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The Green Seal

By CHARLES EDMONDS WALK

Author of "The Silver Blade," "The Paternoster Ruby," "The Time Lock," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX. (Cont'd).

The previous night, it was Strang's firm belief, Loa had meant to tell Lois the whole story, as far as possible explain his reasons for wanting the tattoo-mark obliterated, and thus try to win her consent to its removal. But to secure the requisite privacy without exciting her alarm and suspicion had been next to impossible until circumstances played directly into his hands. He was provided with the opportunity of talking to Lois under the best conditions, and furthermore, unsuspected by her, of using his disappearance as a decoy to get me in his power with the ring and the reliquary. The hour had struck when he must have them, and extreme measures had to be resorted to. He would not have harmed Lois, Strang averred; he might have brought about my murder without a scruple, if I had refused to give up the ring and reliquary.

However, his program was interrupted, as we know, by Struber having met and followed Farlin and me.

Tao-fuism had been spreading not alone among the Pacific Coast and other Chinese colonies of America, but with changing conditions, it was once more coming into its own in China. Lao's rank made it imperative that he recover the symbol of his authority, which my father had seized at the time of the other's flight from China, and remove all others that were being carelessly left to the disposition of chance. But Peter B. Ferris was dead, and what had become of the ring? Occurred then Charley Yen's death, and the trail was indicated to him, though for a time he hestitated to approach me, and did not do so until obliged to. Events in which he was secretly a principal participant were rapidly drawing to a head in China and he was all at once forced to act quickly.

Straightway, however, he was opposed by another serious disadvantage: radical difference of race made it very difficult for him to recover the boxes and the ring without (in his estimation) involving the likely hazard of betraying their significance. So he went about trying to gather them in after his own peculiar methods.

It must not be lost sight of that for more than twenty years Strang and Lao Wing Fu, deceived and misguided by what they believed to be the true state of affairs, entertained a hostile and suspicious attitude toward each other. With true Oriental patience and impassivity, Lao bided his time, believing the opportunity to get even would sooner or later present itself; but the fact that the diamond never appeared between the time of its loss and the meeting between Lao and Strang at Johore Bahru in November, in a measure had prepared the minds of each for openness to conviction regarding the other's innocence.

The two then directed their suspicions toward Steve Willets, a life prisoner in San Quentin, and canvessed the situation from this point of view. For some time Lao's influence had enabled him to communicate with Steve through the medium of the "grapevine" telegraph that constitutes a connecting-link between every prison and the outside world. Unsuccessfully he had sought information that would put him upon the trail of Marian Sylvester. Steve was wily and evasive. Life prisoners sometimes were pardoned, and then the missing heiress would prove a most valuable asset. Steve had contrived to keep informed respecting his putative daughter's whereabouts and condition, but he was not taking Lao into his confidence, even though the latter was holding out the tempting hint of a possible jail delivery. So Lao was merely fed with facts that stopped just short of enabling him positively to identify Marian. If he could learn certainly about the tattoo-mark—But how was a Chinaman to go about that?

Steve tried to make Lao believe that Lois was in reality his daughter; and when Strang, after the November meeting, wrote Hardwick warning him to be cautious about Lois (of whom Strang at the time could know nothing definite), and when his warning was followed immediately on Lao's return to Los Angeles by another from him, to the effect that Lois's presence might be part of a blackmailing scheme that threatened all sorts of dire calamities to Kenton-Hardwick, Meyer Hardwick was thrown into a panic which was openly manifested by the blunt dismissal of the innocent and unsuspecting girl.

So many important eventualities were set in motion by Strang's and Lao's meeting in November, eventualities which, in working to an inevitable end disrupted the even tenor of our lives, Lois's and mine, that it was a pity the meeting could not have happened years before. As another instance, when the two became reasonably certain that Steve had taken the diamond to California along with little Marian, Lao immediately resolved upon starting the conspiracy which was soon to effect the bandit's escape: a degenerate and irresponsible Steve Willets at liberty to pursue his erratic inclinations, would in time expose what a Steve Willets confined could so easily keep concealed. After which Steve could be removed without jeopardy.

Then, too, Strang was in possession of facts that Lao Wing Fu did not have. If Steve had stolen the diamond, the fact that it had not since reappeared argued that he had hidden it; if so, where?

James Strang thought he knew.

He became active at once. First of all, Hardwick was privately and guardedly warned by letter against Lois. There was the old underground traffic in opium upon which their fortunes had been built, respecting which nobody was better informed than Steve Willets. And Strang was unsparing of the cables. Within a week or two he had gathered together a mass of information which made him more than suspect Lois's real identity. and led him to extend to the United States an already projected trip to England. He brought with him the ivory box in his possession, because it bore in its pattern the distinctive symbol of death, a mark that would establish the girl's identity beyond peradventure.

He had informed himself about myself, too. He arrived at Los Angeles on the day he notified Lois of, determined to lose not a minute's time in recovering the diamond and presenting himself with it and the ivory box at my office.

He secured a room at the Republic, on an impulse registered his true name, then boarded a car for San Pedro. Among the hills on the old home place was a certain ravine; in that ravine was a cave which, in the old days, had been known only to his brother and himself; in one of the cave's rough walls was a small concealed niche that had been the hiding place of plundered treasure many a time during the period of their youthful maraudings. While pondering over the matter of the missing diamond this old hiding-place had recurred to James Strang. He went straight to it, thrust a hand into the recess and drew out a small package which once had been tightly wrapped in oiled silk. Now, towever, the fabric was rotting and falling way; but inside it reposed the diamond, undimmed and unharmed.

He crawled out of the cave, and a second later came face to face with—not a Chinaman, as at first he had believed, but Steve. With a roar of fury, the disguised fugitive plunged at him, and the quiet, secluded ravine because the scene of a terrific combat.

The very fierceness of Steve's onslaught, however, defeated its purpose. Strang was sent hurtling down the steep incline, and before Steve, with more regard for his own bones, could come up with him again, he had won the highway and the open, where the other dared not press him.

As a result of this narrow escape, Strang was obliged to remain under cover at San Pedro until near nightfall, nursing his bruised body.

When he started on his return to Los Angeles he discovered that he was surrounded by a veritable cloud of Chinese. While seeming unaware of his presence and to be intent only upon their own affairs, they were colliding with him at every turn, pressing against him at every halt, so that he arrived at the hotel in a condition of nervous strain that left him, as he expressed it, "in the right frame o' mind to take it out on someone." The ransacked room afforded the last straw; but his aches and bruises restricted the taking-out process to an upbraiding of Corrigan, the hotel manager.

Alone at last in the new room to which he had been transferred, he began fully to realize the seriousness of the situation confronting him. In a little while he formed a pretty accurate conception of the true state of affairs: Steve had escaped from prison; he knew Chinese nature, their genius for concealment, for acting secretly in the dark(and he knew it would be hopeless to appeal to the police with the fantastic story he would have to offer to account for his fears. It was too late to find me at my office, and he dreaded going abroad with the diamond in his possession. He could not even open his door without seeing a Chinaman somewhere in the hall; the reflection that they were hotel servants did not in the least restore his peace of mind.

It was now clear that Steve meant to have the diamond at any cost, and that he had at his beck and call any number of dangerous allies against whom a solitary stand would be hopeless. Out of the predicament grew the idea of mailing the diamond to me and accompanying it with a letter of explanation, which he would follow in person as soon as it was possible for him to do so.

How he was assaulted and dragged into an alley when he went forth to hunt a letter-box; how he succeeded in dropping into it the parcel but not the letter, which was taken from him; how his assailants were finally routed, and himself, now seriously injured, crawled into a cab and was driven to the only haven he could think of—Meyer Harwick's residence—must all be passed over. For days he was confined to his room, fretting over the gem's fate. The letter, of course, had been taken to Steve, and Steve would know where the diamond had been sent, whether or not it reached its destination. Therefore Hardwick's machine was pressed into service and a guard of private detectives followed me until Strang was satisfied that I was no longer in danger from the Hop Sings and his desperate brother. By means of the personal he cautioned me against Steve's similar method of trying to entrap me into a betrayal of having the diamond in my possession. And at last, when he had about made up his mind that he was well enough to leave his retreat and pay me the long deferred call, Struber had found him.

Strang turned aside to indulge in a brief digession.

"Was Lao far-seeing, or a lucky dog? His success made him head o' the tong. An' then the time came when he had to skip so sudden that he left behind everything he owned except the clothes he was wearing at the time. It looked like total failure an' complete disaster; but, by gosh! just see how things 've worked out!

"But look here. What I was going to say was this: It wasn't long after that before the Tao-fus were the most active figures in the government. Many o' the leaders lost their heads in more ways than one, but Lao saved his by lighting out for America, an' it looks to a man up a tree as if he'd guessed right. He worked for the dynasty all through the recent revolution, an' now when it's beginning to look like the battered old empire was caught in the toils of a despotism worse than any it ever knew, he recovers his badge of authority an' goes hiking back to China. Republic? Huh! To those who know anything o' the inside workings o' Chinese politics the word has been made a joke of."

(To be Continued.)

Resignation may be a good sauce for adversity.

Aunt—"Johnnie, Why is it that you never remember to say 'Thank you?'" Johnnie (eyeing wistfully a box of chocolates on his aunt's knee)—"I expect it's because I don't get things given to me often enough to practice."

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LIFE IN THE IRON LAND.

German Police Are Continually Raiding Dwelling Houses.

Day by day the Berne "Tagwacht," the organ of Swiss Social Democracy, tells what is really happening in Germany. In the latest issue that has reached this country, it describes the political activity of the police.

"First of all, everybody suspected of ha ing revolutionary tendencies is spied upon day and night. A number of papers which are under preventive censure are no longer allowed to leave blank spaces, where passages or an article have been suppressed.

"Wurtemburg is under a specially close surveillance. The local police officials were sent from the famous police school at Halle. But even these men were not found sufficient to safeguard public order. Stuttgart is flooded with detectives, who are present in numbers at every meeting. These are dissolved on the slightest pretext, and all the names of persons taking part in the meeting taken down.

"One of the latest 'heroic' deeds of the police in Stuttgart was the arrest of four Social Democrats. The police handled them in a most brutal way. Two boys who witnessed the arrest were detained from two o'clock in the afternoon until late in the evening lest they should tell what they knew of the affair and denounce the police. It often happens that school children are suddenly arrested on their way home, detained without food or drink until late at night, and then liberated without any explanation. Their anxious parents are never warned and no excuse is ever given to them. The children are being terrorized in thousands of ways.

"Frequent also are domiciliary searches. A whole row of houses was examined because a rumor had spread that a leaflet was being distributed protesting against a winter campaign.

"Not less severe is the censorship in Rhineland. There is serious unrest amongst the miners in consequence of the prohibition by the Government of all discussions concerning the present state of affairs in Germany. In this way the authorities hope to prevent an outburst of discontent. In Socialist papers the word 'capitalism' is invariably cut out by the censor.

"In all big stations and tramway termini there are many police and detectives.

"Often trains are stopped and the passengers searched, but not from fear of spies. It is even probable that the police keep a descriptive list of all Socialists suspected of peace propaganda, as many members of the Socialist party have noticed themselves being photographed in the streets.

"It is known that all the correspondence of suspected Socialists is opened by the authorities. Lately the police are even overhearing all conversations on the telephone and using this means to ascertain the opinions of different members of the Social Democratic party."

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Money in Sorting Potatoes.

There is money to be made by the sorting of potatoes. Consumers, large and small, do not like mixed lots. They want them uniform in size and quality. Consequently potatoes are usually sorted before being put on the market and the price which is paid the potato-grower is the price of sorted potatoes, less the cost of sorting. Therefore, the potato grower who ships unsorted potatoes really has to pay the charge of sorting.

The shipper of unsorted potatoes, also, has to pay another charge, and that is the freight on the culls which are later taken out of his shipment.

The shipper of unsorted potatoes, therefore, is simply wasting money. It pays to sort because it gives one the top market prices and because it saves freight on culls, and, it might be added because the culls could be kept on the farm and made use of in rations for live stock.

"When is a partnership like a pen? When there is not a split in it."

The difference between stealing and embezzling depends altogether on the size of the pile that the thief gets away with.

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