

The Free Press Short Story

A FLASH FROM THE ORIENT

By GEORGE H. HALL

"I may not get them to-night, nor to-morrow night, but sooner or later we will get them," declared Sergeant Norcross with assurance.

"I hope you do," agreed his companion, Harold Parker, earnestly. "I am told that the smuggling of opium among the natives of the Philippines is one of the worst things that the Government has here has to contend with. I wish I might have a hand in breaking up the wretched trade myself."

"You never can tell," explained his friend. "We often get tips from merchant ships that help a lot. You may be able to do something in that line yourself sometime."

"Count on me if there is any chance to help. Must you go?" asked Harold Parker.

"Yes. I'm due back on the 'Huron' at eight." The sergeant rose from the restaurant table and held out his hand. "Well, it's been good to run onto you again, Parker. Hope you will continue to like your berth on the 'Colorado'."

"You always did like excitement," commented Harold. "Sorry you have to leave so early. I want to see a bit more of the city before I go back to the ship. We sail at midnight."

"Goodbye then until we run on to each other again," said the sergeant, as the two young men shook hands warmly. "Good luck to you," responded Harold. "Hope you get your smugglers."

"We will," were the confident words of the sergeant, as he strode rapidly away.

Again seated at the table, Harold thought over the adventures of the day which had been so filled with interest and pleasure. It had been his first glimpse of the Orient and the unexpected meeting with his old schoolmate had added greatly to the day's enjoyment. Together they had explored the old city of Manila so strange and picturesque with its mingling of the old and the modern.

At once all was excitement and activity in the building. Alvarez shouted his orders and a nondescript crew appeared from dark corners of the shed where they had, until now, remained unseen. The engine of the larger boat was started. Before leaving, the captain bound the unhappy operator in his chair, while a young member of the crew was placed on guard. "If he tried to break away, shot him," were the captain's parting words.

With a great clanging of her engine the opium-smuggling boat slid out of her slip and was on her way. Silence settled over the huge barnlike structure, broken occasionally by the rattle of dishes from the cabin of the smaller boat which had remained tied up.

Tricked! He certainly was, but at the same time Harold felt sure that his captives were tricked also. When they were caught, as they most certainly would be, their hide-out would be found and he would be released. How soon could he expect this release to come? As the clock in a nearby steeple struck the hour of eight, he realized that in four hours his ship would sail. It would not do to wait for release from outside. He must depend on himself. He furiously strained at the cords by which he was bound, at the same time studying the face of his guard. The young man was evidently a native Filipino and his clean-cut, intelligent features made him appear entirely out of place in the disreputable gang with which he was associated. Was it possible that he could be won over?

Almost as though reading Harold's thoughts, the guard smiled, not unkindly. "I hope you told Alvarez the truth about the movements of the 'Erie,'" he said quietly in well-spoken English.

"I did," asserted Harold. "Still something may happen. They may be caught."

"To tell you the truth," replied the guard, almost in a whisper, "I hope so."

"You hope so? I thought you were with them, that you wanted them to succeed."

"I am with them," admitted the Filipino, "so mixed up in their schemes that I would not dare to do anything unless I could be sure of getting away. I know what happened to the man who was here before you. They are a bad lot. I loathe them!"

"Then why are you with them?" "I believed their story. I thought they were offering me a good position in a real trading company. Trading company?" The young man repeated the words in disgust. "I wish they would be caught to-night."

"If I were sure of it, I would free you. We could get away together." The boy spoke so earnestly that Harold was impressed.

"You are telling me the truth, I may be tempted to give you a chance," he at length admitted.

"Senior," the youth drew himself up proudly, "Manuel Fernandez may have done many things that were not right; but he has always spoken the truth."

"Then I'm going to trust you. The report I gave Alvarez about the 'Erie' is absolutely true; but I didn't tell him that the 'Huron' was ordered to patrol the south channel. Why, your gang of smugglers is as good as caught already."

Already the knife Manuel held was busy at the cords with which the operator was bound. "There," he exclaimed.

"None of that!" exploded the captain menacingly. "Your job is to receive, not to send. Put on the phone. I will explain what we want of you."

"Our business," continued the captain, "is to distribute goods to various points throughout the islands. For some reason the Government does not approve of our transactions. In fact they hunt for us whenever we go out."

"We have learned," Alvarez went on, "that instructions to the patrol are radioed each evening at just about this time. You are to pick up these directions for us."

With the receivers at his ears, Harold listened while he tried desperately to think of some means of defeating the smugglers' plans. For a time the air was silent. Clearly then, in the familiar code, came orders from the customs house to the destroyer "Erie."

Without regard for the menacing weapon, the young Filipino threw himself upon his huge antagonist. The pair went heavily to the floor, Harold joined in the fray, which was soon over. The big smuggler lay writhing, dazed and securely tied.

"Did you get him?" asked Harold in anxiety, as he saw blood trickling down over Manuel's hand.

"Only a scratch," replied his companion. "That's nothing. We must hurry."

"What shall we do with him?" asked Harold, indicating their prisoner.

"Why not take him along with us?" suggested Manuel. "I have a plan. The 'Huron' is going to get the others. Let's go out to meet her. We'll take Mendez with us and give him up, too."

"Butly!" laughed Harold. "You certainly believe in seeing a thing through. Carrying their prisoner to the boat, the young men soon had him safely stored in the cabin. Manuel seemed to understand the management of the

motor, as he had it running in short order. "With Harold at the wheel, the craft was soon gliding out over the waters of Manila Harbor. Less than an hour later the dim outline of a swift destroyer, with the smugglers' boat in tow, was seen coming rapidly toward them.

"Huron ahoy!" hailed Harold as he brought his boat alongside.

"What do you want?" challenged the deck watch.

"We have a prisoner for you. Throw us a line. We'll come aboard and explain."

"The explanations were soon made in the cabin of the destroyer's commander. "That's what I call good work, Parker," that officer declared with enthusiasm, as the recital ended. "After you radioed us the place where the smugglers were headed, we had no trouble in rounding them up. Then to have you bring in the other boat with the remaining member of their gang has made it a one-hundred per cent job."

"The credit for that is due to Manuel," explained Harold. "As soon as we got together, he surely proved a fine working partner in the scheme."

"And he will be given a chance to make good," promised the commander. "I know where I can place him in a good honest job to-morrow. Now, what can I do for you?"

"Put me aboard the 'Colorado,' if you will. She sails at midnight."

As Parker came out onto the 'Huron's' deck, he found himself the centre of a most enthusiastic group of sailors and marines. Norcross was loud in his praise. "I told you we were going to get them," he declared, "but you certainly beat us to it. Ray, you ought to be in the Marines."

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