as our hostage was able to be moved.

"I am to see Miss Clement, tonight," I told her, late that afternoon, "also an Oriental acquaintance of hers, who appears to be informed on the subject which interests us. It is possible that he will prove the very person who can arrange it all."

"Let me go with you," she urged, laying a beseeching hand on my arm. "Do let me go with you, Philip. I am so anxious. It will seem years if I have to wait here for you to bring me the news; and there are sure to be some things you will forget to ask about, if I'm not there to prompt you."

In spite of the unflattery of her speech I smiled, indulgent. Her great blue eyes, pathetically pleading as her words were, were able advocates. It was hard to deny her under any circumstances, and now, as I thought it over, I saw no reason why in this instance she should not have her desire.

"Yes," I agreed, "you shall go. But remember, you must be very careful, for the present at least, not to let slip the slightest inkling that we suspect our Cameron is not the real Cameron. We are seeking information, you know, Evelyn, not squandering it."

Fell street wore its night gaudery when the Cameron electric brougham with Evelyn and myself as occupants glided to a halt before the door of the Mission over which Miss Clement ably and successfully presided. The pale, vari-tinted light of lanterns from the balcony of a restaurant across the way, mingling with the flickering yellow beam of the city's gas lamps, threw into sharp relief the curious pendent black signs with their red cloth borders and gilded Chinese lettering, hanging before shop doors. It revealed, too, oddly contrasting figures of loungers and pedestrians, residents and visitors. And it bared, back of all that was bizarre, the commonplace brick fronts of the typically American buildings, with their marring gridironing of fire-escapes. To Evelyn, rarely observant, the combination was interesting, but disappointing.

"It does not look at all as I expected it would," she said to me. "It hasn't the air. It is neither one thing nor the other. It is like a stage scene, carelessly mounted."

As we alighted at the Mission door, the last notes of a familiar hymn, mangled in words and melody almost beyond recognition, flowed out to join the babel of street sounds; and before we could mount the high steps there had begun to pour forth a motley, malodorous freshet of felt-shod soles, that gave us pause; blocking, for a few minutes, not merely the ascent but the sidewalk as well.

When, at length, the way was clear, and by direction of a youth at the entrance, we had passed through the close, ill-smelling hall, where the lights had already been lowered, we came upon Miss Clement, alone in a little well-ventilated and brightly-lighted office or parlor, jutting off at the rear.

If she was surprised at seeing Evelyn, she gave no sign. She welcomed us both with the smiling cordiality of a life-long friend. But abruptly her smile died.

"I tried to get you on the telephone an hour ago," she explained, "but there was some trouble with the wire. I hoped to save you this journey for nothing."

"Your protege couldn't come?" I queried.

"Unfortunately, no," she returned, with a little quaver in her voice. "My protege will never come again. He was shot to death. Poor, poor Ling Fo!"

"Shot to death!" I cried, while Evelyn, with cheeks suddenly pale and eyes wide, held her underlip fast between her teeth, and gripped hard on the arms of the rocking chair in which Miss Clement had placed her.

"Yes," And this strong, sweet-faced, gray-haired woman in gray, her momentarily-lost composure quite recovered, laid a quieting hand softly over Evelyn's tensed clutch. "Yes. That sort of thing is not unusual down here, you know. There is always more or less bad blood between the tonga. But it was most unfortunate, just at this time, because I feel sure he could have told you something worth learning. I'm glad he was a good boy. He was one of the few converts that are really sincere."

"Perhaps he knew too much," I suggested.

But Miss Clement made no comment. I fancy it was out of consideration for Evelyn that she refrained from endorsing my conclusion; while I reproached myself for being less thoughtful, I was all the more convinced that I had voiced the motive for the shooting.

(To be continued.)

Uncle Pennywise Says. A politician is always ready to discuss questions, but he seldom has an answer for any of our troubles.