

# THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER

ROBERT J. CASEY



AUTHOR OF  
THE SECRET OF 37 HAPPY STREET

## \* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \*

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

*Title:* The Voice of the Lobster

*Date of first publication:* 1930

*Author:* Robert J. Casey

*Date first posted:* May 4, 2016

*Date last updated:* May 4, 2016

Faded Page eBook #20160505

This eBook was produced by: Dave Morgan, Stephen Hutcheson & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>



# **THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER**

**ROBERT J. CASEY**



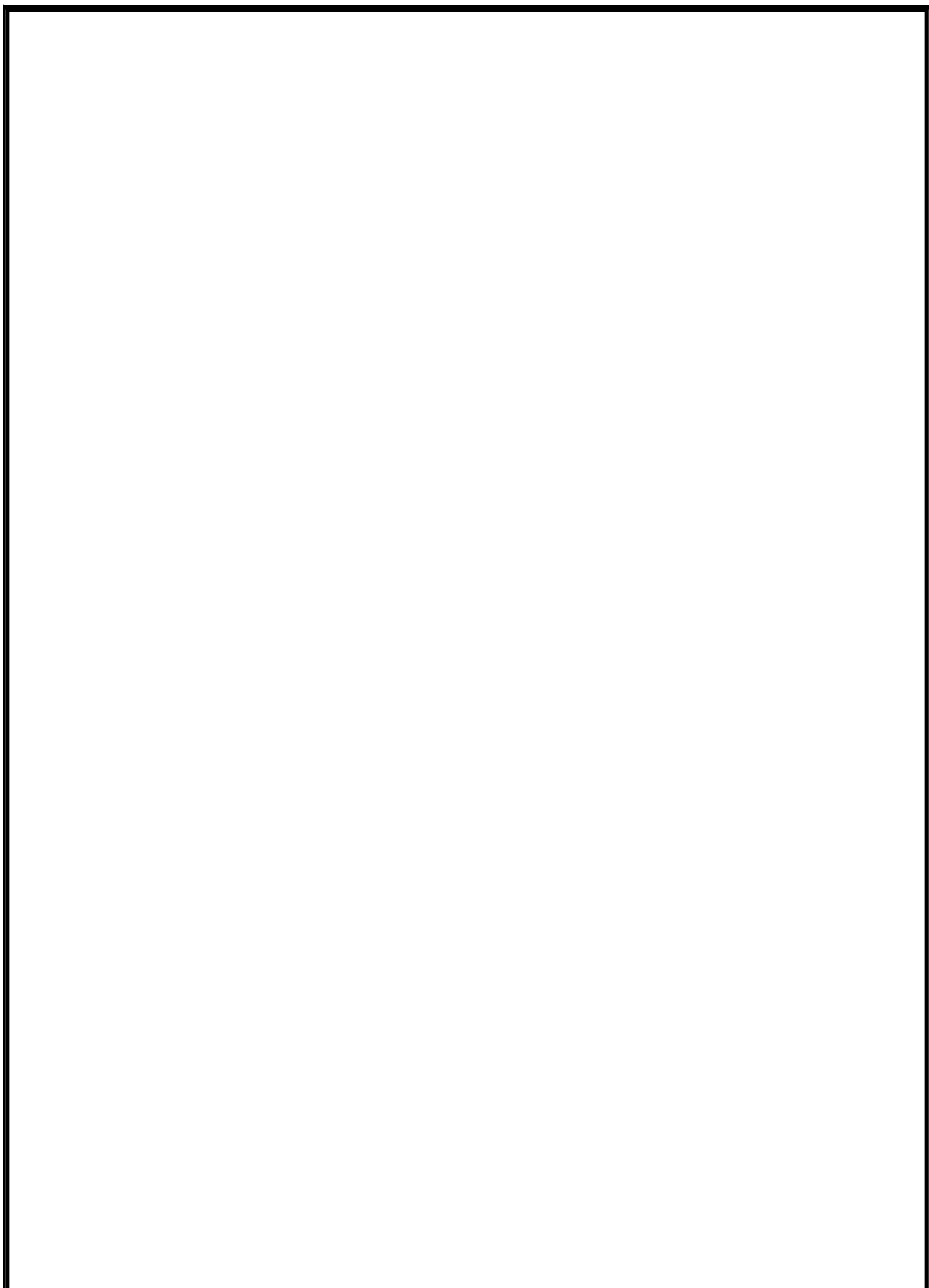
**AUTHOR OF  
THE SECRET OF 37 HARDY STREET**





**THE  
VOICE  
OF THE  
LOBSTER**

**ROBERT J. CASEY**



# THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER

*By*

ROBERT J. CASEY

Author of *The Secret of 37 Hardy Street*

“’Tis the voice of the Lobster: I heard him declare . . .”

—*Alice in Wonderland*

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

INDIANAPOLIS

COPYRIGHT, 1930

BY ROBERT J. CASEY

FIRST EDITION

Printed in the United States of America

PRESS OF

BRAUNWORTH & CO., INC.

BOOK MANUFACTURERS

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

*To*

ETHEL KEARNEY

Who For Some Odd Reason,

Wanted a Book



# CONTENTS

	PAGE
Chapter One:	
<u><a href="#">Talking Cows Tell Little</a></u>	11
Chapter Two:	
<u><a href="#">The Noble Experiment of General Gonzalez</a></u>	22
Chapter Three:	
<u><a href="#">Mr. Bull Beesey Rides to the Hunt</a></u>	32
Chapter Four:	
<u><a href="#">Interesting Riot in Babylon Alley</a></u>	43
Chapter Five:	
<u><a href="#">Liberator Lost in Derby Hat</a></u>	54
Chapter Six:	
<u><a href="#">Target Practise on Mr. Patter</a></u>	64
Chapter Seven:	
<u><a href="#">Gunmen Annoy Shrinking Violet</a></u>	76
Chapter Eight:	
<u><a href="#">The Mystery That Was Miss Henderson</a></u>	87
Chapter Nine:	
<u><a href="#">Voice Arrives Opportunely from Hollywood</a></u>	97
Chapter Ten:	
<u><a href="#">What Price a Million Dollars?</a></u>	108
Chapter Eleven:	
<u><a href="#">Alleged Liberator Craves Iowa</a></u>	121
Chapter Twelve:	
<u><a href="#">General Gonzalez, Meet “General Gonzalez!”</a></u>	133
Chapter Thirteen:	
<u><a href="#">Odd Movements of Sash-Weight Collector</a></u>	144
Chapter Fourteen:	
<u><a href="#">Good Advice from Mr. Mucket</a></u>	156
Chapter Fifteen:	

<i><u>A (Possible) Greek Comes Bearing Gifts</u></i>	166
Chapter Sixteen:	
<i><u>Astounding Behavior of Simple-Minded Arms Merchant</u></i>	176
Chapter Seventeen:	
<i><u>The Dawn of the Well-Advertised Friday</u></i>	186
Chapter Eighteen:	
<i><u>And the Crowded Evening</u></i>	197
Chapter Nineteen:	
<i><u>Scandalous Doings in Railroad Yard</u></i>	206
Chapter Twenty:	
<i><u>Lovely Lady Laughs Out of Turn</u></i>	217
Chapter Twenty-One:	
<i><u>Oh, Who Will Buy My Sash-Weights?</u></i>	228
Chapter Twenty-Two:	
<i><u>Talented Conqueror Falls in Love</u></i>	240
Chapter Twenty-Three:	
<i><u>Star to Sacrifice All for Million Dollars</u></i>	251
Chapter Twenty-Four:	
<i><u>Destiny Favors Purple Buzzard</u></i>	259
Chapter Twenty-Five:	
<i><u>Humble Dumb-Waiter Protects Liberty</u></i>	273
Chapter Twenty-Six:	
<i><u>The Fifty-Fifty Charm of Miss Yule</u></i>	285
Chapter Twenty-Seven:	
<i><u>Metamorphosis of the Ugly Duckling</u></i>	292
Chapter Twenty-Eight:	
<i><u>Stricken Republic Loses Valuable Liberator</u></i>	300
Chapter Twenty-Nine:	
<i><u>Recalling the Story of the Talking Cow</u></i>	304

# THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER

Despite the stark realism which permeates this story of the so-called talking movies, all the characters, situations, names, dates and addresses are fictitious.

# THE VOICE OF THE LOBSTER

## Chapter One:

### *Talking Cows Tell Little.*

The cow nibbled a daisy, looked with soulful eyes upon the maiden clad in white and remarked with an air of familiarity inexcusable even in a cow: “Hello, Bill! How they stackin’?”

And the maid in white glanced down at her feet demurely and played with her frilly apron as she replied in a bass voice: “Hello, Pete, you old son-of-a-gun. I’ve been lookin’ for you everywhere.”

The cow’s reply was lost in a roar from Mr. Moe Eisenstark, directing manager of the Super-Babylon Cinema Palace, who had been watching the Sunday morning preview of Betty Dale’s greatest, first and only “all-talkink moving picture.” Mr. Eisenstark emerged from the shadows into the vast emptiness of the auditorium, waving his hands and shouting imprecations.

“So this is the talkies,” he announced. “This is why we spend, now, twenty thousand dollars for new equipment . . . so’s the cows can talk to my customers.”

A hurrying electrician, bristling with pliers and swathed in wire, emerged from a coop in the orchestra pit and stood with his head cocked birdlike on one side as he gave his right

ear to Mr. Eisenstark and his left ear to the voices of the cinema.

“Take the junk out, I won’t have it!” bellowed Mr. Eisenstark.

“I am changed since you saw me last,” recited the cow. “Once I was a wall-flower at every party. But since that time I have learned to play the saxophone.”

“*Gotnimmel*, that I should now live to see this!” ejaculated Mr. Eisenstark. “Cows speaking pieces in the movies. Cows playing the saxophone and now boasting about it.”

“Strikes me as a pretty good idea,” observed the electrician. “They’ll have to teach a hell of a lot of cows to talk before Hollywood’s dumb blondes get to sign another contract.”

“I’m gettin’ on pretty well myself,” announced the modest maiden. “I socked Kid Bunker to sleep in t’ree rounds. An’ the referee was the sourest I ever seen. . . .”

“Take notice,” commented the electrician, “that the amplifier is working like a clock . . . just like a clock. The girl’s base tones are still a little fuzzy, but we can fix that up by slapping another five hundred volts on the plate and increasing the bias. The top notes are good. You wouldn’t want a nicer piece of elocution than what the cow’s putting out.”

“Me,” stated Mr. Eisenstark above the competition of the cow, the maiden and the gentleman with the wire, “me, I’m goink out of the movie business into a quiet booby hatch.” He resumed the tearing of his hair and retreated hastily up the sloping aisle to the lobby and the stairs that led to the projection room.

In the projection room a youth in the frogged and filleted purple uniform of His Majesty's Palace Guard stood alternately peeping in bewilderment through the little slot that permitted a view of the screen and gazing helplessly at an affair like a phonograph on which a black record spun silently. The steel door swung open, and he looked up into the countenance of Bill McIntyre, the test operator.

"Sure glad you came, Bill," the youth greeted him. "I did just the things you told me to, but I think maybe something's wrong. The cow is all right, but if you ask me the girl has no voice at all."

Mr. McIntyre reached for a switch.

"There's a guy with plenty of voice on his way up here now," he said. "I heard Moe Eisenstark blatting all the way out in the street. You got the wrong record on. But he won't take no explanation like that. When anything goes wrong in this madhouse he thinks it's a conspiracy."

At which point the steel door opened a second time, and Mr. Eisenstark, winded by his climb up the stairs but by no means out of conversation, demanded to know by what right Mr. McIntyre had undertaken to project vocal cows.

"It was a mistake in the marking of the record," explained Mr. McIntyre patiently. "That's why we have these Sunday morning tests, ain't it, to find where the labels is wrong?"

"The whole business is wrong," raved Mr. Eisenstark. "Talkink pictures! What right has a picture got to talk? And now the cows is talkink, too. No sense to that."

“In the right record maybe the cow just gives milk,” suggested the youth of the gold braid helpfully.

“He ain’t that kind of a cow,” demurred Mr. Eisenstark, and then, apparently, he noticed the uniform for the first time.

“Who is this egg?” he demanded of Mr. McIntyre.

“I’m Frederick Franklin Patter,” contributed Mr. Patter. “I’m a first-class private in the usher corps at Station Twenty-Five on the mezzanine floor.”

“Then what the, now, hell are you doing here?” was the fair question of Mr. Eisenstark.

Mr. Patter showed just a trace of indignation and the frogs across his chest stretched to their limit.

“Mr. Eisenstark,” he said, “I came into your employ to study the art of the cinema in the best possible school. I am a student of architecture at the Swift School of Technology but always I have had a keen interest in the cinema. I said to myself when I came to this town from Iowa, I said, ‘Fred, there’s just one place to learn the moving-picture business, and that’s from Mr. Ehrenstein. And there’s just one place to study theater architecture, and that’s the Super-Babylon.’”

“You talk too much to be a good usher,” criticized Mr. Eisenstark. “And the name ain’t Ehrenstein. It’s Eisenstark.”

Mr. McIntyre, grateful for the accident that had distracted the attention of the manager, withdrew from the conversation and



began to rewind his film. Mr. Eisenstark gazed in fascinated admiration at the frogs on Mr. Patter's swelling bosom.

"You ain't said yet what you're doing here in the dog house," he mentioned. "If you're an usher why ain't you ushering?"

"I'm practising my fifteen-minute rest period," explained Mr. Patter haughtily. "I always spend it here when I can. I want to learn all the tricks of the business. Now that I know all about projecting I'm going to try my hand, maybe, at playing a drum in the orchestra."

"You know all about projecting?" inquired Mr. Eisenstark interestedly.

"Everything," announced Mr. Patter, permitting himself to smile. "I learned it thinking that maybe if Mr. McIntyre might want to duck out for a few minutes for a smoke I could run the machine for him."

Mr. McIntyre coughed.

"Of course he wouldn't duck out for a smoke and leave me here to run the machine," Mr. Patter went on. "But if he should, I mean, you know what I mean."

Mr. Eisenstark sighed. He was becoming conscious that a run up two flights of stairs plays hob with one's repartee. He was breathing with difficulty and encompassed by a great sorrow for himself.

"I sure am glad," he declared, "that there is, now, somebody in this joint that takes interest besides me. I can't do everything."

Do you think you could, maybe, run this here picture without having the cows talkink all over the place?”

“That would be virtually no trouble at all,” said Mr. Patter. “All you got to do is start it over and put record Number One on the reproducer instead of Number Two.”

“Suppose you go ahead and do it, then,” ordered Mr. Eisenstark.

Mr. McIntyre, who had just finished rethreading the first projector, clanged the lower magazine shut and swung about indignantly.

“Wait a minute,” he counseled. “Freddy, here, is a nice boy an’ all that. But I’m runnin’ my own dog house. There ain’t no manager comin’ in here to push me out, either. Get that. I got a union card.”

“Union card!” scoffed Mr. Eisenstark. “And I should worry about that. I should let your union fill up my theater with cows that now don’t talk very good English.”

“I pay my dues regular, an’ I got my rights,” declared Mr. McIntyre.

“You pay your dues,” retorted Mr. Eisenstark pityingly. “An’ who pays your business agent. Answer me that. I’ll tell you. Moe Eisenstark pays your business agent. An’ he pays him more in a week as you pay in forty-seven years. One yelp out of you, an’ you can go get yourself a ticket in the, now, icemen’s union.

“Me, I’m goink to see if this, now, picture can be run right. Boy,

do your stuff.”

Mr. McIntyre retreated, mumbling, to a corner. Mr. Patter searched the record case for a disk marked Number One, set it on the turntable and pulled the control switch. The film began to tick through the machine. The titles dissolved one into the other on the screen and then, once more, appeared the lush meadow and the cow and the beautiful blonde in white. This time, however, the cow was present but not oral. Jaw movements that previously had heralded speech now turned out to be merely the chewing of a cud, a process which the sound mechanism reproduced faithfully with snapping noises like subdued bursts of firecrackers.

The girl cast down her eyes demurely and played with the frilly edge of her apron the while she sang a lisping love lyric. Mr. Eisenstark gazed through the peep-hole in gratified surprise.

“That’s it!” he exulted. “That gags the cow. And the girl’s voice is rotten enough to show you got it right. Boy, I won’t forget this. Right now I got to go back to my office an’ think up something swell to do for you. Maybe I get you a card in the operators’ union even if you ain’t dumb enough to suit them.”

Mr. Patter murmured a dignified thanks. He should have liked to elaborate, but instinct told him that it would be as well to remove himself from Mr. McIntyre’s baleful eye. Also he had heard the tinkle of a bell. The usher corps was assembling, and he had not yet been relieved from his duties at Station Twenty-Five on the mezzanine. He sidled out of the projection room and dashed for the balcony where the ranks of His Majesty’s guard were already forming in a broad front of

purple and gold.

Out in front of the company stood Captain Joseph Black, leaning against a gilded statue of Aphrodite, and staring with an expression of despair at his stalwart command.

Captain Black wore neither the purple and gold and gray of the Palace Guard nor the silver and scarlet of the Ural Fusileers. His costume was a gray business suit, plus spats and a fountain pen. But his lack of pictorial grandeur detracted not at all from his effect as a drill-master.

He must have felt a thrill of pride as he saw these, his creatures, lining up for his inspection. Once, perhaps, they had functioned as individuals—although he himself would have been the first to admit the point debatable. Now their personalities were merged in the machine. They moved in a cadence of his designing, they spoke—when they spoke—words out of a book that he had written for them. They thought—if they ever thought—as automata might be expected to think. If Captain Black's memory ever harked back to the days at the Point when other drill-19masters were perfecting him in the knowledge which had made possible the Super-Babylon Usher Corps, or to the days he had led an infantry company up the slope of Vauquois Hill, he must have realized that his training had stood him in good stead.

But he showed neither pride nor sentiment as he drew himself into the correct military position and gave the command, "Fall in." Now, as always, his expression was one of intense dissatisfaction, his one demand for improvement. Improvement! As if one might hope to paint the lily.

The first sergeant called the roll and reported the company present or accounted for. Captain Black acknowledged a salute that had come with some embellishments out of the British Flying Corps. Then he turned sharply and faced his cohorts.

“Private Patter!”

“Here, sir,” replied Private Patter.

“Step two paces to the front!”

Private Patter complied.

“You were half a minute late for this formation,” thundered Captain Black. “Is there any reason why you should think the rules have been suspended in your behalf?”

Mr. Patter hurriedly went over the catechism which he had been obliged to learn early in his career at the Super-Babylon. There seemed to be no stock answer for such questions as this. So, despite his better judgment, he ventured one of his own.

“It was on account of the talking cow, sir,” he began.

20

Captain Black showed symptoms of apoplexy.

“You will report to me at Station Eight on the main floor directly after this formation,” he stated. “Step back into ranks. . . . Squads right, column right. . . . March!”

So an atmosphere of depression overhung the corps as it went through the intricate maneuvers required for its training in the duties of informing customers that the only available seats might

be found in the last row in the top gallery. But Private Patter, the cause of all the turmoil, was unconcerned with the gloom that had seized upon his comrades. His mind was detached, and he went through the routine of drill in a series of reflex actions that aroused the grudging admiration of Captain Black himself. His body might belong to Black the martinet, but his soul was the property of Moe Eisenstark.

It was as an automaton that he reported stiffly to Captain Black at Station Eight on the main floor, and as an automaton that he heard the captain's pointed critique on military promptitude.

His wandering consciousness was captured by a scene from an oral news reel now spinning out on the screen. . . . A scene from Guava, the capital of the Republic of Pandorra, with President Gutierrez and his military staff standing on the steps of the executive mansion. The president seemed to be swearing in somewhat commonplace English, but this turned out to be not the language of Señor Gutierrez or even of the film—21 as it had been in the case of the cow. A stage-hand behind the screen had dropped a hammer on his foot.

So, as the captain dismissed Mr. Patter, Mr. Patter dismissed President Gutierrez and his aides.

“Punk picture even without the conversation,” he observed with the assurance of one whose gifts had been recognized by the great Moe Eisenstark. “Those birds wear the same kind of uniforms we do, but that ends it. What have we got to do with Pandorra? Who’s going to be interested in that kind of tripe?”

The guffaw that resounded through the theater might have been

the laughing of one of the Norns that work out the destiny of moving-picture ushers but instead was due to a defective needle at the end of the record.



## Chapter Two:

### *The Noble Experiment of General Gonzalez.*

In the field before Guava, General Miguel Gonzalez, representing the forces of Liberty known colloquially as the Insurrectos, heard the report of his chief of staff regarding the recent defeat of the forces of Liberty sometimes called the Federalistas. He sighed expressively.

“And now that victory has perched on our eagles what are we going to do with it?” he inquired helplessly.

General Emilio Rivero, the chief of staff, made diffident rejoinder.

“If I might be so bold as to suggest,” he said, “all we have to do now is follow General Bandelero’s defeated army right into the capital via National Highway Forty-Two.”

“What!” ejaculated General Gonzalez.

“Or Route Fifty-Six if you prefer that,” corrected the chief of staff.

“Rot!” criticized the high commander. “I can see readily enough that we ought to take the capital. The only drawback to that plan that occurs to me at this moment is that we are completely out of ammunition.”

“But General Bandelero is defeated.”

“And so, for that matter, are we. You don’t expect to get into

Guava without a fight, do you? You didn't suppose old Gutierrez might come romping out to meet us with a string band?"

"I was thinking that perhaps success would continue to favor the cause of righteousness as represented by us," explained General Rivero. "We are right up within striking distance and I did so hope to get home for the beginning of the opera season."

General Gonzalez sighed once more.

"It is all very sad, this victory," he commented. "If we had been defeated we could have retreated on Santa Cruz—just as I had planned it. We could have entrenched ourselves there and, being in a seaport, would have had no trouble getting what arms we needed from *Los Estados Unidos*. And then, too, we could have ceased to worry about the patriotism, if any, of Pedro Copal."

"Copal," admitted the chief of staff, "is a menace who ought to be stamped out."

"Any ally is that," observed General Gonzalez. "Copal is merely a closer ally than most. The trouble with him is the same as the trouble with the Federalistas. We haven't any more bullets."

"Maybe we could make a dicker with Copal and get a lot of his ammunition."

"Does one haggle with the devil for his eye-teeth? All we'll ever get out of Copal is loyalty and very little of that. He took no part in yesterday's great victory, and so he is probably in a better position than we are. If he were less of a numskull he

might cause us serious concern.”

The chief of staff considered this for a moment.

“You are right about that,” he agreed at last. “Now that you mention it I wonder why he doesn’t attack us?”

24

“For two reasons: in the first place he is a nitwit; in the second place he probably has no more ammunition than we have. He hadn’t any to start off with, and he hasn’t been near any source of supply since. But anyway he annoys me frightfully.”

“It certainly is a complicated problem. . . . And it seemed so simple in the beginning. Even I, young as I am, can remember when the object of battles was to win them. Now it seems to be the worst possible form.”

“Victory is one of the things you never can guard against properly when fighting the Federalista dogs. Only the love I bear old Pandorra who nurtured me and made me what I am to-day continues me in this silly business of war. For two centavos I’d call the whole business off, here and now.”

“And why not? If you were to sue for peace right now you could get it and probably the governorship of a province thrown in. If you wait until Gutierrez finds out that you haven’t any powder and shot you probably will get yourself jolly well executed.”

For the third time General Gonzalez sighed.

“I can’t do it,” he demurred. “I admit that I am in a position now from which I can retire gracefully and with considerable profit to myself. But I am not in this war, such as it is, for my

25

own glory and gain.”

“Oh, certainly not!” stated the chief of staff.

“I should like to be known to posterity as one of the last of the great idealists—a patriot who was above all a patriot. Were I to quit now I might be able to bank say a million pesos. What of that? The man who takes the capital will be able to bank about twenty million pesos and in addition to that will be hailed as a liberator.”

“I think you have analyzed the situation with remarkable perception,” mentioned General Rivero.

Over the first ridge of the Sierra del Toro, the soldiers of Liberty sometimes laughingly designated as the Independistas rested on their arms while waiting the pleasure of General Pedro Copal, their commander-in-chief. General Copal sat in his tent sipping cognac and exchanging ideas with General Gomez Porfirio, his chief adviser.

“I get it over the radio that Old Woman Gonzalez, our noble ally in the cause of Liberty, knocked hell out of General Bandelero’s ruffians yesterday afternoon,” said Señor Copal.

“I heard something of the sort,” replied General Porfirio.

“That’s what brought me over. Are we going to do anything about it?”

“Not that I know of,” observed General Copal. “This is a comfortable camp. We have just raided a warehouse containing an almost unlimited supply of cognac, and when one rests

on his arms he loses no men. Besides, we haven't any ammunition. This, however, is a minor consideration because to the best of my knowledge and belief, we never did have any."

"Where did Bandelero go with his thieving dogs?"

"Back to the capital, I suppose. The scouts report that he was headed that way."

"And what of Gonzalez, our noble ally in the cause of Liberty? What of him?"

"Ah, there you put a question of more vital interest. I should like to know just what General Gonzalez is thinking about or what he intends to do."

"I should think he'd be hotfooting it after Bandelero. I believe that's what I should do under the circumstances."

General Copal took another drink and shook his head.

"You have been back with the S. O. S., improperly so called, just long enough to forget all that you ever knew about our sacred cause.

"When I put in with Old Woman Gonzalez—may the god of battles be ever at his elbow—I was well aware that I couldn't very well do anything else. The soldados aren't what they were in my grandfather's day. They have a notion that a gun without anything to put into it is an encumbrance—and up here in the hills it's pretty hard to get ammunition, especially if you haven't any money.

“That’s what kept me from joining in Gonzalez’ active campaign. He’d have found out that we weren’t a serious menace and he’d have kicked me out of the proceedings. He was always an ungrateful bird.

“But so long as we stayed out here within striking distance of his flank he had to treat us with respect. He had no way of knowing our limitations.

“He is still uninformed, and that makes it hard for him. I learned to-day that with the defeat of Bandelero he came upon what might normally be considered a stroke of luck. He captured the Oro Hondo gold mine which is owned almost in toto in the United States. And he found in the smelter a large quantity of copper matte, the gold content of which is somewhere around twenty thousand pesos to the ton.”

“The double-crossing old scoundrel!” ejaculated Señor Porfirio.

“Your characterization is excellent as always,” complimented General Copal. “To date I have heard no mention of his offering to cut us in for a share of the loot. But in a way I sympathize with him.

“I don’t know how he feels about quitting and cashing in on the proceeds to date, but I can guess that he might prefer the bigger profits that would come to him if he could capture Guava City. He can’t do much with a load of copper matte as it stands. The American engineers wrecked the place long before the Federalistas came in. There isn’t a working refinery between the border and the capital. General Gonzalez’ only

hope is to get the stuff to the United States and trade it for arms. But the owners are United States citizens, and they would be waiting for him at the docks if he tried to land it.”

General Copal took another drink.

“And there you have it,” he said. “General Gonzalez is a nincompoop and an incompetent, but one must admit that he has made for himself a first-class quandary. I can forecast that whatever the general may intend to do ultimately, his operations in the immediate future will be conducted in the general direction of Santa Cruz. And I feel that it is our sacred duty to get as close to him as possible.

“If he tries to get this gold out of Pandorra, then our work is cut out for us. We shall be compelled to seize it in the holy name of Liberty and get it out on our own account.”

“When shall we undertake this important work?” inquired General Porfirio, pouring himself a spot of brandy.

“*Mañana*,” counseled General Copal. “That will be time enough. He won’t be able to get far with a load like that in twenty-four hours. . . . When we get our share of the spoils I am going to buy myself a new uniform. It will be purple like this one and will have the same gold frogs across the chest. But I shall embellish it with a scarlet cape lined with cloth of silver. . . . And then we shall march on the capital. Gomez, my dear fellow, there is a little girl in Guava who is crying her eyes out for me right now. . . .”

29

“And Emilio’s bar on the plaza . . .” contributed General Porfirio reminiscently. “The band is playing there now, and the



crowds are gathering about the tables on the sidewalks.” He shed some tears into his drink. “And we are out here in this wilderness because of tyrants who sit in the high places.”

“Heaven speed the end of this horrid war,” prayed General Copal, and he ordered the corporal of the guard to find another bottle of cognac.

All that night General Gonzalez remained at his desk seeking a solution to his great problem. Shortly after midnight he summoned his chief of staff. General Rivero came hurriedly in the hope that the solution might include a plan for paying back salaries due the more important members of the command.

“I am going to ask for an armistice,” announced General Gonzalez. “I shan’t bother to tell the Federalista government that I need the time to get arms, but that is how I shall occupy myself for the duration of the truce.”

“One must have money to buy arms,” General Rivero reminded him as if he had just made this discovery.

“I know that,” stated General Gonzalez patiently. “But we shall have the money. Do you remember the pile of copper matte in the old smelter of the Oro Hondo mine?”

30

“Yes,” admitted General Rivero with genuine regret. He had hoped that the pile of copper matte might have escaped the attention of the commander-in-chief. But of course he realized now that such hopes are always futile.

“That stuff is mostly gold,” confided General Gonzalez. “I

shouldn't tell any one but you, even in this army where no man's loyalty can be questioned. But I have learned that the gringos in leaving the smelter mixed up their gold with this refuse, so that, even if discovered, it would be hard to carry away.

"Now my further plan is this: We will take this stuff to Santa Cruz and ship it to the United States."

"Not if I can get to the docks first," confided Rivero to himself.

"You, of course, will come with me to assist in this patriotic work," pursued the commander.

"I am honored beyond words," replied the chief of staff.

"You will be agent for the provisional government," General Gonzalez reminded him, "and of course you will receive the commissions that are customarily paid such agents. Do you think you can get the metal moved down to Santa Cruz quietly and expeditiously?"

"You have the word of a patriot, sir," replied General Rivero with that touch of Old-World distinction that has always marked the true caballero.

31

Three days later the army of General Pedro Copal came by forced marches to the suburban district south of Santa Cruz. The scouts returned a puzzling report to the effect that an armistice had been signed and that the forces of the Insurrectos had withdrawn into the hills. General Copal sent out more scouts and later conferred with them on the terrace of the Grand Hotel.

"The Old Woman Gonzalez, our noble ally, has given us the

slip,” reported General Gomez Porfirio. “He sailed this morning on a banana boat for New Orleans.”

“What!” roared Señor Copal. “But he can’t have done that. He wouldn’t dare leave the loot and he couldn’t take it with him. Where is the loot now?”

“That I can’t tell you, sir,” reported the chief of scouts. “I only know that General Gonzalez took no gold with him. The manifest at the offices of the shipping company shows that he paid for a passage and arranged for the shipment of a hundred tons of sash-weights. . . . Now what do you suppose he wanted with them?”

“Did he go alone?” gasped General Copal.

“Yes, all alone,” replied the chief of scouts. “I heard at the docks that General Rivero was to have gone with him, but he missed the boat and now is dead drunk in a rum warehouse.”

“A good place to get drunk,” observed General Copal. “I think I shall follow his example.”

## Chapter Three:

### *Mr. Bull Beesey Rides to the Hunt.*

To Frederick Franklin Patter, as he stood at the position described in the manual as “port baton” under a spot of golden light at Station Twenty-Five on the mezzanine floor, came the great miracle called Love.

Mr. Patter, stiff-spined, immobile as a bit of Greek sculpture would be if such statues wore uniforms of purple with frogs of gold, as handsome as a field-marshal on dress parade . . . Mr. Patter, so disposed and appareled, was a picture that might have attracted a second glance from any girl. He had just finished giving reply Number 43-A to an old man with a cane:

“I beg your pardon, sir, but better seats than the one you now occupy will be found in the last row of the top gallery.”

The old man, being deaf, had not taken advantage of Mr. Patter’s offer, even though Mr. Patter had repeated it twice. But to the near-by patrons Mr. Patter’s solicitude had been clearly apparent. They had felt that by looking on they shared, vicariously, in this kindly deed, and before their attention had been distracted by the picture on the screen, they had remarked to one another on the thoughtfulness of the young god in the spotlight. Mr. Patter may have been conscious of this. It may have had its reaction in making him receptive to impressions of beauty. At any rate, a moment later, Mr. Patter was all atremble and wondering dazedly what had happened.

He had seen her there, a glowing creature with the aura of drifting sunlight in her fine-spun hair. Every fold in her simple

girlish gown of lace and what-che-ma-call-it was impressed for ever upon his memory. . . . And her voice,—it had come to him in tinkling loveliness . . . “Like the echo of golden bells,” he said to himself with poetic originality. And he repeated the phrase over again, marveling that he could have thought it up: “Like the echo of golden bells.”

His soul told him that she had spoken to him . . . to him alone of all the hundreds who occupied the Super-Babylon’s “five acres of seats.” But he made no reply. Always the soldier! That was the motto of his caste. And it would have done no good anyway, for the girl with the sunlight in her hair was a shadow on the screen, Janice Yule, and the voice, like that of the cow at the Sunday morning rehearsal, was a shadow’s echoing.

The picture, which he thought the most magnificent thing that the art of the cinema had yet produced, was a simple thing. It depicted the life of a princess in a kingdom torn by revolution, and it reached its climax in a thrilling rescue by the leading man (an oaf without charm of manner or form or voice, Mr. Patter observed) and a subsequent fight on the palace stairs. Mr. Patter kept his poise with dignity. She, who should have been saved by him, lay fainting in the arms of another. She, who from a distance had cast this spell on him, would presently stand with this other before an altar. But he braved himself for the sight. The puppet show of the screen was for the others in the five acres of seats. The soul of the woman, projected intangibly across the dark void, was his and must be for ever . . . for she was his destiny.

However, Freddy Patter had made one mistake about his destiny. That was ably represented by a man concerning whom

Mr. Patter had never heard, General Gonzalez, of Pandorra, on his way northward with a cargo of sash-weights. To a lesser extent it was represented by an advance agent in the person of General Pedro Copal who at that very moment was being lifted in an intoxicated condition from an airplane at a landing field on the outskirts of the city.

The lobby denizens of the Millard Fillmore Hotel were unaware of the identity of General Pedro Copal as he was escorted past them to the elevator. Even had they known his name they might not have connected it with the struggle for Liberty in the Republic of Pandorra. For no one is so provincial as your so-called cosmopolitan resident in a great American city. The management of the hotel knew vaguely that Señor Copal was some kind of general, and so he was guided to a room instead of to a patrol wagon. No political sympathies were involved in this. The management hadn't the slightest hope for the recovery of Liberty in Pandorra. On the other hand, it was the privilege of a general to get drunk if he felt like it.

35

General Copal awoke the next morning to gaze upon a quantity of hotel art work and furniture and to experience a great remorse. His remorse was not particularly concerned with his condition on arrival. Practise had made him callous about such things. His chief regret had to do with the time wasted in becoming sober again.

“*Los Estados Unidos! Bah!*” At home, now, a man could get pie-eyed and there would be a corporal or somebody to lead him around and make it possible for him to transact business. Here there were no convenient corporals. What a man had to do

he had better do for himself and manifestly he must stay reasonably sober while doing it . . . a silly state of affairs.

General Copal had not come to the United States entirely unprepared. He had chosen his terminal city because he knew that General Gonzalez had booked his sash-weights thither, and subsequent inquiry among the American generals in his command had elicited a quantity of useful information regarding persons who might further the cause of Liberty in the chilly North.

He ordered his breakfast, sent out some telephone calls and then sat down to await the arrival of a synthetic patriot known locally as “Bull-Neck” Beesey. Mr. Beesey arrived at ten o’clock with a selected representation of his mob. Mr. Copal was pleased with the appearance of Mr. Beesey and said as much. Then he found a bottle in his suitcase and passed it to his guests. Ten minutes later had any one sounded out Mr. Beesey and his mob regarding the state of Liberty in the Republic of Pandorra he would have found these sturdy Americans strictly pro-Copal.

36

“Yesterday I gits a telegram from me old pal, Bill Anderson, in Santa Cruz, sayin’ you’re comin’ here,” said Mr. Beesey. “He says you want somethin’ done. And I’m here to tell you, boy, we’ll do it.”

Señor Copal’s English was not idiomatic but it was fluent. He explained at some length the military situation in Pandorra, after which Mr. Beesey reciprocated by explaining an almost precisely similar military condition in the fourteenth ward.

“We have been betrayed,” observed General Copal sadly. “We entrust our cause into the hands of General Gonzalez, and he sells us out. He is coming here now. He is already on the way. He must be remove’.”

“Don’t let that worry you a minute, Pete,” counseled Mr. Beesey. “Mark him off. He’ll get a ride the minute he lands here. It’ll cost you one grand. Two grand if you want us to use machine-guns. The machine-guns is surer, but the boys can put up pretty fancy with sawed-off shotguns if you ain’t anxious to go to the extra expense.”

“I pay more,” replied General Copal with much dignity, after Mr. Beesey had explained the meaning of his terms in pesos. “I pay ten thousand pesos, but there is another business you must do. You must get away the million pesos he has stolen from Pandorra, and you must bring it to me. If not, what will happen to our cause?”

37

“Right there is where you have me,” admitted Mr. Beesey. But he might not have recognized his voice in the answer. He was thinking of the million pesos that he was supposed to recapture and return to General Copal lest the sacred cause of Liberty in Pandorra be hopelessly lost.

“How are we going to recognize this guy?” he found strength to inquire.

“I show you,” said General Copal. “Right here I have the likeness of him. It is a picture made special by the own photographer of his army which he give me when he trick me into joining with him in the cause. It is photograph but the color



is by hand. Is it not beautiful?”

And he thrust into the hand of Mr. Beesey a picture showing much purple uniform and gold epaulets and frogs, above which rose the bearded chin of General Gonzalez. Mr. Beesey whistled.

“Somewhere I seen this guy,” he remarked.

And the members of his mob murmured their assent.

“I never fergit a face,” went on Mr. Beesey. “Names, now, I can’t remember. But I always remember a face. And I seen somebody only the other day that looks just like this bird.”

“He is not yet arrive’,” mentioned Mr. Copal. “He leave on boat. I leave on airplane. I get here first. He get here maybe to-morrow.”

38

“Anyways, I seen him,” retorted Mr. Beesey positively. “Write him off. An’ if we find the million pesos we’ll send you a post-card.”

General Copal was smiling when he ushered his guests out of his room and into the vision of the waiting house detective. Pleasant chaps, he thought . . . different perhaps from Pandorran patriots but very businesslike and friendly. In a way they were like the sergeants and corporals of his beloved army. They took the work off of one’s shoulders and allowed one to look after more pleasant affairs. He searched his suitcase for another bottle.

The coming of General Gonzalez was not so much of a surprise to the city as had been the advent of General Copal, but even so it was not well advertised. On the platform where Señor Gonzalez alighted from the New Orleans Limited five or six earnest souls had gathered to bid him welcome. In excellent Spanish they identified themselves for what they were: members of the Midwest Chapter of the Friends of Pandorran Freedom. General Gonzalez was touched by the warmth of their greeting.

“This is a great day for the Republic of Pandorra,” he assured them. “I came here as a stranger to a strange land, seeking help for our soldiers who lie intrenched in the bloody field before Guava. Last week, after years of toil and struggle and bitter suffering, we came within striking distance of the capital. In an unforeseen moment we achieved the success that all military experts had deemed impossible. And then we discovered that we had exhausted our resources before our end could be achieved. We were out of arms and ammunition.”

39

“We must do something at once to raise funds,” stated Professor José Cabrillo. “It is shameful that these brave men should be doing so much while we are doing so little.”

“Don’t worry about that,” suggested General Gonzalez as he sensed a sudden chilliness in the atmosphere. “I didn’t come up here to beg the assistance of our friends except in a moral way. I know that your support would be given freely, but we have plenty of gold. What we need mostly are your prayers and your cheers. And also I should like to know the address of Two-Gun Jack Vest who is, I am told, an able soldado of the bootleg revolution.”

Professor Cabrillo looked at General Gonzalez closely as if undecided that he had heard aright. The general repeated the request.

“But he is a gunman,” mentioned the professor. “What has the Liberty of Pandorra to do with such a man?”

“I am menaced by a former ally named Copal,” explained the general. “I have had wireless advice tending to show that he started for here by airplane. If so, I must protect myself. . . . Not for any personal motive, understand. It is for Pandorra that I would remain alive.”

40

“Hear! Hear!” exclaimed the delegation, and the professor undertook the job of locating Mr. Vest.

An hour later Two-Gun Jack was closeted with General Gonzalez in the drawing-room of the general’s suite at the New Seville Hotel.

“I understand that you kill people,” announced the general.

“Nobody’s proved it on me,” retorted Mr. Vest.

“That is unimportant,” said the general. “I am a soldier, fighting for a great cause, and I find my battle-field suddenly moved up here into the North. My enemy is still my enemy, just as he was in the plains outside of our capital. But I am forbidden to kill him here because of some silly law. Perhaps you would be willing to aid our great cause by removing this enemy. I am willing, of course, to pay the customary fee.”

Mr. Vest quoted a price which was reasonable enough

considering the scale of tariffs presented by Mr. Beesey to General Copal. General Gonzalez paid the specified retainer.

“Who is the bird you want knocked off?” inquired Mr. Vest.

“Can you describe him?”

“Better than that,” replied Señor Gonzalez. “I can show you his colored photograph. It is a splendid likeness. It was prepared by my own photographic artist and colored by hand.”

So it came about that Mr. Vest, like Mr. Beesey, looked upon a vista of purple and gold uniform and became too dazzled to pay any particular attention to the face that surmounted it.

41

“I take your word for it when you say this bird has been in town only a day or two,” mentioned Mr. Vest. “But I’ll swear I seen him somewhere not so long ago. It’ll be a pipe to get him.”

General Gonzalez walked with him as far as the door and shook hands with him gratefully.

“I can’t tell you how much good your visit has done me,” he said. “To-night, for the first time in months, I can sleep with full assurance that nobody is plotting to kill me. That is what it means to live in a country where the government is strong and in a city where law and order are an established habit. Peace . . . security . . . those are the aims of our revolution in Pandorra.”

Word came to the city hall that Beesey’s mob was on the prowl and that Two-Gun Jack’s little group of hoodlums had received a mobilization order. And this annoyed the mayor because the

word had gone out that an armistice might be advisable until after the forthcoming primary election.

The police ticker sputtered out a message that Messrs. Beesey and Vest were to be brought to headquarters for a conference, and presently the street outside the Super-Babylon was crashing to the echoing of sirens on squad cars outward bound.

In his dressing-room on the third floor Frederick Patter heard the wailing horns as detached and intangible noises. What difference to him if the police were faring forth to deeds of high empires? He was in love . . . and furthermore he had just been promoted to the rank of corporal in the usher corps. Before him on the rack hung his new uniform—purple and gold as the old one had been but much more elaborate, with a cape of scarlet and epaulets with a heavy brass fringe.

42

43

## Chapter Four:

### *Interesting Riot in Babylon Alley.*

A bit of gunfire in the alley alongside the Super-Babylon brought the weary wits of Frederick Patter back from Hollywood and the delectable comfort of his lady's shadowy presence to the locker-room where he had begun to remove his regimentals.

Midnight had come and gone, and the last show was well along toward its final lisp. The usher corps, all save the unfortunates on special guard duty, had assembled in the lobby for a snappy inspection and had been duly dismissed. Most of the command, unhampered by any thoughts of love for Miss Janice Yule, had been more fleet of foot than Mr. Patter. Thus it came about that the festive sound of the pistol-shot in the alley found him alone.

A reflex action set Mr. Patter on his feet, and a similar reflex caused him to reach for his hat and coat. His complete return to consciousness found him in the middle of the room listening in bewilderment to the noises in the alley. For a moment he wondered if he had actually heard gunfire. But only for a moment. To set his doubts definitely at rest came the guffaw of the sawed-off shotgun and the jingle of broken glass.

Normally Mr. Patter would have proceeded with his dressing, for, after all, pistol-shots in alleys were none of his business. Mr. Patter's previous acquaintance with musketry had been in the cinema—an excellent place for it—and save for his recent exaltation in the matter of Janice Yule, he might have been content to leave it there.

Mr. Patter, however, had not functioned normally since the night when he had stood hypnotized under the golden flood-light of Station Twenty-Five on the mezzanine and had discovered the miracle called Love. His inner consciousness which should have been whispering "Safety First" was reciting a jumble of titles that had explained the great rescue scene in Miss Yule's triumph: *Catch 'Em and Kill 'Em!* For the moment Mr. Patter was not Mr. Patter, the carefully disciplined usher, but Colonel Godfrey Gonfalon V. C., of the Light Brigade, the man who knew no fear.

So Mr. Patter stepped boldly through the door that led to the fire-escape and narrowly escaped massacre as a half-brick described an arc over his head. He dodged instinctively—just as Colonel Godfrey Gonfalon might have dodged in similar circumstances. He released his hold on the door-knob and heard a clang as the door swung to behind him. For just a few seconds he became normal enough to regret that he had blundered into this affair. Pistols and pistol-shots might be sufficiently unusual to be the concern solely of some peculiar breed created to get themselves shot. Half-bricks, now, were something homely and tangible . . . and dangerous.

Mr. Patter realized, however, that there was nothing much to be done about it. The door had closed and the spring lock had caught and he was standing in what might be called an exposed position on the fire-escape. He draped his overcoat about his shoulders, jammed his hat down over his ears and began a rapid descent.

Although he had not analyzed his plan of campaign, he was aware that he had no intention of going all the way to the alley.

The upper reaches of the iron grill work might be made perilous by flying brickbats, but there were other considerable dangers in the shadows below. Half-seen forms were milling about in the dark. Swear words were rising from their battle-field and fragments of broken windows were still falling musically from some point unseen. Mr. Patter's instinctive course led him to a spot just above the swinging stairs at the end of the escape. That point was beyond the halo of the street-lamps and well above the heads of the combatants in the alley!

Even afterward when he had plenty of leisure to consider the matter he was forced to conclude that he could have mapped no better line of retreat. But accident entirely unforeseen prevented his carrying it out.

He reached the shadow with safety and paused for a moment to rest. He could see more clearly, now, the figures in the alley. On the fringe of the disturbance he could discern some uniformed policemen. Deeper in the blackness he made out what seemed to be a mass of men struggling in front of a doorway in a building across the area-way. Even as he looked this crowd seemed to thin out and trickle away in the general direction of the street. Then he sensed rather than saw a movement at the opposite end of the alley. At that point the gloom would normally have been deepest, for the dead-wall in which the little cañon ended was flanked on one side by the bulking precipice that was the stage of the Super-Babylon and on the other by an office building whose empty rooms showed no light. Only one spot of illumination broke through the darkness—a thin glow surrounding the lamp that hung over the stage door. But this light was sufficient to show to the now alert eye of Mr. Patter an incident which presumably had escaped the



attention of the musketeers nearer the street. The stage door had opened and closed so quickly that Mr. Patter might have believed himself the victim of an optical illusion save for the fact that a figure suddenly moved through the nimbus of the lamp . . . a woman with a cloak or dark scarf caught up about her head . . . a woman who moved furtively along the theater wall toward the rear of the building where, as Mr. Patter knew, there was a passage leading to a side-street.

Mr. Patter leaned forward to study this phenomenon at closer range and in doing so stepped on to the swinging stairs. His flapping overcoat snared his feet and a moment later he had completed a painful slide into the alley. The stairs, freed of his weight, clanged upward and out of his reach.

47

It was pleasant, he thought, to lie on the cool asphalt with a solid wall at one's elbow and a refuse can shielding one's head from flying missiles. But as breath returned to him he sensed that he had best be up and doing. The conviction that this was none of his business was strong within him. A hurried audit convinced him that he had broken no bones, so he lifted himself unsteadily to his feet and sidled along the theater wall toward the dim light of the stage door. He noticed with some gratitude that the noise of the rioting came from a distance—as if the combatants had forced their way into the building across the alley. And in the sense of security that the ebb of battle brought to him he found time to wonder what it was all about. He was still wondering when he collided with something in the darkness, heard a sharp intake of breath and a nervous voice, only half audible, saying, “Oh, I beg your pardon . . . stupid of me, I'm sure.”

“What the what!” ejaculated Mr. Patter. “A woman!”

“That’s right,” said the voice more cheerily. “I hope you’ll forgive me for it.”

“What are you doing here?” whispered Mr. Patter. “This is no place for a woman.”

“I’m trying to get out,” she answered shakily. “It’s been terrible. There was shooting and everything. But I suppose you know that.”

“Yes, I heard the shooting.”

48

“There was quite a lot of it and a lot of men rushed into the alley and pushed me right off the street. Then I saw you coming down the stairs. I just caught a fleeting glimpse of you, but you seemed to be flying. It was splendid.” She sighed expressively.

“I slid down,” explained Mr. Patter hastily. “No telling when they’d start shooting again. . . . But there’s no sense in standing here talking about it. Come on, I’ll get you out of this.”

“You’ll get me out of it?” There was puzzlement in her voice and some other quality that he could not quite classify.

“Yes,” he assured her in the aloof but kindly manner that he had acquired under the direction of Captain Black. “If we can get through the light at the stage door without being picked off by flying bricks and such we can probably make it to Poole Street.”

She hesitated.

“All right,” she said as if she had come to a sudden decision. “I’m terribly frightened and I feel perfectly safe in your hands, and I guess the show is all over here anyway.”

She seized his arm and half followed, half pushed him toward the end of the building. The panicky pressure of her hand somehow suggested the big scene in *Catch 'Em and Kill 'Em* and restored the somewhat shattered vision of Janice Yule. The poor little thing must be in a frightfully nervous state, he judged. He wondered what she looked like.

49

In the light at the stage door he caught a glimpse of brown hair and a smooth young cheek, but then they were in shadow again and his attempt to coordinate his impressions was interrupted by an increase in the pressure on his arm.

“How did you leave everything in Pandora?” she inquired with amazing irrelevancy.

“Pan what?” he replied. Had it not been for her obvious panic he could have sworn that she was laughing.

“Aren’t you from Pandora?” she demanded. “The Republic of Pandora, I mean. . . .”

“Never heard of it,” stated Mr. Patter.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized. “It was the uniform that deceived me.”

The uniform! Mr. Patter almost stopped in his tracks at the thought of it. What must it look like after a slide down a flight of iron stairs and an indefinite repose on the pavement of an alley?

Well, no matter. There was nothing that he could do about it now. His topcoat would give it some protection on the way home and some “Suits Pressed While You Wait” shop probably could get it fixed up by drill call.

“I hadn’t thought of the uniform,” he told her truthfully. “I was wearing it in the theater when the shooting started.”

“You are an actor then?” The awe in her voice was patent.

“No,” admitted Mr. Patter gruffly. “I am an officer in the usher corps of the Super-Babylon Theater.”

50

“That must be awfully interesting work,” she said.

“I think you’re a very unconvincing liar,” was the message she conveyed.

“Well, anyway, that’s what I am,” retorted Mr. Patter with obvious irritation. And his indignation was still evident in the haughty uplift of his jaw and in the straining of the golden frogs across his bosom when they emerged from the passage under the blue arcs of Poole Street.

For a moment the pair stood taking inventory of each other. The girl as seen in the plentiful though cold light of the arc-lamps was almost pretty but as negative a figure as a loose-fitting gray coat and other articles of colorless attire could make her. She wore large horn-rimmed spectacles through which she gazed at him wide-eyed.

“I think you’re just wonderful,” she told him convincingly. “It was sweet of you to pilot me out of such a mess. I didn’t know

which way to turn. Honestly I've never been in a situation like that in all my life before."

He believed her readily enough. Her type was fairly obvious. Mr. Patter had learned about women from the moving-pictures, and he knew that little gray mice in amorphous garments are not the ones who go about setting the world on end and burning the topless towers of Ilium. This one, he judged, would probably turn out to be a clerk in a ten-cent store or a stenographer in a coal office.

51

But he was no longer impatient with her. He saw some excuse for her skepticism. To girls of her class would never occur the thought that the demigods of the movie palaces might be human beings with a skill in sliding down fire-escapes. She would think of the men in the Super-Babylon corps as creatures entirely apart from the world in which she moved—akin perhaps to the statues in the lobby . . . and she was a grateful little thing with nice eyes in spite of her objectionable glasses.

"So you are really a movie usher," she observed in a hushed voice.

"An officer in the corps," corrected Mr. Patter. "I had just finished my report for the evening when this riot started. That's how I happened to be out on the fire-escape. I naturally wanted to find out what it was all about. . . . And come to think about it I didn't find out."

"It was a raid," she informed him. "A squad from Central Detail got word that Two-Gun Jack Vest's mob was in a gambling-place in that building across the alley. . . . I heard somebody

talking about it while they were pushing me around. . . . I'll wait here if you care to go back and find out how it finished."

"We can read about it in the morning papers," replied Mr. Patter airily. "I think I'd better be seeing you home."

52

"Oh, you shouldn't take the trouble, really . . . it's too good of you. . . . I can get home all right. I'm used to it."

"You've had enough trouble wandering around the streets." His tone was sternly paternal. "Tell me where you want to go, and I'll take you there."

"I live at the Legation Hotel. . . . It's only a few blocks from here."

"The Legation!" His attempt to keep the surprise out of his tone came just a fraction of a second too late.

She laughed.

"It does sound grand, doesn't it? But it isn't really. I'm doing some secretarial work for a convention that's meeting there."

It did not occur to Mr. Patter that there was anything odd in her apology for living in the most grandiose of the city's hotels. He had felt just a little resentful that one whom he had roughly classified as a clerk should fail to keep her assigned place. He accepted her explanation as his due.

"I live near there myself," he told her.

"I am putting up at the Morgan Apartments across the court from

the Legation. . . . It's a quiet place . . . lots of professional people stop there."

She looked at him oddly but made no comment.

They walked the six blocks to the hotel. Mr. Patter felt a bit of sympathy for the girl. It was a lovely spring night—cool but not too cool—and the little gray mouse seemed almost pretty. He wondered if thinking so constituted treason to the beautiful memory of Janice Yule. He learned that her name was Margaret Banning, and that she frequently ate her luncheon in the Little Gem Cafeteria, and that she often came to the Super-Babylon and usually sat near Station Twenty-Five on the mezzanine floor. She thanked him once more at the door of the Legation, shook his hand timidly and then sped across the lobby to a telephone booth where she called a number and received a speedy connection.

53

"I saw him," she reported. "I was waiting for him to come out the door of Hogan's joint, but instead he came down the fire-escape of the Super-Babylon on his neck. He answers the description all right, but he's either the deepest lad in the world or the dumbest."

Then she sighed prettily, hung up the receiver and took the elevator on her way to bed.

54

## Chapter Five:

### *Liberator Lost in Derby Hat.*

The morning newspapers had much to say about the affair in the Super-Babylon alley. There seemed to be no very definite version of what had happened, but all accounts agreed on certain general details.

It was the consensus, for example, that three or four squads, under the leadership of some assorted sergeants whose names were duly listed, had made a raid on a dice game operated by “Black Mike” Hogan in the Western Guaranty Building, and that numerous shots had been fired before the doorkeeper could be convinced that the police had come with serious intent.

*The Clarion*, an administration mouthpiece, called attention unostentatiously to the fact that this raid was merely another significant step on the part of Mayor Theodore Schulthenheim to clean up the community. *The Daily Inquiry* mentioned that Two-Gun Jack Vest was generally to be found in Mr. Hogan’s interesting resort and quoted a source of news named Pete to the effect that the detectives had been looking for Mr. Vest. *The Morning Record* verified the matter of Mr. Vest’s connection with Mr. Hogan, but suggested that something other than Mr. Vest’s violation of the anti-gambling act might have aroused the solicitude of the city hall. As a foot-note the *Record* added 55 the news that Mr. Beesey was also being sought by the police in spite of an armistice supposed to remain in effect until midnight on election day.

The general result of all these accounts was to befuddle Mr. Patter as no doubt many other readers were befuddled. Whether



or not Mr. Vest had been present in Mr. Hogan's palatially furnished joint at the beginning of the raid it was certain that he had not been there when the diligent police crashed through the last door. Morn had come serene and lovely, and the roll-call of the combatants had discovered no casualties.

Mr. Patter noticed with some surprise that all of the newspapers had failed to learn anything about his heroic plunge into the midst of the fight, and this tended to shake his childlike faith in the omniscience of the mysterious creatures known as reporters. Not that he minded, of course. He was above any craving for personal aggrandizement. . . . But on the other hand, it might have helped focus the attention of the theater management on his merits had there been some well-written report on his timely rescue of Miss Banning.

Miss Banning! He smiled at the memory of her helplessness. So tiny, so wistful, so pathetic . . . nice eyes, though . . . might not be so bad-looking if she knew where to buy her clothes.

He started suddenly at the memory that Miss Banning at the time of their collision in the alley had been wearing a close-fitting hat of gray felt, and a long gray coat.

56

But out of the depths of his mind came the picture of another woman . . . the woman who had slipped through the stage door. She had been wearing a brownish cloak and her head had been covered by a dark scarf. . . . Who could that be? She certainly was not one of the vaudeville performers, and there was no woman in the prologue to the feature picture. . . . He pushed the puzzle back into the mental hole from which it had emerged and went down to get a bit of breakfast.

Mr. Patter had never found it difficult to achieve privacy in Mrs. Bee Morgan's Apartment Hotel. Mrs. Morgan, partly through the reflected glory of the Legation next door and partly through a low rate per diem, had acquired a clientele of People Who Do Things . . . Johns Martin, the author; Benjamin Jark, the sculptor; Miss Mary Pilling, the batik designer; Horace Culvert, the poet; Genevieve Holmes, the vocalist; Egbert Struve, the skywriter; and a number of others of similar note. True they were not yet listed among the builders of the better mouse-traps. For the most part they were still youthful and still ambitious. But from Freddy's point of view as he looked up at them and from their point of view as they looked down on him, they were already numbered with the gods on high Olympus.

So it was with some surprise that Freddy looked up from his grapefruit and discovered the svelte figure of Miss Estelle Henderson curving into the chair opposite him at the breakfast table.

57

"Do you mind if I sit here?" she inquired in a deep contralto that gave her question all the significance of scandal.

"Charmed, I'm sure," mumbled Mr. Patter.

Miss Henderson sat down. Mr. Patter gave her a quick inspection to determine whether or not he had been mistaken in previous appraisals, and he decided that there had been no mistake. Miss Henderson was patently lacking in whatever it is that gets homely women named as correspondents.

She had deep-set, burning eyes that were always expectant. She had a figure of the type whose vogue promoted the sale of

exercising machines. She dressed fairly well, if somberly. And she had her contralto voice. The sum of all of this was as nothing to Freddy Patter, and for that matter it was as nothing to most of the males in the acquaintance of Miss Henderson.

Miss Henderson was one of the People Who Do Things. Just what Thing Miss Henderson Did never concerned Mr. Patter. He had heard vaguely that she was a parlor elocutionist of some fame in circles where parlor elocutionists become famous. But their paths had never crossed, and he had been content to admire her from afar off, if at all.

“I hope you don’t mind my intruding myself on you this way,” she murmured with the intensity of one who imparts an important secret. “I am in one of my moods to-day, and I feel that I must talk to some one. My work just drains me . . . just absolutely drains me.”

58

“You ought to take a vacation,” suggested Mr. Patter helpfully.

“That is a good thought,” agreed Miss Henderson, “but I fear it is impossible at this time. What is the old saying about the sons of Martha having to toil that the sons of Mary may take their ease?”

“I don’t know either of them,” admitted Mr. Patter.

“You are a keen wit, Mr. Patter. But you get my point. What holds true for the sons of Martha is doubly true in the case of Martha’s daughters. Some of us must carry on while others go a-Maying. So I put my soul—my life’s blood—into my work. But perhaps you know how it is.”

“I certainly do,” sighed Mr. Patter. “None better.”

He recalled as he said it the long dismal days of squad drill. . . . If that wasn’t putting one’s life-blood into one’s work, what would you call it?

“I suppose that’s why I stopped here at your table this morning,” Miss Henderson went on. “You have the gift of understanding.”

“Umph,” replied Mr. Patter.

For a minute Miss Henderson was silent as she spooned her compote of prunes.

“Do you know,” she said at length, “you remind me in many ways of Steven O’Kelly. . . . He, too, was a great adventurer—a wanderer with a free sword. And like all of his kind, he was quiet and unassuming and shy. . . . I wonder if you ever met him?”

59

Freddy Patter looked up at her with an expression that might have betokened surprise at her discernment or merely a belief that she had taken leave of her senses.

“He, too, was a great adventurer. . . .” That’s what she had said. Mr. Patter was sure of it.

“I’m afraid I never met him,” he admitted. “Was he ever in the pictures?”

She shook her head and smiled knowingly.

“I wonder if you are being perfectly frank with me?” she chided.

“Modesty is all right in its way. But I think that Men Who Do Things should identify themselves if only as an example to others.”

“I haven’t the faintest idea what you’re talking about,” stated the bewildered Mr. Patter.

Miss Henderson reached across the table and patted his hand before he could remove it.

“Don’t fib,” she counseled playfully. “We all know what you’ve done.”

Mr. Patter gazed at her dumfounded. . . . The affair in the alley . . . she must be talking about that. . . . But how could she know?

“Who’s been talking about that?” he demanded. “And anyway it didn’t amount to anything.”

She laughed again, and he found himself wondering what it was that made her seem like some one he had always known.

“I’ll not keep you on nettles,” she said. “One of the boys next door saw you come in last night, and he spread the word to our boys and they passed the news all over the hotel. The gossip is that you were a colonel in the foreign legion. Is that correct?”

60

“Well, not exactly,” replied Mr. Patter mysteriously, and he turned his attention to his wheat cakes and sausage.

General Gonzalez, the last hope of Liberty in the Republic of

Pandorra, was in the city nearly twenty-four hours before the keen-scented hounds of the press discovered him at the New Seville. His incognito was preserved that long because the press-agent of the Friends of Pandorran Freedom had gone to the annual barbecue of the Enemies of Prohibition, for which society he was also press-agent.

General Gonzalez was a bit distressed at the fact that his presence in the city had become known. He changed his address from the New Seville to the Legation Hotel and later to a series of other hotels without pausing to analyze the motives of the diligent reporter.

It was the contention of the Friends of Pandorran Freedom that the time had arrived for the raising of funds. No funds had been raised for several months, and the treasury of the society was in a condition that seemed to indicate the usefulness of a good old-fashioned fund-raising, whatever Señor Gonzalez might have to say about it. As against that Señor Gonzalez placed the argument that the more people who knew his whereabouts, the more enthusiasts might be found willing to remove him. He went so far as to observe in the strict privacy of his new quarters that the enmity of Pedro Copal was not so dangerous as the friendship of the Friends of Pandorran Freedom.

61

Professor Cabrillo, in behalf of the Friends, expressed suitable regrets that the diligence of the society had carried it to extremes, and he promised that no further publicity would be issued regarding the general's whereabouts.

"You are quite right about that," agreed General Gonzalez in fluent Castilian. "One of the reasons is that as soon as I move

out of this place—which is going to be almost any minute, now, I shall not leave a forwarding address. If I want any help from the Friends of Pandorran Freedom I shall use the telephone which I have heard well spoken of as a means of communication. . . . And now, before we part, I should like to have from you the name of some drill-master with World War experience, who can put some snap into the morale of my loyal troops.”

“There is such a one in the city,” replied Professor Cabrillo. “Out of the least promising raw material in the whole world he has evolved as fine a corps as ever wore a uniform. I refer to Captain Joseph Black of the Super-Babylon staff.”

“Can he be hired?”

“I have no doubt of that. He is getting five or six times the salary that he would be drawing as a captain in the regular army of the United States. But his work is not of the sort calculated to bring him glory on a field of honor. Perhaps if you were to point out to him the fact that Pandorra is fighting to make its capital safe for democracy, promise him a commission as field-marshal and offer him twice as much money as he is getting now, you might stir something of his latent idealism.”

62

“When can I see this Napoleon?”

“I shall find out and telephone to you,” promised Professor Cabrillo. “Or perhaps you might prefer to have me make an appointment for you.”

“The appointment would be better,” decided Señor Gonzalez. “Designate an hour and call me. I shall be there. And remember

that I am anxious above all things to avoid further publicity.”

“Your wishes shall be respected, Excellency,” promised Professor Cabrillo, and he went out.

The professor arranged a meeting with Captain Black for one o’clock and so informed the general. After that he informed the press-agent who informed all the newspapers.

The doors of the Super-Babylon had just opened for the afternoon performance. The orchestra was doing what there was to be done to *The Poet and Peasant* under a madman’s mélange of colored lights. The purple-clad hosts of the “personal staff” had executed their daily maneuver and the guard had been posted under the golden flood lights at Stations One to 63 Eighty-Seven inclusive. Down the broad marble stairs, slowly and impressively, came Corporal Frederick Franklin Patter a-jingle with silver chains, his plumed shako in the crook of his arm, to report to Captain Black. The clock struck one. Mr. Patter raised his right hand in the regulation salute.

From fifteen niches behind the rubber plants and potted palms, fifteen photographers rushed out with flash-lamps poised. Fifteen charges of magnesium ignited as one magnificent blinding glare. Fifteen photographers rushed for the street, tripping over a nervous old gentleman who sat on a marble bench toying with a derby hat. And that was excusable inasmuch as they could have had no means for identifying an old gentleman with a derby hat as Gonzalez the Liberator.



## Chapter Six:

### *Target Practise on Mr. Patter.*

Had Mr. Patter paused to read the newspapers that afternoon or the next morning it is conceivable that much of his life might have been altered. But the notable visit of General Gonzalez to the Super-Babylon Theater occurred just as Mr. Patter was preparing to depart for his afternoon off. The resplendent target of the fifteen photographers went fishing and did not return until noon the next day. By that time the damage, if any, was complete.

Mr. Patter had been puzzled by the discharge of the flash-lights, but he saw nothing personal in the assault. People were always taking photographs in the lobby of the Super-Babylon and that they should be operating in groups seemed to be a logical development.

However, if Mr. Patter failed to read the newspapers on this momentous occasion, his delinquency was not shared by any one else. General Gonzalez saw the front-page art work as he was packing up his grips preparatory to leaving the Legation Hotel for an unannounced destination and he permitted himself to laugh out loud. In the onslaught of the photographers he had seen plainly the skilful hand of the mealy-mouthed Cabrillo, and he had no difficulty imagining the professor's chagrin at the outcome.

65

The pictures in all the papers were similar—a warrior in a pose that seemed preliminary to an outburst of song—and beneath the warrior a caption informing the palpitant world that this was: “General Gonzalez, youthful commander of the Pandorran

revolutionary armies.” The name Gonzalez was rendered in a great variety of spelling. But the intent was uniform.

Miss Margaret Banning studied the photograph and did some more telephoning:

“There is something wrong somewhere,” she reported. “But all the newspapers seem agreed that this is Gonzalez. It may be that the old bird who came in on the New Orleans train was just a decoy. I’ll find out what I can.”

Miss Estelle Henderson picked up her copy of *The Daily Voice*, smiled, cut out the photograph with a pair of manicure scissors and pasted it in the corner of her mirror.

Mr. Bull-Neck Beesey passed out several copies of *The Evening Dispatch* to members of his mob as clues to the whereabouts of a million pesos.

Mr. Two-Gun Jack Vest compared all the final editions available at the news-stands and then scratched his head.

“I think this is the bunk,” Mr. Vest observed to Boney Milligan, a trusted lieutenant. “I seen Gonzalez, and this ain’t the same bird.”

“Maybe he shaved off his beard.”

“I’m going to find out,” declared Mr. Vest. “I’ll know tomorrow morning.”

And if one holds to the principle of a life after death then it may be announced conservatively that Mr. Vest kept his word. He

started out to look for Mr. Gonzalez, and on the way crossed the mob of Mr. Beesey with disastrous results to Mr. Vest. There was quite a to-do about it because election day was still a full two weeks off when Mr. Vest met with his unfortunate accident. The coroner's jury decided that Mr. Vest had killed himself while cleaning a shotgun.

Mr. Frederick Patter, who had gone fishing with an identity which, despite its limitations, satisfied him perfectly, returned to discover that he had acquired a new personality with concomitant obligations. Captain Black, who, alone of all the theater staff, might have testified to the fact that Mr. Patter was really Mr. Patter and not General Gonzalez, had left the Super-Babylon overnight. It was reported that he had started for Pandorra to take charge of the Insurrecto army, but there was no proof of this rumor. Mr. Patter was appointed temporarily to command of the Super-Babylon corps in his place.

Mr. Patter went home to dinner and found Miss Henderson occupying a seat at his table.

"I hope you don't mind my sitting here," she greeted him. And once more he was startled by her resemblance to some one else—some one whom instinct told him she did not resemble at all.

"Not at all," replied Mr. Patter while he made a rapid mental calculation to convince himself that his new salary would make it possible for him to dine somewhere else.

67

"I just had to talk to you," she went on. "Your secret is common property now. . . ."

"It's all a mistake," deprecated Mr. Patter. "My name isn't

Gonzalez. It's Frederick Franklin Patter. And my home town isn't Guava. It's Little Oak, Iowa."

He said all this half-heartedly. After all, it was pleasant to be the hero of a romance—even a borrowed romance, and his denials were due less to his own preference than to possible expediency. . . . No telling what hour this lad Gonzalez might arise to complain bitterly.

But whatever the intent of Mr. Patter his disclaimer might as well have been left unsaid. Miss Henderson merely smiled her understanding smile, and Mr. Patter found her difficult to look upon.

Miss Henderson was enjoying herself. She glanced about the dining-room and observed with satisfaction that The People Who Do Things were marking her every movement. Day after day, she remembered, they had allowed this boy to sit alone and eat his meals without companionship or sign of recognition. Now they could not but envy the uncanny insight with which she had penetrated his disguise. He was her personal property by right of discovery, and she intended that they all should witness the staking of her claim.

"It must be splendid to lead a downtrodden people to a glorious destiny," she observed. "And you are still in the prime of youth . . . your whole life is ahead of you. Perfectly amazing . . . to have crowded so much into so short a span of years you have had little or no time to think of what you've done."

"Well, maybe not," acquiesced Mr. Patter. This woman, he

found, was very convincing. She made it not at all difficult for him to see himself leading troops and storming cities. Almost he could feel that he had actually done these things. Had Miss Henderson been a bit prettier, perhaps, the metamorphosis might have been complete. . . . She was talking again. . . .

“If I were to ask you could you tell me the greatest accomplishment of your career?”

“I think I could.” Mr. Patter was not listening to his own voice. It seemed to be coming from a far land, as say, for example, Pandorra. “I think I could. I once silenced a cow that was talking in a vocal movie.”

He mentioned this accomplishment without smiling because, of course, it was nothing to smile about. But Miss Henderson laughed aloud and suspected the pseudo-liberator of being the most modest humorist of her acquaintance.

They walked out into the little lobby and sank into a divan beneath a dusty palm. Mr. Patter had some vague idea of getting away. He looked at Miss Henderson and abandoned it. One needed more than an ordinary excuse if one were to get away from Miss Henderson.

69

“You weren’t going anywhere,” she said, and the words were more of a decree than a question.

He found himself answering her with a docility somewhat out of character for a hard-bitten soldier who had planned and executed wars of liberation in Pandorra.

“No,” he murmured. “I’m not working to-night.”

Her low laugh reminded him of what he had said.

“What I mean to say is that I’m not going to bother with things to-night,” he hastily corrected. And then he paused in befuddlement. There seemed to be no good reason for keeping up this farce just to impress Miss Henderson. He had never coveted her companionship when he was merely Private Patter of the Super-Babylon corps, and she the cold vision that swept through the lobby or dining-room with the haughty poise that so frequently is found in women whose charm is debatable. He found her no particular prize now that she was speaking to him as one Person Who Does Things to another. He resented her quiet air of understanding more than he intended to convey when he spoke to her. He resented her air of proprietorship. He viewed with alarm her possible intentions. And yet he lacked the courage necessary to disillusion her even were such a thing possible.

“You have told me very little of yourself,” she told him with an arch smile as she laid a hand carelessly on his knee. “Up here we have heard of your work only through the garbled stories in the press, and we are interested, I assure you.” Her manner was that of a nurse complimenting her charge on his expertness in the molding of mud pies, but her voice was low and intense.

70

“There is so little I can say,” mentioned Mr. Patter truthfully.

“It is the right of great men to be reticent,” she observed as she stared across the lobby at the bald head of a cloak and suit salesman.

“But to one who understands, great men are after all only sons of women.”

“That’s true,” nodded Mr. Patter. The remark seemed safe enough.

“Have you ever been in love?” Miss Henderson removed her eyes from the back of the suit salesman’s head and gazed at the averted countenance of the worried Freddy.

Once more he nodded.

“Yes,” he admitted with a sigh. “I have been in love. I still am.” He noticed that his declaration had had no visible effect on his companion.

“Love,” she repeated, “is the crucible that reduces all men—even the great—to a common humanity. I knew that somewhere in Pandorra, in a salon of the capital or perhaps in a cottage in the hills, would be a woman living only for you, giving you the constant incentive to strive and to win. And the pathos of it is, I suppose, that the historians who write of you will never know her name.”

71

“She isn’t in Pandorra,” commented Mr. Patter. “She’s a moving-picture.”

“What?”

“I mean she’s a star. . . . She does things in the cinema. Her name is Janice Yule.”

“Janice Yule!”

For a moment Mr. Patter thought that Miss Henderson was going to faint. Her face had gone dead white—so completely white that the patches of rouge stood out from her cheeks like pasted lozenges. And her thin nervous hand was clutching spasmodically at the lace of her dress.

“What about it?” he inquired, but she paid no attention to his query.

“How did you come to know her?” she demanded in a dull flat tone.

And he was a long time thinking up a suitable reply. His old irritation came back to him. As plain Freddy Patter . . . even as Captain Patter of the ushers . . . there would be nothing amiss in a recital of the truth. However, as General Gonzalez he could see the absurdity of a plain announcement that he had fallen in love with a shadow and an echo.

“It’s a long story,” he said at length. “I hardly know where to begin it.” And that was undoubtedly the truth. He flushed and stammered once or twice and then came inspiration. . . .

72

There had been a moving-picture in the old days before the talkies . . . a thing called *Yucatan Love* in which a blonde lady had been kidnaped by a soldier of fortune to save her from a fate worse than death. And as nearly as one could determine on the spur of the moment, that seemed to be a good story for the eager ears of Miss Henderson.

With a hesitation which might easily be mistaken for modesty Mr. Patter incited the plot of this splendid piece as nearly as he could remember it.



“I did not know who she was then,” he finished with a sigh. “I went my way, and she went hers. Just a slip of a girl she was, so lovely and pure. And I was what I was.”

He repeated that line. He remembered that he had been impressed by it when he saw it as an animated title.

“I was what I was . . . nobody in the world. But I have always remembered her.”

Miss Henderson’s reply surprised Mr. Patter for it was unspoken. As nearly as he could describe it, it was a sniff, yet she seemed intensely moved.

“Janice Yule . . . so pure . . . so good,” she murmured. “You poor, poor . . . man.”

“She has been my angel,” confided Mr. Patter. “All that I am, all that I have I’d give to her freely.”

“I hate her,” was the incomprehensible reply of Miss Henderson. But it passed unheard for Mr. Patter had looked up just then to discover the startled eyes of Miss Margaret Banning peering at him through the foliage of the rubber plant.

73

“Oo, hello!” she greeted timidly. “I didn’t know you were here.”

Miss Henderson calmed herself with sudden effort. To her, at least, it seemed obvious that this young woman might have been listening. She noted with some slight percentage of comfort that Mr. Patter did not seem at all overjoyed to behold this startled fawn. He rose to introduce her, but the movement was

mechanical.

“I didn’t expect to see you, really I didn’t,” stated Miss Banning. “I just came in here to get a fashion magazine. I just love to read fashion magazines. The pictures are frightfully interesting.”

“Probably because you find them novel,” commented Miss Henderson with a glance at Miss Banning’s nondescript clothes. “I do hope you find one. . . . The gen—I mean Mr. Patter is going to take me out to the Greymere Country Club or I should be glad to help you.” And then to the dumfounded Freddy: “I hope you won’t mind waiting for me a minute while I run upstairs and get a suitable wrap. . . .”

In a flurry of black silk she was gone, and Margaret sat down gingerly in the place she had vacated.

“Oo, she’s fascinating!” she crooned. “Such character and such chic. . . . Have you known her long?”

“Not very long.”

74

“But she’s so positive . . . I mean to say positive. . . . You wouldn’t have to know her very long to tell her things.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

She was silent for a moment as she gazed at the tips of her unornamental black shoes. When she answered all the diffidence had gone out of her voice, and her great staring eyes were half closed.

“Do you know,” she said, “I don’t think I’d go very far with that woman. She’s charming and all that, but I saw her in the theater alley last night just before the shooting started.”

“What!” In a rush there came to Freddy’s memory the picture of the woman who had stepped through the light at the stage door. . . . The woman with the scarf over her head. “But that couldn’t have been Miss Henderson,” he argued. But the woman he had glimpsed for just a moment behind the starry-eyed mask of the girl before him was gone.

“I don’t really know,” she said with a helpless gesture. “I’m just frightened. I feel that you shouldn’t go out of here to-night.”

Something of her intensity communicated itself to Mr. Patter, and he honestly regretted that he could not take her advice. If he could have made a sudden dash for his room he would have seized upon the opportunity instantly. But the aura of the departed Miss Henderson still stood between him and the elevator. . . . Even if he could think up some excuse that would satisfy Miss Henderson it would do him no good, for Miss Banning showed no sign of returning to her hotel, and that made it Hobson’s choice.

75

Miss Henderson came presently, bade a sweet good night to Miss Banning, and accepted Mr. Patter’s escort to a taxicab.

“Just take me anywhere,” she counseled him in a thrilling, throaty voice. “Just take me anywhere away from it all. . . . I have heard that the music is very good at the Purple Buzzard.”

He gave the address, and they started away. Five minutes later he was in a heap on the floor of the cab with Miss Henderson

similarly disposed somewhere beside him. Pulverized glass rained endlessly from above and sawed-off shotguns filled the night with iron washers and evil sounds.

## Chapter Seven:

### *Gunmen Annoy Shrinking Violet.*

Under similar circumstances, perhaps, General Gonzalez, the Liberator, might have reacted quickly. He probably would have dived as Mr. Patter had dived, at the first salvo, but on the way to the floor it is safe to suppose that he should have thought up some effective stratagem to circumvent the gunmen. One gets most valuable practise in keeping alive when one is an Insurrecto general in Pandorra. Mr. Patter, it must be remembered, had none of the general's background except a purple uniform with gold frogs across the bosom, and when he got to the bottom of the cab and for many seconds thereafter his main concern was to figure out what had happened.

Miss Henderson was screaming in his ear, and because he was jammed in under the frame of one of the dicky seats he could not move his head. Something in the timbre and pitch of the scream caused his heart to leap up within him, but before he could account for that his ear had quit functioning like a dead telephone.

"Shut up!" he urged her. But the advice, though excellent, went for nothing.

The cab was careering about drunkenly, but Mr. Patter had no idea about where it was going. He found that lying as he was with his face in a bristly floor mat and his legs in the air, his sense of direction was virtually nil. Then suddenly the car struck something, up-ended and came down again right side up to an accompaniment of bursting tires. The side door swung open and Mr. Patter fell into a street that seemed entirely filled

with moving wheels. As his face flattened against the pavement something struck him in the small of the back. That, he judged, would be Estelle.

Mr. Bull-Neck Beesey and his marksmen, after a well-executed sally in which the taxicab had been forced over the curb and into a collision with a water plug, had moved along down the street.

Normally the procedure in an affair of this sort would have been based upon the economic principle of a quick turnover and a safe get-away. The best shotgunmen found it excellent stratagem to take the effect of the barrage for granted and leave the assembling of the corpse to the police.

This time, however, there was a variation from normalcy due to no lack of diligence on the part of Mr. Beesey or his lieutenants. The taxicab, after striking the curb, veered back again to the street and in doing so had jammed the right front wheel of Mr. Beesey's sedan. The car skidded in a complete circle and thus it came about that the gunmen were looking at the wreckage when Mr. Patter stirred himself and rose out of it.

"What kind of shootin' do you call that?" inquired Mr. Beesey indignantly. "This bird's still alive . . . an' so's the taxi driver."

"I wasn't shootin' at the taxi driver," growled Nick Moot, the principal executioner. "An' if the first charge went high that was because you hit a hole just as I pulled the trigger."

78

There was similar protest from three other able but human gunners . . . none of which argument could change the fact that the target was still alive. It was too late to reload, and Mr.

Patter seemed to be staggering toward the sidewalk.

“Get him with the rods. Sock him down, but get him, you so-and-sos,” counseled Mr. Beesey.

So the disgruntled mob spilled out of the sedan in close formation and came dashing across the street determined that this time there should be no mistake.

Mr. Patter had come to his feet mechanically and just as mechanically he had reached down to pick up the still screaming Miss Henderson. It wasn't that he wanted Miss Henderson. He experienced a distinct distaste for her as he brought her head level with his shoulder and received the full force of her screech in the ear that had thus far escaped her. Instinct told him to get away at once. The code of the movies, imbedded somewhere deeply in his subconscious being, forced him to set Estelle on her feet and drag her with him.

“Shut the trap and beat it!” he advised. “Get going, or I'll crash you right in the jaw.”

Miss Henderson stopped one vocal effort and embarked on another.

“Don't you dare talk to me like that,” she wept bitterly. “You're not in Pandora now, you know. Let me alone, you big ruffian.” At which point the gunners of Mr. Beesey came erupting from their car.

79

Estelle felt a sudden grip on her arm and willy-nilly she was jerked across the sidewalk and into a convenient alley. Instinctively she rebelled against this affront to her dignity . . . to

her womanhood. Instinctively she hung back against Mr. Patter's tow, and she saw a flash at the alley entrance and heard a bullet pass overhead with a sound like the crack of a whip. In three steps she had freed herself from Mr. Patter and was ahead of him when they came out of the passage at the end of the block.

A taxi was cruising slowly at right angles to her flight. She leaped to the running-board and resumed her screaming. As Mr. Patter came into the street close behind her, the cab accelerated and left him in a wild burst of speed. The gunmen spilled out of the alley, and three more shots came close enough to him to stir a breeze against his cheek.

He plunged forward, this time in blind panic as an automobile spun around the corner and veered outward to avoid hitting him.

"Get in," called a familiar voice. And without stopping to reason, he got in. The car picked up with a jerk that knocked him sprawling into the tonneau, and it wasn't until they stopped for a crossing light three blocks farther on that he recognized his rescuer. There was a girl at the wheel, and although he doubted the evidence of his eyes he was forced to recognize her as Margaret Banning. She heard him lifting himself from the floor to the seat and half turned to look at him.

80

"Hurt?" she inquired.

"Guess not," he admitted. "Little winded."

She laughed. "Must make you homesick for good old Pandorra," she commented. "What happened to your lady friend?"

She had turned about again to give her attention to her driving



and Mr. Patter strove in vain to see her face. Something about her puzzled him. She was still the gray mouse . . . little Alice hunting rabbits in Wonderland . . . and yet there were times when she seemed to be speaking entirely out of character.

“Miss Henderson got away,” he told her. “I think she caught a taxicab.”

“I’m glad of that,” came a far-away voice. “It must have been a terrible experience for her . . . just simply terrible. But she is a very good runner. . . . Women like that do everything so well, don’t they?”

She turned out of traffic into a side-street and stopped at the curb.

“I wish you’d get up here in the front seat with me,” she told him. “It will make me feel safer, and besides, I’m just yearning to know what happened.”

He groaned as he lifted himself out of the cushions and changed position.

“I don’t know what happened,” he admitted with a gasp as he settled down beside her.

81

“We were riding along Taylor Avenue and a red sedan came by us doing fifty. The next thing I knew all the glass was broken and Miss Henderson was screeching in my ear.”

“It must have been terrible,” iterated Miss Banning sympathetically. “But do you know I felt when you left the hotel that something was going to happen. Maybe I’m psychic. Do you

think that could be it?"

He did not bother to consider this problem.

"Don't you think we'd better be moving on? Those gunmen aren't so far behind, and they've got a car."

"I feel safer right now than I've felt all evening," she assured him. "You are here, and besides, that building across the street is a police station."

He took a deep breath, conscious that his danger—whatever it was—had passed, and it came to him suddenly that the girl beside him had bade him good-by only a few minutes ago in the lobby of his hotel.

"How did you get into this business?" he demanded abruptly.

"I'm ashamed of myself, I really am," she answered. "I'm frightened to death at meeting people and doing things and that leads me to act on impulses. Sometimes I'm wrong, and sometimes I'm right. I felt right down in my heart that you were going to have a lot of trouble. So I went out and got into this car and followed you. I'm glad now I did."

82

"Who owns the car?" Mr. Patter's voice was husky with suspicion.

"Some man who lives at the Legation, I suppose," she answered with a hint of panic. "I never thought of that. The key was in it . . . and oh, dear, maybe I'll get arrested for stealing it."

"They won't arrest you if you put it back before they find out

about it,” he counseled. “And if they do I’ll say I stole it. A jail would be a pretty safe place for me right now.”

“Sweet of you to suggest it, anyway,” she answered as she let in the clutch, “about taking the blame, I mean . . . not about going to jail.” She was whistling an airy lyric from a current musical comedy as she swung about the next corner on two wheels.

“I wonder if Estelle got home,” observed Mr. Patter as they came in sight of the Legation’s tall tower.

“Oh, dear, I hope nothing happened to her,” murmured Margaret. “I mean nothing more serious than two broken legs.” But she said this with a demure air, so obviously it didn’t mean anything.

The car was parked in the court adjoining the Legation Hotel without mishap. Apparently its owner had not yet come to claim it. Miss Banning walked with Mr. Patter to the side door of the Morgan Apartments whence he would be able to get to the elevator without attracting too much attention to his skinned face and torn clothes.

“I’ll be down in the lobby in ten minutes,” she told him. “The lobby of the Legation. Get yourself prettied up and meet me there. I want to talk to you. . . . And would you like to have me call the police?”

83

“The police!” he exclaimed in a horrified tone. “Good lord, no!”

“Oh, all right,” she acquiesced. “I don’t suppose it makes any difference. I just thought I’d mention it.”

Miss Banning proceeded with all due decorum to the writing-room on the mezzanine floor of the Legation where she took off her gray overcoat and admired in the glass door of a telephone booth the striking effect of a scarlet evening dress that it had completely concealed. Then she lighted a cigarette and sat down to wait for a man who presently arrived . . . a gray-haired, hard-faced man who looked like a bank president but who showed no sign of affronted dignity when she addressed him as “Joe.”

“They almost got him to-night,” she remarked with a trace of nervousness. “Beesey’s mob it was . . . sawed-off shotguns and about as rotten a job of shooting as anybody ever saw. They missed him the first crack and then chased after him. They’d have got him, too, if Maggie hadn’t been looking out for him. I was right behind him. . . . Borrowed your car and followed when he went away from here.”

Joe lowered himself carefully into one of the flimsy chairs at the writing-desk beside her.

“What do you make of it?” he inquired. “Is this bird Gonzalez or isn’t he?”

84

“Well, I’ll take you into my full confidence. I don’t know. His name isn’t Gonzalez. You don’t have to talk to him twice to know that. If Gonzalez came up here in person we’re off on the wrong foot.”

“Our agents in Santa Cruz were positive about that. They reported that Gonzalez’ American adviser was being sent to make a deal for arms. I sent you a copy of the report.”

“I got it, but there are plenty of things it doesn’t explain to me. If

my boy friend is really Gonzalez' military adviser—which heaven forbid—then who is the old lad who was welcomed by the Friends of Pandorran Freedom the other day?"

"I think you solved that when you called him a decoy."

"And who is the female basilisk who calls herself Estelle Henderson?"

The man looked at her closely.

"There's a new character," he answered. "What has she to do with it?"

"I'll find out. Our subject took her out for a taxi ride to-night, and that's how he came to be picked up by Beesey's mob. I don't know that there's anything wrong with her except that she was in the theater alley when the cops were raiding Hogan's place.

"To-night just as I was coming out from dinner I saw Beesey's car go around the corner, and I tried to warn this boy that he'd better stay in. Everybody in town knows that they've been booked to get Gonzalez . . . even Gonzalez knows it by this time."

85

"The fact that they tried to bump off your friend Patter is pretty conclusive evidence that he's our man, don't you think?"

"I read it that way. But of course there's no law to keep Bull-Neck from making a mistake. The thing that to my mind elects Mr. Patter queen of May is the fact that he didn't set up any wild cry for the gendarmerie. Much as I regret to admit that such

innocence may be spurious I must say that for once I fear the newspapers are right.”

“Well, I suppose we can’t act hurriedly. Keep him alive if you can. Remember, his market value is about a million pesos. Maybe more.”

“I’d be willing to keep him alive anyway,” replied Miss Banning. “He’s really a nice boy. . . . But if I have to go around in this poor-relation’s costume much longer in my imitation of Dumb Dora, the shrinking violet, I’ll kill somebody myself.”

“The person who would be nosey had best be also colorless,” the man observed. “That’s an old Persian proverb. If it isn’t it ought to be.”

“I’ll tear that cat’s eyes out if she makes any more remarks about my clothes,” the demure Miss Banning assured him. Then she pinched out her cigarette and poked her arms savagely into the sleeves of the gray coat.

The gunnery of the Beesey contingent was mentioned at some length in the morning newspapers. Police interviews were singularly unenlightening inasmuch as the target had disappeared and none of the gunmen had been caught.

86

However the theorists of journalism found much scope for their talent in a report that three moving-picture theater ushers had narrowly escaped assassination at various periods during the night in the alley south of the Super-Babylon.

Investigators placed much credence in a rumor that the long-suffering populace had at last arisen to blot out all theater

ushers. On the other hand, there seemed to be no good reason why vigilantes engaged in so public-spirited an enterprise should confine their attentions to such members of the corps as chanced to sneak out into the alley to steal a smoke.

## Chapter Eight:

### *The Mystery That Was Miss Henderson.*

Freddy Patter listened in complete befuddlement to Miss Banning's suggestion that perhaps the gunmen who had wrecked his taxicab had been shooting with malice aforethought. For one so obviously inexperienced in the ways of the world, she seemed to know quite a lot about what hoodlums think of when and if they think.

"I believe that maybe the pictures of you in the newspapers might have had something to do with it," she suggested diffidently. "Correct me if I am wrong. I am shamefully ignorant about such things. But it seems to me that, now your identity is discovered, your old enemies from Pandorra will be hiring local talent to make your life miserable."

"There may be something in that," he conceded. "But it's all a silly mistake. I'm not Gonzalez. I told you the truth. My name is Patter . . . Frederick Patter, and I think I ought to sue the newspapers for making me be somebody else."

Miss Banning nodded understandingly.

"I don't doubt you at all," she assured him. "You know I believe in you, don't you? But I don't think you could convince anybody even if you started a libel suit. The gunmen would probably think you were just looking for an alibi—isn't that what you call it when you prove you're somebody that you actually aren't?"

"That sounds reasonable," he admitted. "People generally believe what they want to believe. . . . Now there's Miss



Henderson. Gee! I don't suppose she'll speak to me after tonight's performance."

"That would certainly be too bad." Miss Banning's big eyes were full-page advertisements of sympathy. "But I don't see how she could hold you responsible for her escape in the taxicab."

"It isn't that. I'm afraid I spoke rather harshly to her. I had to stop her screaming so I told her I would give her a wallop on the jaw or something like that."

"You did! Not really!" One not acquainted with Miss Banning's gentle nature might have suspected—erroneously of course—that she found something cheery in this ghastly confession of misconduct.

"Of course I had no intention of doing anything like that."

"Of course not."

"But I couldn't just stand there and listen to her scream with all those hoodlums shooting at us."

"As an artistic performance screaming duets lack a little something."

"I suppose I'd better find her as soon as possible and apologize."

Miss Banning shook her head.

"I don't think I should do that," she advised. "Even if Miss

Henderson has a good explanation for her presence in the theater alley . . . and I don't say she hasn't . . . it would be foolish to apologize to her. I am too ignorant for words about many things, but I believe I know Miss Henderson's type. Just wait until to-morrow morning, and she'll apologize to you."

Mr. Patter smiled skeptically. It was plain that this girl had never seen Miss Henderson in the days of her haughtiness. But he did not argue the point. Miss Banning, he knew, was merely trying to be helpful.

And so had passed the evening after the futile musketry of Mr. Bull-Neck Beesey. Mr. Patter had gone home and to bed long before any reports were in circulation concerning the attack on three members of his corps. He did not see Miss Henderson until she swept into the dining-room next morning at breakfast.

In spite of Miss Banning's advice, Mr. Patter was half out of his chair with a speech of regret on his lips when she silenced him with a smiling greeting.

"I can't tell you how glad I am to see that nothing happened to you," she assured him. "I did my best to get the taxi driver to stop and go back after you. But the cowardly beast couldn't think of anything but saving his own skin. When I succeeded in turning him around you were gone. I'm frightfully sorry. It must have looked to you as if I had deserted you wilfully."

"Not at all," lied Mr. Patter.

"I hope you mean that. Of course there would have been extenuating circumstances. Such things as shotgun attacks probably are an old story to you? . . ."

“Oh, yes, indeed.”

“But they are a distinct novelty to me. I’m afraid I was just on the verge of panic.”

Mr. Patter was content to let it go at that. He listened only half-heartedly as the lovely voice of Estelle flowed on and on like the music of a rippling river. Mentally he was upset. That Miss Henderson should have apologized to him was surprising enough. That Miss Banning should have had the uncanny foresight to guess what Miss Henderson would do seemed even more incomprehensible.

And as he struggled with this mystery he found himself back face to face with another: the reason for the almost hypnotic effect of her voice. He wondered if it denoted a bigamous strain in his nature that he should so far forget the beautiful vision of Janice Yule as to be conscious of another woman’s influence. But he dismissed that subject hastily because the image of Margaret Banning kept breaking in on it.

Mr. Patter departed for the theater via the kitchen and service doorway and reached his objective unharmed. Five minutes later Miss Henderson, crossing the lobby to the street door, saw the wraithlike form of Margaret Banning rising up in front of her.

“Did you wish to see me?” inquired Miss Henderson.

“Yes, please,” said Miss Banning. “We can go across to the Legation lobby. There’s no privacy here.”

“I suppose you speak from experience,” commented Estelle.

“Oh, indeed I do,” agreed Miss Banning ingenuously.

“I overheard every word the general said to you when you were talking with him yesterday . . . all about his love for Janice Yule. . . . It was perfectly thrilling. Just like a story in a magazine. Of course if you’d care to talk here . . . It makes no difference . . . really.”

“We can step into the Legation for a minute or two,” acquiesced Miss Henderson hurriedly. “But I have very little time.”

They walked in silence across the narrow strip of asphalt that separated the haughty Legation from its unworthy rival, and as if by prearranged plan they proceeded to the quiet writing-room where Miss Banning had conferred with the man called Joe.

In the calm elegance of the hotel the dowdiness of Margaret was more evident; her hesitating manner, her consciousness of being out of place, seemed more pronounced. Miss Henderson who for just a moment had felt the threat of panic, smiled to herself at her own stupidity in having allowed herself to be tricked into an interview.

“I hope you will be as brief as possible,” she said. “I am really very late for my appointment as it is.”

“I hope you won’t think me rude,” replied Margaret. “Oh, please don’t think that. But I do so need advice. I wanted to talk to you about the general . . . I mean Mr. Patter.”

92

Miss Henderson had been condescending. She became haughty.

“You’ll pardon me, I’m sure,” she said, “if I point out to you that

I have neither the right nor the inclination to discuss his business.”

Miss Banning sighed.

“I was so afraid you might feel that way about it,” she murmured. “I feel a little fool blundering into other folks’ affairs. But I like the general . . . I mean Mr. Patter, and he has eyes only for you.”

“You are impertinent!” gasped Miss Henderson, but her eyes lighted with the implied compliment.

“Please don’t be angry with me.” The gray mouse seemed close to tears. “It isn’t impertinent to admire and envy you. If I were clever perhaps I might be a rival. But I’m not clever, and I’m not pretty. I’d like to be your friend, and I should be a safe friend.”

Miss Henderson sniffed.

“For one whom I met for the first time yesterday you seem to be taking a keen interest in my affairs.”

Margaret’s eyes widened.

“Oo, yesterday wasn’t the first time I met you,” she corrected. “Don’t you remember when you bumped into me in the theater alley the night of all the shooting?”

Miss Henderson felt suddenly cold. The girl’s simplicity seemed obvious . . . and yet . . .

“So you were there that night,” she observed. “And what were

you doing there?”

“Nothing at all as a matter of fact.” Miss Banning’s tone showed plainly that the memory distressed her. “I was walking by the theater when the police began to push in from the street and I had to go with them or be trodden underfoot. And what were you doing there?”

Miss Henderson had been expecting this question, and she had decided that an easy answer might prove to be a better policy than disdainful reticence.

“I had intended to go to the theater office to see about placing a girl—one of my pupils—in a pageant,” she said in a tone almost friendly. “But I missed the office entrance and got as far as the stage door. Then the riot started, and I was glad to get away.”

“I’m sure you were.” Margaret Banning shuddered prettily. “It was an awful experience. But what do you think started the trouble?”

“How should I know? I suppose it was a raid on a gambling-hall as the papers said.”

“And that affair last night? I’ve been so worried about that. Why should anybody be shooting at you?”

Miss Henderson’s suspicions were lost in indignation. “What makes you suppose they were shooting at me?”

“Well, I thought . . . Well, they were shooting at somebody.”

“Did it ever occur to you that a man doesn’t get to be a military dictator without making enemies?”

“I thought of that, but Pandorra seems so far away and other causes of trouble are so close. I was wondering if one of your disgruntled admirers might have had something to do with it.”

“Really, Miss Banning, I shall have to wish you good afternoon. I dare say you mean well enough, but you have no conception of what it means to mind your own business. My friendship with Mr. Patter is just a real wholesome friendship. You must have heard in your eavesdropping yesterday that he is in love with Janice Yule.” She laughed bitterly and rose to go.

“I didn’t think he meant that literally,” the girl observed hastily, as if anxious to convince herself rather than Miss Henderson. “I thought it was just an artistic love, if you know what I mean. He told you that thrilling story of how they met down there on the desert, and he mentioned that he wished to give her his all. That’s what made me think he was romancing.”

Miss Henderson had turned away. She hesitated for a moment.

“His all,” she scoffed. “And what is that? The wide open spaces of Pandorra and a barefooted army.”

“He has also a million dollars in cash,” commented Miss Banning. “I thought you knew that. Good day, Miss Henderson, and thank you for your kindness in listening to me.”

Miss Banning did a bit more telephoning.

“I still can’t say where Miss Henderson fits,” she reported. “But offhand I’d say she is in love with the lad. I could tell from her reaction that she had never heard of the million, so it isn’t likely to change hands in that quarter. It’s a long chance, but you’d better have the agency put somebody on Janice Yule, the moving-picture actress.”

Came Joe’s voice over the wire:

“What’s she got to do with it?”

“Our subject says he’s in love with her. I thought at first he was just kidding Miss Henderson. Now I’m not so sure. And whether or not Miss Yule might return his affections I feel sure that she could love a million dollars with no effort whatever.”

“We’ll look into that,” said Joe.

Out in far Hollywood, Janice Yule, the perfect blonde, stood in her blue-tiled kitchen attired in a five-hundred-dollar Paris creation of crêpe-de-chine and a thirty-five-cent apron of mauve rubber. She was waiting for a press photographer whose art was presently to inform the world of her domesticity. The cook, watching the derangement of her system, eyed Miss Yule with disfavor. Miss Yule, mixing flour and things in a bowl as a convincing detail, swore at the cook and was in a fine temper when a timid maid arrived to announce Jerome Kenney, the eminent press-agent. Miss Yule essayed a smile which she abandoned when Mr. Kenney was ushered in unaccompanied by any cameramen.

“Ike is on his way out,” he consoled her. “I telephoned him just



before I left the lot. But anyway it doesn't make any difference whether he gets here or not. I got a better story."

"About time," snarled Miss Yule. "If it's another idea to show me cookin' my own cakes or washin' my old clothes you can beat it before I crown you with a dish."

"It's high-class stuff," replied Mr. Kenney evenly. "I got the idea when I read about the Hokus kidnaping in Omaha. We complain to the police that you're being followed by mysterious birds in long whiskers, see. Then you ask for police protection, and we find a bomb in your front hall. We get the whole town talking about it, see. We get everybody wondering what the what. And then you let the secret slip that it's an international conspiracy. Whole smears of foreign noblemen are trying to keep you from upsetting the map of Europe because by rights you ought to be the Queen of Patagonia."

"By rights you ought to be the king of the booby hatch," sniffed Miss Yule. She was impressed by the idea, but one had to keep press-agents in their place—wherever that might be.

"International conspiracy me eye," she scoffed. "That old gag hasn't been pulled since Mary Pickford was a little girl. To hell with it!"

## Chapter Nine:

### *Voice Arrives Opportunely from Hollywood.*

Mr. Moe Eisenstark let it be known that he wished to see the captain of his guards, and Mr. Patter was ushered into the august presence. Mr. Eisenstark sat at a mahogany desk that had been one of the important factors in the initiation of the “save our forests” campaign, and he drummed on a green blotting-pad with a gold pencil. Mr. Patter moved to a position directly in front of him and stood at attention.

“You sent for me, sir?” he inquired.

“You bet,” replied Mr. Eisenstark. “I want to know why is it the, now, gunmen are hanging around in my alley?”

“I don’t know, sir,” said Mr. Patter.

“Ain’t you the captain? I’m asking you. Ain’t you running this regiment which costs me, now, a lot of money? Then why ain’t you chasink these low-lifes out of the alley?”

A week ago Mr. Patter might have been terrified by this onslaught—although, of course, a week ago would have seen him a private in the corps and thus immune from censure by Mr. Eisenstark. At present, surrounded as he was by the aura of General Gonzalez, his only reaction was to feel sorrow for Mr. Eisenstark.

“Sir,” he said with quiet dignity, “I have carried on as well as I am able the work of Captain Black. What I mean is I try to do my work and give satisfaction all around. But

nobody told me I was supposed to chase gunmen. There's nothing about that in the book of rules."

"Remember, now, you got a swell job. Remember that. It's always easy to fill in a good job like that with so many soldiers out of work and all. Get me?"

"I try to do my work," iterated Mr. Patter. "But anyway I don't want the job. I'm going over to the Grand Cauchemar Theater at the end of the week anyway."

His voice was tired and toneless, but there was no doubting his sincerity. Mr. Eisenstark had contemplated nothing like this, and he rose half out of his seat with a quick protest.

"What's the idea of that?" he demanded. "Ain't we treating you right here? Ain't we able to pay as much money as the Grand Cauchemar?"

"You've been good to me, and I like the work. I try to do my work right and please everybody all round. But that's not it. The Janice Yule feature goes over there next week, and it stays for two weeks."

"Are you, now, nutty?" Mr. Eisenstark was staring at him open-mouthed. In all of Mr. Eisenstark's experience with the oddities of the theater—and it had been considerable—he had never encountered anything quite like this.

"I like to look at Janice Yule, and I'm going where I can see her act," explained Mr. Patter quietly. "And if that's all, Mr. Eisenstark, I'll be going down for afternoon roll-call."

“Wait a minute,” commanded Mr. Eisenstark. “That’s no way to do business. Tell me something. What’s your right name?”

“Frederick Franklin Patter,” replied Frederick Franklin Patter.

“You ain’t this General Gonzalez?”

“No, sir.”

Mr. Eisenstark rubbed his hands together gleefully.

“That’s fine. If you was really the general maybe you should, now, have to go down to this here place where is the revolution. If you ain’t you can stay here with me and make a lot of money.”

Mr. Patter listened with a detached smile. He was thinking of the spirituality that surrounded the image of Janice Yule, and he was not much concerned with money.

“Here’s the proposition,” continued Mr. Eisenstark. “I feed the newspaper boys a lot of hooey about how General Gonzalez is keeping under cover at the Super-Babylon theater. How he figures the best way to make people quit noticin’ him is to get out in public in his own trick uniform. That’s what they call, now, the psychology.

“We can tell ’em how he hires Captain Black an’ how he’s studyin’ Black’s plans an’ drillink Captain Black’s own guards just to get the hang of it. How about it?”

“I’ve been wondering, Mr. Eisenstark, if the hoodlums in the alley aren’t there because they think right now that General Gonzalez is here.”

“I get some more cops in the alley,” promised Mr. Eisenstark.  
“And I pay you more money and I get you some life insurance.”

“Over at the Grand Cauchemar next week they will be showing this Janice Yule picture.”

“We get you something prettier as Janice Yule. We get Helen Hoy—this here red-hot mama.”

“I don’t care anything about Helen Hoy.”

“You’ll learn to like her. I’m now through with this Yule woman. If I told you how much this business costs me last week account of her you wouldn’t believe me. I give you my word you wouldn’t believe me. She is a rotten actress. And the voice!”

“Mr. Eisenstark, you have my resignation. I had better go now and post the guard.”

“All right, have it your way. We hold over this thing a week an’ then we buy two more which they got in Hollywood an’ can’t sell. If you stay and bring the money in I should worry what punk actress wants to keep it out.”

“What terms do you offer?” inquired Mr. Patter, thereby altering the entire course of his life.

The life of Mr. Patter during the next four days was much as it had always been before his Destiny had run afoul of that of the Pandorran Republic. His salary had been raised. His position in the guard had been made permanent by contract. He had been measured by the foremost designer of comic-opera

costumes for a uniform of unbelievable magnificence. And Moe Eisenstark had begun the whispering campaign that was to make Freddy Patter the season's sensation. Mr. Patter, however, found the eve of glory a pretty dull affair.

He saw little of Estelle Henderson. Once or twice he encountered her in the dining-room or lobby and, as always, succumbed to the unfathomable mystery of her. He thought for a time that she was avoiding him in fear that he might attract further attentions from the still active Mr. Beesey. And he felt hurt at this . . . not because he yearned for her companionship, but because it implied a criticism of his style in rescues. Later he learned that she was working diligently at something day and night.

He saw plenty of Margaret Banning and wished that he might see less. Her helplessness, her amazing innocence, her startled eyes aroused in him a sense of parental superiority, but at the same time made him wish that she might be a little less omnipresent. He marveled at that unsurpassed paragon of human endurance, her theoretical employer, and he puzzled over the nature of the job at which she never seemed to be working. He complimented himself on his aloofness in speaking to her and felt sure that he had maintained very well the dignified reticence which his new position seemed to warrant.

At the end of one of his unrevealing talks Margaret Banning walked out of the Morgan Apartments and rode over town to an office building where she was admitted without delay to the presence of the hard-faced man called Joe.

"I'd like to throw up this job," she announced.

The man looked at her without surprise.

“If it’s Beesey’s mob I’ll have him run out of town,” he told her. “I’d have done it before, but I felt that if we could stir up some action we might get some clue to the million dollars.”

“It’s not Beesey. . . . It’s Mr. Patter. I can’t get it out of my head as an experienced bloodhound that Mr. Patter is a red herring.”

He smiled.

“My dear,” he said, “no matter what we do in this world, we have to have faith in somebody else. We have to presume that our sources of information are correct until we can prove them to be something else.”

“But it’s all so silly. This poor lad has spilled everything he knows to me. If he had any information at all about Pandorra or the million dollars I’d have had it long ago. He’s just a . . . well, for lack of a better word, a sap.”

“Are you saying that because you dislike him?”

“Dislike him? I love him. A simple soul like that is what every girl is yearning for. But look at the picture:

“He is actually working as a sublimated usher in a permanent eyesore movie house. He’s on Moe Eisenstark’s pay-roll, and his salary up until ten days ago was twenty-five dollars a week. Does that sound like a conqueror or even a conqueror’s fiscal agent?”

“A conqueror’s fiscal agent with a million dollars in his kitty

could live comfortably on twenty-five dollars a week.”

“But what purpose could he have in submitting to the programs of the Super-Babylon day and night?”

“Because, being a wise lad, he would know that most people would argue just as you are arguing. Can’t you see that he couldn’t pick a more suitable camouflage?”

“But I’m telling you that Freddy Patter wouldn’t have the ingenuity to figure all that out. He’s just about as secretive as a flapper’s party dress and as complex as ham and eggs.”

“Well, we can consider some more evidence. I’ve known for some time that Patter was really employed by Eisenstark. But it is significant that he went to work there just about the time that the agent we were told to look out for would have arrived in town.

“In addition to that I got word from some friends at Central Detail that Mr. Beesey is not the only gunman who is interested in him. The remnants of Two-Gun Jack’s little junta are out to get him, and that would seem to give him the nomination. One mob might make a mistake, but two . . .? Maggie, please don’t ask me to be too credulous.”

She considered this for a moment and advanced no further argument, but she shook her head slowly as if unconvinced.

“I learned to-day,” said Joe, “that Pedro Copal, the rival Liberator of Pandorra, is also somewhere about town, and I dare say that we can guess what he’s here for. Perhaps his



presence might explain the peculiar activities of Miss Henderson.”

“Nothing would explain Miss Henderson except the inscrutability of Providence. If she were playing Copal’s game she would naturally know about the loot. And I can give you my word that she hadn’t heard a word of it until I told her. There’s something funny about her, but for the life of me I can’t put a finger on it.”

“And you still want to give up the job?”

She looked squarely into his gray eyes, thoroughly serious for the first time since she had come into the room.

“I’ll carry on,” she told him. “But I’m telling you you’ve got to do something to protect that boy. If he has the million we’ll get it. But I don’t want him knocked off by Beesey’s mob or Vest’s mob or any home talent that you may pick up on your own account.”

“My dear girl,” he answered, “I am interested only in the loot and I should suggest that you continue to make that your primary concern also. In the meantime you may find solace in the fact that he can lead us to it only while he’s alive. We shall pray for his enduring good health.”

That night as always, Captain Freddy Patter stole out of his orderly room to the door behind Station One on the main floor to pay his silent and long-distance court to the lovely eikon of Janice Yule.

It was nine o’clock . . . almost time for the second show. Patrons

who had been standing in line for an hour on the sidewalk were being admitted in platoons with fifty-five-cent tickets in their hands to enjoy the privilege of standing for another three-quarters of an hour in the marble and brass foyer. Mr. Patter was conscious that some sort of disturbance was in progress. But he paid little attention to that. There were always such disturbances when the standees had paid for their new standing places. Such little wrangles were usually settled by the lance corporals armed with replies Number 4, Number 4-A and Number 6 out of the house manual.

He heard some one whisper hoarsely: "That's him!" But this, too, barely made an impression on his consciousness. It seemed likely that Mr. Eisenstark's subrosa advertising was beginning to have its effect.

A moment later three heel-clicks resounded through the lobby, and this time he turned around to see what it was all about. Three heel-clicks were the signal for the floor manager, and a call for a floor manager signified that the temper of the customers who are always right was getting out of normal control.

As he looked a squad came down the stairs from the mezzanine stations, and there was a distinct movement in the crowd. The focal point of the charge seemed to be the door at which he was standing. For just a moment he wondered if his job as captain of the house militia might not require his presence in the action that seemed so imminent. But nobody had signaled for him and safety first was usually a pretty good motto.

The rush stopped as speedily as it had begun without any police

work by the ushers.

The voice that he had heard before announced in another stage whisper: “The exit is down the corridor to the right.” And then there was silence save for the grumbling and catcalls of about two hundred patrons who seemed dissatisfied with the Super-Babylon’s policies. Mr. Patter took up his position just inside of Door Number One and was lost to the world of fifty-five-cent ticket holders as the astral self of Janice Yule was conjured out of the dusk before him.

He had seen this picture many times—a score or more. But now as always it came to him as an entirely new miracle. He saw the girl, a sweet childish figure in a simple gingham gown and silk stockings come walking through a rose garden swinging a sunbonnet. He heard the thrilling notes of her simple little love song.

Somewhat resentfully he witnessed the entrance of the villain and heard his crafty remarks. Even more resentfully he observed the arrival of the hero. And as he might have felt had he been living this story of love and intrigue, he followed the lovely Janice through storm and trial and temptation until he saw her in reel five pouring tea as one to the manner born in the château from which in another few minutes she would be kidnaped. One by one her guests departed, and as she walked toward the door she suddenly halted as she had halted every night since the film first began to spin its way through the Super-Babylon projectors.

Mr. Patter knew what her next lines would be . . . and just when she would say them. Her smile would vanish, she would wipe

her beautiful burning eyes with an absurd little handkerchief, and she would croon into the ear of the girl about to pass through the doorway:

“Tell him, then, that the thing I do is not of my choosing. James Glendon may force me to wed him, but my heart will be where it always has been, with . . .”

The lovely lips parted. The slim, white fingers crumpled the filmy lace handkerchief. And then it seemed to Mr. Patter as if the roof of the theater had fallen in. The beautiful Janice had called his name. . . .

“General Gonzalez,” she shrieked from the flickering screen. “Freddy Patter . . . Freddy . . . listen to me! They are coming up through the orchestra pit. . . . They are going to kill you. Run, Freddy, run!”

## Chapter Ten:

### *What Price a Million Dollars?*

It flashed upon the consciousness of Mr. Patter that the advice, even aside from its miraculous delivery, was good. But he could not have acted upon it even had his legs been willing to function, which they were not. He only half realized that danger was approaching him. Uppermost in his mind was the realization that She had spoken to him.

She who had been a shadow had been wooed to life by his love. He had called to her across the great distances, and she had responded. The lads who sorted the phonograph records in the projection room could laugh that off! Death! What of that? He felt that he would rush gaily, gladly to meet it if only he could get his legs to work.

It was plain to him that the miracle had been no mere trick of his mind, for the theater was in a turmoil. The house lights had flashed up—including the violet spot generally reserved for the entrance of the orchestra leader. Ushers were dashing about, and there seemed to be a glad mêlée out in the foyer.

Men and women were on their feet, but there was no panic-stricken stampede for the exits. Instead the favored stratagem seemed a dive under the seats, and once this movement started there was no halting it. Five seconds later not a head was to be seen anywhere in the great auditorium save three covered with caps that were emerging from the orchestra pit in the neighborhood of the trombone section.

Mr. Patter was almost gratified to note the arrival of this trio. It

verified his good opinion of Janice Yule. She certainly knew what she was talking about.

He saw three men dart through the violet light and come running down the aisle toward Door Number One. He made one more effort to move, but his legs were numb and the upper portion of his body might have been frozen.

He observed the phenomenon that the trio seemed to be creatures out of the slow motion-pictures. To his racing brain it seemed that they must be delayed for hours in reaching the spot where he stood. . . . Perhaps they might never get there at all. There were pistols in their hands. Their footfall on the thick carpets was almost inaudible.

Then the door behind Mr. Patter was suddenly pushed inward. It struck him squarely in the small of the back, and he tumbled face down in the aisle. That broke the spell that had bound him, for a smash on the nose is a phenomenon as alarming to the senses as any miraculous warning that ever came from a cinema screen. Mr. Patter shot under a seat, and after that had no clear idea of what was happening.

The lights went out again. Later the electrician explained convincingly that his assistant, seeking further illumination, had jerked out the master switch. The intentions of the assistant apparently were unknown to the men in the aisle for they cursed violently. Feet—a regiment of feet—milled in the passage close to Mr. Patter's face. Mr. Patter's consciousness was hazy but not so hazy that he could not see the advantage of removing himself from harm's way. He attempted to crawl still farther under the seat, encountered the neck of a previous

occupant of the space and backed up to change direction. As he did so he stuck a leg into the aisle and a number of people fell over it in rapid succession.

There came a pistol-shot and another—then the slamming of Door Number One and the echo of footsteps receding along the corridor toward the alley exit. Mr. Patter was conscious of a weight across his ankles. He shook it off and got groggily to his feet. The lights came on again to discover him leaning over the unconscious form of a gunman.

A reconstruction of the raid after the police had taken the lone victim out of the hands of Captain Patter made it obvious that two distinct forces had been involved. Three gangsters, presumably in the ranks of Bull-Neck Beesey, had entered the theater via the stage door and had loitered in the wings until Mr. Patter had taken up his usual position at Door Number One. Then they had proceeded swiftly down the three iron stairs to the orchestra pit and had crossed midway between the first and second trombones.

111

Simultaneously another mob, said to represent the lingering ideals of the late Mr. Vest, had charged out of the crowd in the foyer and into the aisle.

The one bit of clinical material which survived the crash was identified as “Cow” Thomas, a hoodlum who had been numbered among the mourners for Mr. Vest. With great reluctance he admitted that poor staff work had been responsible for his part in the debacle.

“We was waitin’ in the lobby until we could git a chance to

slide into the hallway goin' to the alley door," he explained on his bed of pain. "We wasn't goin' to pull no raw stuff. We was goin' to be quiet until we could give this bozo a rap wit' out tellin' the whole house about it, see?"

"Then somebody starts a riot inside an' somebody in our mob yells fer us to git in. We got in. I fell over somethin' I think, or maybe I got socked."

Mr. Thomas was not sufficiently injured to give him immunity from a third degree, but it was plain to the police after an hour or two of questioning that he had not been taken into the confidence of the master strategists. He had been notified that there was a job to be done and that he had better assist in the doing of it. Mr. Patter had been pointed out to him as the victim, but aside from the fact that Mr. Patter was an usher of sorts he could ascribe no good reason for the attack.

112

Mr. Patter wondered that the detectives should have paid so little attention to various accounts of the miracle that had preceded the riot. It was plain that they ascribed it less to some telepathic linking of the kindred souls of Mr. Patter and Miss Yule than to mob hysteria. Mr. Patter, though he felt inclined to argue the point, was given no opportunity. The police refused to listen, and the reporters were clamoring.

A few hours later Mr. Patter was a hero. It came to him as a distinct surprise that his new classification had nothing at all to do with General Gonzalez.

When Freddy came home at midnight he found Miss Henderson sitting in the lobby.



“I’ve been waiting for you,” she told him frankly and with no trace of her usual superiority. “I was in the theater to-night. . . . I think you are the most wonderful man in the world.”

“Not at all,” deprecated Mr. Patter. “Anybody would have done the same thing.”

She shook her head.

“One man in ten thousand would have done it,” she stated in a disconcerting tremolo. “You stood your ground against those three men. . . .”

“There were at least eight,” he corrected her. “Not that it makes any difference.”

“Eight . . . I thought I counted three.”

113

“The others came in through the door. Different mob. . . . Three came through the orchestra pit.”

She shivered and drew her opera cape closer about her shoulders.

“I didn’t see all of it,” she said nervously. “I wish you’d tell me just what happened.”

He did not answer her at once. He was eager enough to tell her of how the wraith of Janice Yule had intervened to save him, but he knew how silly the story must sound to one of her logical mind. Had he been able to think of some less truthful but more convincing account of events he should have lied diligently. But he was tired, bruised and shaken . . . and anyway the morning

papers were pretty sure to make the most of the mystery. So he began at the beginning—haltingly—apologetically.

“I don’t know what to make of it,” he admitted. “Do you think that love is superior to space?”

“I am sure it is,” she whispered, and she smoothed down her skirt with a complicated movement that brought her closer to him on the divan.

“What would you say if I told you that a voice came to me warning me that these men were after me?”

“I should believe you of course, silly boy. Love has its own language and its own rules. Science and common sense have nothing to do with it.”

Mr. Patter should have felt encouraged, but unaccountably he did not. The conversation was taking a turn that he could not quite follow.

114

“Well, there was a voice,” he declared. “I heard it and so did everybody else in the theater. And I know it was a real voice.”

“Of course it was. What else could it be?”

“The cops said it was mob psychology, but they weren’t there to hear it.”

“The stupid police,” she whispered, and she laid a hand on his knee.

“What kind of voice was it? Who spoke to you?”

He sensed a climax that he could not understand, and something of her own excitement was expressed in his half-audible answer:

“Janice Yule. . . .”

“Janice Yule!” Her face was ghastly, and she seemed to be choking.

He got her a glass of water and stood holding her palsied hand as she drank it. Then with an effort she arose.

“It’s nothing at all,” she said. “I didn’t expect what you said. . . . I hate that woman.”

So Miss Henderson went to bed, and Mr. Patter remained in the lobby to accommodate anybody who might care to hear his story.

It was not until morning that he saw Margaret Banning. When he did encounter her in the Legation court he realized that he had expected to hear from her. He was glad to see her. She would not doubt any story he might tell her . . . even the truth . . . and she would not spoil his climax with any weird complexes.

115

“Are the stories in the morning papers true?” she asked nervously.

“I haven’t seen them all, but I suppose they are,” he said.

“I think you are marvelous,” she observed unaware that she was

plagiarizing the lines of Miss Henderson. “To fight two gangs like that . . . and without warning . . .”

“Didn’t the papers mention any warning?”

“Not the one I saw. . . . I have them all, but I only got through the story in *The Clarion*.”

“There was a warning,” he said impressively, and once more he repeated the details of it.

Mr. Patter was disappointed in Miss Banning. He had expected her to show proper credulity and in this respect her conduct was gratifying. On the other hand, he had envisioned her as gasping in surprise and staring at him with frightened eyes . . . and she did nothing of the sort. Instead she frowned and seemingly forgot about him. Obviously she was in deep thought, and that was certainly out of character.

“Are you sure it was Janice Yule who called to you?” she asked him suddenly.

“I’ve been listening to that picture every night since they put it on. I ought to know.”

“Puzzling thing, isn’t it? How do you suppose they worked it—and why?”

“I’ve been thinking maybe it was this telepathy they talk about . . . voices come thousands of miles by radio, why couldn’t they come without radio?”

He was ashamed of himself for attempting any explanation, and

yet he had to do it. Had she been skeptical he could have been haughty. Had she been amazed he could have been condescending. The fact that she was merely inquisitive upset all his assurance and altered his lines. She did not appear to be convinced.

“I don’t think there is much telepathy about this,” she said almost apologetically. “Telepathy is a communion between two brains.”

He looked at her sharply, but it was manifest that she could not have meant what her words implied.

“If it wasn’t telepathy, what was it?”

“I’m afraid I won’t go to sleep until I find out,” she told him with no hint of flippancy. “There’s something ghostly about it . . . just positively ghostly. I wish, honestly, that I were a big strong man—a man like you with no nerves at all. I really do. I’m so sensitive, and puzzles of all sorts just upset me for days.”

“I don’t see that it makes any difference to you,” he said just a little shortly. “I’m the one who ought to be upset.”

“I suppose it’s because I’m psychic. But I’m worried about you. I had a dream last night that you had a million dollars, and that a lot of people were trying to get it away from you. I woke up unnerved . . . just absolutely unnerved. . . . You haven’t got a million dollars, have you?”

Freddy gasped. As nearly as he could calculate his finances at the moment he owned eleven dollars and forty-five cents.

“I haven’t got a million dollars,” he replied convincingly. “I ought to be safe from people who are out to collect that much money.”

“I was certain you hadn’t,” she said, and for a long time afterward he wondered why she had been so exultant about it.

Whatever the press and the public might think of the psychic manifestations that had preceded the riot in the Super-Babylon, one little group of ultra-materialists stood ready to accept them as phenomena of the occult.

The remnants of Two-Gun Jack Vest’s belligerents grouped themselves about a table in the damp back room of Horse Koptick’s Coffee Shop and discussed the affair with hushed voices.

“I was watchin’ at a crack in the door, and I hears the Jane in the picture raise the yell,” testified Tony Pamello. “There’s somethin’ phony about it. I move we lay off this guy an’ go back to shovin’ the beer.”

“An’ that ain’t a bad idea,” agreed Red Mucket, the machine-gunner.

Al Novak, with a bandage on his hand to mark where one of Beesey’s bullets had creased it, shifted his gross body in his creaking chair and shook his head.

118

“Nix,” he counseled. “Nix! If all the moving-pictures in town began to howl bloody murder we stay in this racket, see. You’d have to hijack a hell of a lot of beer before you could get a

million dollars.”

“Million dollars!” scoffed Mr. Mucket. “I’d like to see about twenty-five that I could buy beans wit’. This mob couldn’t get a dime outen a blind man’s cup.”

In a way Mr. Mucket’s generalization was correct. The mob’s grief over the departure of Mr. Vest was genuine and logical for Mr. Vest had been more than a mere leader. He had been popular with the city hall. When his heroic lieutenants had gone forth to battle they had known that when they should be found in somebody’s stolen limousine on the outskirts of town, too dead to testify, Mr. Vest would mobilize many judges and aldermen and police officials to do them honor. It had been a fairly good life, working for Two-Gun Jack. If one had the misfortune to be taken for a ride of course the results were quite the same as if they had been enlisted with a lesser general. But if one lived, no matter what his sins, he could be assured of a prompt habeas corpus and an early acquittal.

Now the great man had gone to that bourne whence no clever lawyer could spring him on a writ, and the mayor was peevish with his surviving legionaries because they were discharging firearms inside the city limits too close to election day. It was all very dispiriting.

119

“But anyway we got to stick together,” argued Mr. Novak. “If we bust up we ain’t got a Chinaman’s chance . . . not one of us. If Beesey didn’t get us the cops’d start rememberin’ things. We got to stick together an’ while we’re stickin’ we might as well cash in on this here million bucks they been tellin’ us about.”

There was a moment of silence because instinctively the gunmen felt that Mr. Novak was right.

“Whose mob is it goin’ to be then if we stick together?” demanded Mr. Mucket, precipitating the question that was bothering the entire group. “Who’s goin’ to figure on the jobs and hand out the groceries?”

“Don’t look at me,” counseled Mr. Novak. “I don’t give a damn who runs the works so long as I get my cut. I been readin’ a lot about these here cooperative tea-stores, an’ I was thinkin’ maybe a cooperative mob would be a good idea. We can elect a manager an’ split the profits all round. . . . If you like the idea I was thinkin’ maybe I’d make a good honest manager.”

He looked around threateningly, and there were no dissenting votes. Then Mr. Mucket arose to address the meeting.

“But how do we know this guy will give us the million?” he inquired.

“The best way to find out is to ask him for it,” decided Mr. Novak. “You an’ me can go over an’ see him.”

120

So it came about that when Mr. Patter stepped from the elevator just before noon he found two young men in gray suits, silk shirts and gaudy socks waiting to see him.

“Anything I can do for you, gentlemen?”

“Sure,” said Mr. Novak who was a man of few words. “You got a million dollars, an’ we want it.”



Mr. Patter smiled. Such remarks, he felt, must be highly esteemed as humor in the silk-shirt belt.

“No kidding, what’s on your mind?” he replied.

“Don’t wise-crack with me or I’ll sock you down,” observed Mr. Novak. “We know you got a million dollars, see. We know where you got it, an’ we know it ain’t yours. Now get this through your dumb conk, we’re goin’ to muscle in. Maybe you get a split . . . maybe you don’t. We’ll find out about that when you come through.”

Mr. Patter was slow in taking alarm. He could not envision himself having any possible connection, dangerous or otherwise, with a million dollars. These strange-looking oafs might be maniacs but more likely they were just drunk.

“I assure you, gentlemen,” he iterated, “I haven’t got a million dollars.”

“Well, then, git it!” suggested the practical-minded Mr. Mucket. “An’ you’ll git it by Friday, or we’ll knock you off.”

“To-day is Saturday,” commented Mr. Patter. “I shall do everything in my power to oblige.”

## Chapter Eleven:

### *Alleged Liberator Craves Iowa.*

Messrs. Novak and Mucket stepped grandly out of the hotel and into a car that had been awaiting them, with motor running, in the court. Mr. Patter, after he had bowed in the graceful Old-World manner so effective in the movies and presumably in Pandorra, his adopted country, stood looking at the door that had swung to behind them.

Queer birds, he decided, and, maniacs or no maniacs, a bit cheeky going around that way asking people for a million dollars. He was startled to see that they had come in an automobile, but on second thought decided—and a pretty good guess it was—that they had borrowed it. He was about to forget them and move along to the theater when he discovered Margaret Banning among the palms on the opposite side of the lobby. She, too, was watching his recent visitors, and he was astonished to note the tensy in her pose.

The sight of her took his mind from the plea for the million dollars and none too pleasantly. Since Miss Banning stood between him and the door he must pass her on his way out, and he could not possibly escape speaking to her. She probably would be hopelessly adoring—as usual—and of course he could not blame her for that. But she would delay him and ask a lot of silly questions and otherwise prove that even a woman's admiration may get to be a good deal of a nuisance.

However, there was no help for it. He proceeded to the door. Although she gave no sign of having seen him she moved over to

cross his path. He hastily recalled all the good advice in the Super-Babylon's manual on politeness in expectation of her languid greeting and so was unprepared when she dispensed with the greeting and spoke as if continuing a conversation only recently interrupted.

"Do you know who those two birds are?" she demanded.

"A pair of drunks," he said impatiently. "What difference does it make?"

"What did they want?"

"A million dollars."

She started and her face became grave.

"What did they tell you?"

"They said that I'd have to get a million dollars for them Friday or get knocked off. . . . Silliest thing I ever heard of in my life."

"My dear boy, listen to me. Don't try to bull mama. Tell me the truth this time. Have you got that million dollars?"

In his exasperation at the query he failed to observe the change in the lady he had ticketed as "the gray mouse." "I told you this morning that I haven't anything like that amount."

"I know what you told me this morning. What are you telling me now?"

"I haven't a dime more now than I had when I spoke to

you last.” Mr. Patter, striving to retain the dignity that befitted a Pandorran conqueror, succeeded in being peevish.

“And anyway what business is it of yours?” he demanded. “Are you making up a list of bright sayings of drunks or are you drunk, too?”

“Dunks!” repeated Miss Banning. “Dunks! Don’t get it into your head that those lads are drunks. The big fathead with the bandaged hand is ‘Dopey’ Al Novak. And the one with him is Red Mucket . . . used to run the typewriter for Two-Gun Jack’s mob.”

All at once it came to Mr. Patter that the woman who was telling him this in a calmly assured but slightly sneering tone was somebody entirely different from the lady of the saucer-eyes that he had known as Margaret Banning. Just as suddenly he felt that he knew what had prompted the startling metamorphosis.

“Poor little girl!” he murmured to himself. He was not to be caught by any such trickery. Mr. Patter might not know much about psychological theories of the inferiority complex, but he could realize the motives that might cause a gray mouse to masquerade as a lioness. Why was it, he puzzled, that so many people sought to attract attention by appearing to be what they were not.

He took her hand and patted it gently.

“There, there,” he said soothingly. “Don’t let your nerves get the best of you.”

She freed herself from his clasp with an angry jerk.

“I think you are the most unbelievable sap in the whole world,” she told him fervently, and then she turned from him and ran across the court to the Legation.

124

Mr. Patter did not give much of his time to worry over the strange performance of Miss Banning. Her failure to respond to his kindness did not fit in, exactly, with his theory regarding her motives. But what of that? One couldn't expect women to be consistent even in their inconsistencies.

He sighed. It was just another heritage from Mr. Gonzalez, he supposed, that he should attract the hopeless yearnings of girls like Margaret Banning. Or was it really that? In her normal state Miss Banning had shown herself to be a creature of excellent common sense, despite her lack of experience in the world. Might it not be possible that she had fallen in love with him for himself alone? It was more comforting to think that she had. He let himself dream for a moment of raising Margaret to the supreme heights of ecstasy by marrying her. He saw himself at the altar, on a honeymoon at Niagara Falls, mowing the grass in front of a bungalow in a suburb where the rumors of war in Pandorra could never penetrate. . . . But always the face that he saw under the brown curls of Margaret Banning was the face of Janice Yule.

He sighed once more and allowed his mind to close Miss Banning's file.

125

Mr. Patter felt when he stepped across the marble flags beneath the rococo dome of the Super-Babylon that he was a votary come back again to a temple. Unconsciously he bent an ear to

catch a voice whose echoes might still be resounding from the combination Gothic, Byzantine and Javanese vaults. With disappointment no less keen because expected he realized that the distant tongue of Janice Yule was stilled, and then his mind restored the miracle.

The idea had not taken definite shape in the brain of Mr. Patter as to what new deference he might show his goddess in appreciation of her recent kindness but he resented, somewhat, the activities in the manager's office and the ticket coop which tended to show that the vulgar public was about to be admitted as usual. It seemed to him that it would be no more than a deserved tribute to Miss Yule were the Super-Babylon to be kept that day free from commercial taint as a shrine to the conquering power of Love.

His indignation over the mercenary attitude of Mr. Moe Eisenstark and others was given little chance to warm up. As Mr. Patter strode up the marble stairs a sergeant informed him that the diligent police were waiting for him and that a lieutenant would conduct the drill in his place.

Detective Sergeant Thomas Mooney and his squad destroyed the last illusion of the supernatural in the atmosphere of the Super-Babylon. They occupied deep leather chairs in the manager's office, smoked cigarettes, asked numerous questions of all and sundry employees and seemed to be anything in the world save priests before the altar of Miss Yule.

126

"Hello," greeted Sergeant Mooney cheerily as Mr. Patter entered. "You don't seem to be suffering none from the mix-up."

"I'm all right," acknowledged Mr. Patter stiffly.

"The guy you socked is still in the hospital," the sergeant went on. "He'll be lucky if he gets out this week. . . . Sit down an' take the weight off your dogs. We won't keep you long. Just wanted to ask you if you had any idea what started this riot."

"I haven't an inkling," said Mr. Patter.

Mr. Mooney grinned.

"Can it," he advised. "We ain't going to let this get any further, see? . . . Anything you say to us is safe. But we got the straight dope on who you are. . . . You can start from there."

"Start what from where?"

"You can just take it for granted that we know you're somebody from a certain South American Republic, see. Then you can tell us if there's anybody else up here from the same place who might want to see you knocked off."

"I don't think the men who caused that row last night were South Americans."

"South Americans! Not a chance. Good old one hundred per cent. American murderers those boys were. We can't put the finger right now on who was who, but we know what mobs was mixed up in it. I was figurin' if you could tell us who might be wantin' you out of the way, then we could tell who hired the gunmen."

During the questioning Moe Eisenstark had come out of his

private office to linger in the doorway behind Mr. Patter. Now he injected himself into the conversation pointedly.

“What’d he want to hire two mobs for?” he inquired.

“That’s what puzzles me,” admitted Sergeant Mooney. “That’s why I’m checkin’ up on the story of the lad we picked up here last night. We got a couple o’ witnesses who say the birds that come from the stage was Beesey’s men. An’ if that’s true I don’t see how Vest’s old mob can fit into the picture.

“Now right here, General—I mean Mr. Patter—right here we got some photographs of Vest’s mourners. I wish you’d take a look at ’em and see if you recognize anybody.”

Mr. Patter walked over to the table and studied the exhibit apathetically. It seemed a futile procedure. When one is lying face down under a theater chair in the dark it is unlikely that he can have any definite impressions of people who fight in the aisle. He turned over one portrait after another with his denial all worded and ready for speech. Then suddenly he gulped and clasped the edge of the table.

“There’s no joke about this?” he inquired of Mr. Mooney in a voice that he tried vainly to make casual.

128

“There sure ain’t,” protested Mr. Mooney.

“Well, then,” proceeded Mr. Patter, “who are these two?”

Mr. Mooney looked.

“Red Mucket and Al Novak,” he exclaimed exultantly. “Boy,



you picked a pair of good ones. Were they here last night?"

"I don't know," replied Mr. Patter dully. "I never saw either of them until this morning. They came to me and said they wanted a million dollars. . . . Which reminds me, Mr. Eisenstark, I'll have to have my salary raised if I'm going to save that much money by next Friday."

The police went on with their questioning but for all that Mr. Patter was aware of their performance they might have been in the next county. Miss Banning had recognized these men. That seemed to be evidence enough that her sudden hardness had not been assumed. Who, then, and what was Miss Banning?

At the same time the identities of Messrs. Novak and Mucket were clearly established, and it became reasonable to suppose that they had been in earnest in their demand for a million dollars. Mr. Patter wondered if General Gonzalez had ever come face to face with an experience such as this. He presumed not. Generals are not chased around by hoodlums with delusions of grandeur.

He realized of a sudden that he was shaking hands with Sergeant Mooney, and that the detectives were filing out of the office. Automatically he turned toward the door only to be stopped by a familiar name that apparently had fallen from the lips of Moe Eisenstark.

129

"Your lady friend, this here, now, Janice Yule, she's going to be in town next week," Eisenstark was saying. "They're going to open up the old Ellenjay studio to make what this Dumb Dora thinks is talkies. . . . Friday she gets here. I thought maybe you'd

like to know.”

Mr. Patter mumbled a reply and staggered out. His dejection was now complete.

It was plain that he would have to leave town at once. Let others have the glory of being mistaken for General Gonzalez and standing as targets for rival groups of sprightly gunmen. Such things had lost their appeal to the simple nature of Mr. Patter. He remembered a little valley in Iowa where there hadn't been a murder in eighty years and there by day the thrush sang in the bushes and by night the bullfrogs made cheerful noises winding their watches. . . . To-night he would have a week's salary coming to him and that would be more than enough to pay for a railroad ticket. . . .

As against that was the vision of Janice Yule speeding out of the West, perhaps in answer to his unspoken call. And with luck she might arrive early on Friday to view his body in the morgue. It was all very touching.

That night Mr. Patter went home early—his hours were virtually of his own fixing since he had stepped into the shoes of Captain Black. He packed a small trunk and a Gladstone bag and called for the porter. He was at the desk negotiating for their transfer to an outbound baggage depot when he became conscious that some one was looking at him. He knew without turning around that the some one was Margaret Banning, but he turned around anyway and faced her.

“Going away?” she inquired with all her old-time stage business of Little Elsa in the Big City.

“I was thinking of it,” he admitted.

“Why?”

“Business.”

“You aren’t going back to Pandorra?”

Mr. Patter felt that he should have liked to take Miss Banning by the shoulders and shake her until her horn-rimmed glasses fell off. He distrusted her interest in his affairs. He was at once irritated and baffled by her dual personality. He had seen two distinct Margaret Bannings and he could not tell which was which.

“I probably won’t live to get to Pandorra.”

“Oo, I shouldn’t say that. It hurts me to hear you talk like that. It really does. You’re the bravest man I ever knew in my whole life, and you’ve been the winner every time you met these horrid gunmen.”

“This noon you called me a sap. . . . I guess that’s really what I am.”

Miss Banning tried hard to blush but compromised on lowering her eyes.

131

“I didn’t mean that,” she lied. “I recognized those men from their pictures in the papers and I knew you couldn’t have heard of them down in Pandorra. It hurt me to think I couldn’t make you see your danger.”

“It’s all right. It doesn’t make any difference.”

“Oo, but I want it to make a difference. . . . Don’t you see I want it to make a difference? These men think they can run you out of town. I know that. . . . What I mean is I have a woman’s instinct for such things. I know you aren’t really going. You’re too big a man to run away from a pair of third-raters like them. You can’t fool me about that. But I did want to be sure that you wouldn’t be foolhardy.”

“Well, I’ll keep my eyes open.”

“I’m sure you will. I’ll sleep better to-night just because you told me so. . . . Good night.”

“Good night,” he said gruffly. He saw his baggage carried out, and then he sat down and tried to decide whether or not he was going to follow it.

Margaret crossed the court to her customary terminus in a telephone booth.

“He’s about to beat it,” she reported. “Ordered a ticket to Whosit’s Cross Roads, Iowa. Better get a couple of the boys down here right away and stop that. I’m a sweet unselfish girl, but I don’t go to Iowa.”

An hour later Mr. Patter, still in the throes of his great indecision, stepped out into the court to take the air. Two burly figures detached themselves from the shadow and approached him. He went back into the hotel and thence to bed.

## Chapter Twelve:

### *General Gonzalez, Meet “General Gonzalez!”*

In the Grand Hotel Belvedere, General Miguel Gonzalez, the Liberator, sat reading the evening papers and wondering at the prevalence of crime in America. He was somewhat puzzled to see occasional mention of some other Gonzalez, also from Pandorra if one could believe the reports, who, apparently, was getting into all sorts of trouble with gunmen and theater attachés. It was impossible, of course, that this other Gonzalez should be an impostor . . . surely the face of the Liberator was well enough known to the world to make such a deception out of the question . . . and yet . . .

He let the papers slide to the floor at his feet and lighted a long black cigar.

After all, what difference did it make whether or not this more unfortunate Gonzalez had any right to the name? If he could contrive to keep the attention of the press and the assassins on himself, so much the better for those who had at heart the cause of Liberty in Pandorra.

General Gonzalez no longer feared discovery in his new hiding-place. He had dropped out of sight by the simple expedient of transferring his baggage to the largest hotel in town, shaving off his mustache and registering as M. Gonzalez instead of Miguel Gonzalez.

Thus ensconced he had lived uneventfully for more than a week while planning new campaigns for the capture of Guava City and attempting to figure out the value of the loot he

had brought with him. The figuring of the value of the loot was the more interesting of the two pastimes. The general became convinced in less than three days of calculation that unless the assayers had lied to him the profit, even with generous discounts to agents, would run into a comfortable sum.

On the very night when Frederick Franklin Patter was considering a strategic withdrawal from the affairs of General Gonzalez there came to the suite of the Liberator, one Hiram Kelly, his American agent.

“What is the news from Pandorra?” inquired Señor Gonzalez.

“Plenty,” replied Mr. Kelly. “Your loyal troops have exhausted the supply of rum in Santa Cruz and are now thinking of calling off the war and going home.”

“Splendid,” observed the general. “If they go home we get out of feeding them.”

“There is a disadvantage,” commented Mr. Kelly. “If they go home you have to recruit them all over again before you can take the field.”

The general smiled.

“You do not understand,” he said. “It is always easy to recruit an army in Pandorra. All you have to have is a good cause—such as the restoration of Liberty—and plenty of ready cash to pay the first few weeks’ wages. As for cash, of course, we shall have plenty.”

“So you still have it,” Mr. Kelly observed. “I’d have put up

odds that Copal would be giving you a run for your money before now. . . . Where did you manage to hide the stuff?"

The general's smile broadened.

"Nobody knows that but myself," he said. "It is better that way. But you may rest assured the stuff is well hid."

"Do you think you can get it turned into money without Copal finding out about it?"

"I think so. The day I came to this lovely city I had an interesting conversation with a man named Beesey who has had much experience in a military way. He is a bootlegger. There is something called Prohibition in America, and a bootlegger is a person . . ."

"I understand," broke in Mr. Kelly. "I know many bootleggers. In point of fact I think I know your friend Mr. Beesey. What's the plot? Are you going to poison Copal with local hooch, or what?"

"Mr. Beesey will suit himself in choosing a method," said the general. "But he will cause Señor Copal to become incapacitated."

Mr. Kelly shrugged. In his association with General Gonzalez he had been concerned chiefly with the removal of enemies. What the general might decide to do with his friends and allies was, after all, the general's business.

"I've been reading some of the activities of Mr. Beesey," he recalled. "But it seems to me that Two-Gun Jack Vest

was mixed up in it some way. Is Vest another of your unofficial aides?"

"I do not know this Vest. It may be that he is a true patriot who hunts Pedro Copal merely because he happens to know that Pedro Copal is a scoundrel."

"I think not. The information I get is that Vest's mob is hunting somebody called Gonzalez. And that's what brought me here tonight. I'd like to advise you to get busy, sell your junk, buy what arms you're going to buy and get out of here while you're all in one piece."

"*Mañana* will be time enough."

"Not with the two birds running the show who have succeeded the late Mr. Vest. The head of the gang now is Al Novak. If he could quit bootlegging long enough to turn honest somebody would put him in an insane asylum. He's paired off with Red Mucket who is also only half there. Mr. Mucket runs a machine-gun as occasion demands, and I have heard his work very well spoken of. And these boys are gunning for Señor Gonzalez. All in all it occurs to me that the patriots of Pandorra are in dire need of arms, money and leadership. How about it?"

"I think it's some other Gonzalez who should worry," replied the general, unmoved. "However, it is possible that those who make a mistake may rectify it. So perhaps, as you say, I had better complete the great work. Make an appointment for me to-morrow afternoon to meet a representative of the Jefferson Arms Corporation. I shall see him in the grand foyer of the Super-Babylon Theater at two o'clock. Tell him I am



Colonel Angeles.”

“Why not meet him here?”

“Only you know that I am here. It is not well to advertise. On the other hand, to-morrow is Sunday, and in this moral land everything shuts up on Sunday but the cinema. Of the cinema houses the Super-Babylon is not the least obnoxious, but it is the one I know best. I visited it when I hired that eminent drill-master, Captain Black. . . .”

There were no gunmen in the lobby of the Super-Babylon when General Gonzalez and Jerome Appleby of the Jefferson Arms Corporation met there at the appointed hour. Nor were there any policemen in the manager’s office. Mr. Patter, who had taxied from his hotel without molestation by any of the men who had stood in the shadows of the court, was posting his corps of ushers just as if he expected to stay on earth for another twenty-four hours.

“Let us step in and see the picture,” suggested Mr. Appleby. “Later we can go to dinner somewhere and discuss our affair with some degree of privacy.”

So they passed in to the half-filled auditorium and took seats near the rear of the house.

The orchestra finished its colored music. The news reel ground out a varied program consisting of a dock fire in Boston, a factory fire in New York, a box-car fire in Chicago and a bonfire in Ishpeming, Michigan. Unnoticed by General Gonzalez, Mr. Patter came in out of the lobby to stand near

Station One. For the feature picture was beginning—an all vocal affair entitled *Speak Easily* with Janice Yule in the stellar rôle.

The opening scene was a cabaret into which came Janice as Mary Meredith, the cigarette girl. As in her previous picture, she was singing a little love song.

General Gonzalez gasped.

“*Dios!*” he ejaculated. “There is the queen of beauty . . . the most marvelous creature I have ever seen.”

“What a pity she has adenoids,” murmured Mr. Appleby. “They seem to be affecting her voice.”

“Even were she dumb I should love her,” declared the general.

“I dare say she is,” mentioned Mr. Appleby.

Behind them, unable to close his ears to their conversation, stood Mr. Patter. Only his training in the theater manual enabled him to hold his temper. Indignation surged within him and did not die when at regular intervals the general made some new attestation of regard for the beautiful Janice.

The general’s interest in American amusement methods quickened perceptibly as the picture went on.

“I do not know places like this one,” he informed Mr. Appleby. “It is like a cabaret and yet more like a club. What is your name for it?”

“That’s a speakeasy,” explained Mr. Appleby. He added a few

words concerning the nature of the speakeasy, but to its extra-legal affairs his companion showed slight attention. It was the flora and fauna of the speakeasy that had taken General Gonzalez' eye, and concerning these he demanded further explanation.

"Are there lovely señoritas like this one in speakeasies?" he demanded.

"Occasionally," admitted Mr. Appleby in a bored tone.

"I should like to see one," announced the general. "Is such a thing possible?"

"Unfortunately, it is," sighed the arms agent. "I hear they have removed the padlock from the Purple Buzzard. If you feel equal to it we can go out there after dinner. It's only about fifty miles."

"I shall consider myself in luck," replied Señor Gonzalez, and he resumed his amorous discussion of Janice Yule.

When the great drama of life among the night clubs had ended and Mr. Appleby and his companion stepped into the aisle, they collided with Mr. Patter who had just entered through Door Number One with a hammer in his hand. Mr. Patter looked at them and then at the hammer and showed great disappointment. The pair passed on into the foyer.

"Colonel Angeles," said Mr. Appleby in a half-whisper, "I am a little uninformed concerning your position in Pandorran politics. I presume, of course, you are with the Insurrectos."

“That is correct,” admitted the general.

“Then you probably are personally acquainted with General Gonzalez.”

Only the innate caution of the general prevented his committing himself at that.

“I know him slightly,” he said. “I haven’t seen him for years. I am his representative here, of course, but that is only because he is the provisional head of the government in northern Pandorra.”

“Is he an old man?”

“On the contrary I should say he is quite young . . . just in the full vigor of life. . . .”

Mr. Appleby did not seem to have noticed his companion’s indignation.

“I have reason for these questions,” he said. “There is a mystery here. I have heard many rumors, some of them from Moe Eisenstark, himself. It is just as well that you should know them. Did you notice that man with the hammer in his hand who came through the door just as we passed out?”

“Yes . . . I did not notice him closely, but I saw him.”

“Well, that man, if the rumor is correct, is General Gonzalez.”

The general gulped twice and thanked heaven that Mr. Appleby had given his attention to the lighting of a cigarette.

“Is that possible?” he managed to reply at last. “If you don’t mind I shall slip back and take another look at him. I should like to know General Gonzalez when we meet again.”

141

Over the dinner-table they discussed the arms market and arranged for the destruction of Guava City without undue delay. By the time they had reached the dessert only one minor item stood in the way of immediate relief for the Pandorran patriots—an initial payment of two hundred thousand dollars in gold which the suppositious Colonel Angeles thought might be available in two days.

“Will you have to see General Gonzalez about this?” inquired Mr. Appleby.

“I have carte blanche to do what I think proper in the interests of Pandorra,” said the general with dignity. “Under ordinary circumstances it might be well to consult him. On the other hand, if he is in hiding in the Super-Babylon Theater he must have a very good reason for wishing to preserve his incognito. We may call this business finished. And now let us go to the Purple Buzzard and see the beautiful ladies who frequent the speakeasies.”

They took the long drive to the Purple Buzzard in Mr. Appleby’s car, leaving the city over the same road where Mr. Patter and Estelle Henderson had had their first encounter with Mr. Beesey. It was nearly ten o’clock when they found parking space under the maples surrounding the converted barn that was the city’s latest shrine to prohibition. But despite the early hour they found business well under way.

142

General Gonzalez surveyed the big room with sparkling eyes.

“It is just like the picture,” he breathed excitedly. “And I see the tall and short glasses that remind me so much of the scenery in my own dear Pandorra. . . . But I do not see the beautiful lady.”

Mr. Appleby smiled.

“No,” he admitted. “She does not seem to be here to-night. Perhaps she finds it too long a jaunt from Hollywood. But there are other important people here. . . . Over there at the table in the corner . . . not the blonde . . . the two men.”

General Gonzalez looked.

“They are not ornamental,” he criticized.

“But they are very good customers of the arms manufacturers,” stated Mr. Appleby.

“The large one is Al Novak, and his companion is Red Mucket. They virtually own this joint. Maybe you’ve heard of them.”

“Certainly,” protested the general. “Every one has heard of them. I think I should like to meet them.”

“It’s a far cry from the beautiful Janice to Al Novak, but everybody to his taste,” said Mr. Appleby. “Come along and I’ll introduce you.”

Mr. Novak was on the verge of becoming maudlin when Mr. Appleby and General Gonzalez stopped at his side. He was on his feet instantly with a hand on his hip when

recognition erased other and deeper emotions from his face. By way of reaction he greeted Mr. Appleby warmly as did Mr. Mucket.

“Like you to know a friend of mine,” said Mr. Appleby. “Boys, this is a real soldier . . . Colonel Angeles from Pandorra.”

“Pandorra!” ejaculated Mr. Mucket. “Sit down, won’t you?”

They sat.

“Certunny glad you came,” mumbled Mr. Novak. “Wanna know something about Pandorra. We’re lookin’ for a million dollars, and the guy says he ain’t got it. Now, what we wanna know, is he phony or ain’t he?”

“Million dollars,” echoed General Gonzalez. “Who’s supposed to have it?” He hoped that the whiteness of his face might escape the attention of Mr. Appleby.

“Guy says his name’s Guzzolus,” maundered Mr. Novak. “But he’s a movie usher or somethin’. What we wanna know, is zis the right Guzzolus?”

“To the best of my knowledge he is,” replied the general gravely. Then he wiped the perspiration from his brow and ordered a round of drinks.

Pandorra seemed very far away.

## Chapter Thirteen:

### *Odd Movements of Sash-Weight Collector.*

To the alert mind of Mr. Patter came the suspicion that Dopey Al Novak and Red Mucket meant him harm. With this thought came another to the effect that there wasn't much he could do about it.

He made one more effort to leave town, only to meet his unknown shadows in the train sheds and receive another warning. He called Sergeant Mooney at the detective bureau and suggested a need for police protection. Mr. Mooney laughed at this quaint idea.

"It's the gunmen should be looking for police protection," he observed. "They've had all the worst of the argument so far. And on the other hand, if the public got the idea that we were making a kind of game preserve for movie ushers—which, of course, is what they think you are—there'd be a fine row. . . . I can get you sworn in as a special policeman if that would do you any good."

Mr. Patter thanked him and let the matter rest.

It puzzled Mr. Patter that the watchers at the gate never closed in on him unless he contemplated flight. He seldom saw them as he went to and from the theater. On the rare occasions when his path crossed theirs at the hotel they showed no sign of animus nor, for that matter, recognition. Their patience was what annoyed Mr. Patter. Had they cursed at him or threatened him with violence he might have been panicky, but he should have had the consolation of hoping that they did not feel sure of themselves. Their quiet aloofness showed only too plainly that



they *knew* what was going to happen to Mr. Patter and found no need for hastening destiny.

Monday was a cold day, even for spring as it is interpreted in northern latitudes. There was a thin rain blowing out of the west and a gray-white cloud rack overhead that pressed down upon the city closely enough to hide the tops of the office buildings.

Mr. Patter's bedroom window opened on to a court through which rose the largest and blackest iron smoke-stack within the city limits. And to-day as he stared through the rain-beaded pane at the cold wet surface of the stack, Mr. Patter voted Nature and the out-of-doors a clean miss.

A dirgeful eaves-drip was falling on a tin roof with a dismal insistent echo like tom-toms off stage. And the spirits of Mr. Patter, already lower than a wet collar, got no higher.

He turned from the telephone that had brought so unproductive a conversation from Sergeant Mooney. He looked at the calendar above the writing-desk—a calendar that appropriately enough advertised life insurance—and he roughly calculated that the distance between Monday and Friday might look like five days to some people but only three days to others. And in the latter class Mr. Patter readily installed himself.

146

He had not yet breakfasted, but even so he took the time to sit down on the edge of his bed and analyze the situation. If Messrs. Novak and Mucket should prove beyond argument,—and there was every reason to suppose that they would,—Mr. Patter could look forward to the closing of his account on Friday—he wondered what time on Friday; it made such a difference. With

that prospect it behooved him to consider carefully what use he would make of the days remaining to him; and he found material for a sermon in the planning. Three days to live . . . and he was arranging them on an operating schedule that considered every second. What might not a man make of a lifetime if he plotted all of his years as carefully? Mr. Patter revolved this in his mind and decided that he didn't know the answer and that he was wasting his time thinking about it.

With some difficulty he searched his memory for the reason why he had involved himself in all this mess. So many things had happened in the last few days, so many identities had been thrust upon him that his entire career from the unremembered cradle to the little grave around the corner had been cluttered up with gunmen, and police, and hoodlums, and screaming women. It was almost with surprise that he recalled how trouble had followed in the wake of the press photographs that presented him to the world as General Gonzalez.

147

Simultaneously came another thought: If he had acquired the troubles of General Gonzalez by stepping into the general's shoes, then presumably he could get rid of them by stepping out again. He considered this pro and con and could discover no flaw in it. Very few gunmen had ever been interested in Freddy Patter when he was avowedly and unequivocally Freddy Patter. It seemed merely the most elementary logic to suppose that once he should become Freddy Patter again the Novaks and the Muckets and the Bull-Neck Beeseys would seek green fields and pastures new.

True there was a drawback to this procedure. In the first place he did not know for certain that Messrs. Mucket and Novak

were dealing with him as the Liberator of Pandorra. Their chief interest seemed to be the whereabouts of a million dollars, and perhaps they would expect him to find it no matter what he might do to his name. In the second place, once he shed the honors that he had worn so easily he could expect no more favors from the great Moe Eisenstark. . . . He envisioned himself once more a second-class private in a purple uniform with gold frogs across the breast and his sensitive soul rebelled. . . . “Beg your pardon, sir, but there are plenty of good seats in the last row in the top gallery. . . . Beg your pardon, moddom, but will moddom please stand over here instead of in the aisle? . . . Beg your pardon, ladies and gentlemen, but would you please be so kind as to leave quietly through exits eight, six and three-A on account of a slight four-alarm fire back stage?” In the third place, there was Janice Yule, and she furnished the most serious problem of all. It was conceivable of course that she might love him for himself alone; the fact that their thoughts had intertwined in space seemed to indicate some such reaction. But jobless, unimportant, discredited, he would have little to offer her. The reverse of the picture was hardly more inviting: Were he to continue to delight the world as General Gonzalez he should presently be a corpse with even less to offer her. All of which made a puzzle which Mr. Patter despaired of solving.

In the end he decided in favor of remaining alive though broken-hearted. He hastily donned his hat and raincoat and went downstairs to begin a canvass of the newspaper offices.

His first stop was just outside the local room of *The Evening Telegraph* where an ancient at what was humorously called the information desk requested him to come back again in two or three days.

“But I have a piece of news for the paper,” stated Mr. Patter, under the impression that the unseen editor might be interested in getting a piece of news.

“We get lots of pieces of news,” deprecated the guardian.  
“Whoja wanta see?”

“The managing editor, the city editor . . . anybody,” explained Mr. Patter. “It’s important.”

149

The ancient departed and after a glance about the busy room picked the golf editor for his news.

“Guy outside named Pewter,” he said.

“Bill collector?” inquired the golf editor.

“Not one of the regulars, anyway,” reported the ancient.

“Well, tell him to go to hell and turn to the left,” advised the golf editor. “Safety first.”

The guardian delivered the message in part. Mr. Patter was saddened by the lack of technique that seemed to prevail in newspapers. In the words of the *Super-Babylon Manual of Etiquette* he was being given the air, or the bum’s rush. A well-trained usher corps would have carried out this maneuver with much apology, enveloping the entire process with such ceremonial and dignity that the rushee would think that he had been done a favor in getting tossed out. This old lad at the gate had no finesse. Mr. Patter became indignant with the indignation of General Gonzalez.

“Go back there and tell the city editor that General Gonzalez is here,” he snapped. “And be quick about it.”

“How many names you got?” demanded the guard; but he pursued the argument no further. Once more he stumbled back into the city room.

John Bales, the city editor, looked up petulantly from a pile of copy as the ancient delivered his message.

“Damn!” he said. “Is there a law that makes all these visiting liberators romp into the office on dead-lines? Bill. Oh, Bill . . .”

150

An eager-eyed youth in college clothes came leaping across the room.

“Here’s a chance for you, Bill,” said Mr. Bales. “There’s a genuine field-marshal out there who wants to see the city editor. You’re elected city editor. Go and see what he wants, if anything.”

So Bill, who until a month previously had been a campus correspondent unversed in the ways of newspapering, walked out to hear the plaint of Mr. Patter.

“Good morning, General,” he saluted easily. “I’d have recognized you instantly from your photograph . . . wonderful likeness.”

“That’s what I want to talk about,” said Mr. Patter. “I’m not General Gonzalez. My name is Frederick Franklin Patter, and you put the wrong name under the photograph you printed.”

Bill merely smiled.

“What’s the idea, General?” he demanded. “What do you want us to do?”

“I want you to put in a retraction or whatever you call it about the photograph. I want you to tell people that I’m not General Gonzalez. And then I want you to quit printing things about me.”

Inexperienced as he was, Bill realized that this was something new. He looked at Mr. Patter admiringly.

“You can’t get away with it, General,” he said. “Your face is as well known in this town as Lindbergh’s. Everybody was interested in you because you look so much like an American. We’d just look foolish if we tried to undo all that publicity.”

151

Mr. Patter looked at him pleadingly.

“It’s a matter of life and death,” he said. “I must let the world know there has been some sort of mistake. I can’t go on wearing another man’s name. . . .”

“We’ll do what we can about it,” promised Bill.

Mr. Patter departed to visit another editorial office. Bill went back to report to Mr. Bales. Mr. Bales for the first time that morning displayed some interest in Mr. Patter.

“This verifies something I’ve been suspecting for a long time,” he declared. “The Pandorran revolution has moved right up here into our well-known midst. Gonzalez is up here and Copal is up

here, and they're fighting each other with local mercenaries. The fact that Gonzalez wants to get back under cover shows that they're pushing him pretty close."

He called over a rewrite man and outlined his case in a few rapid sentences.

"Blow it up to a column," he said. "We've got a good picture of Gonzalez."

"What's he doing up here?" demanded the rewrite man.

"Trying to buy arms, I suppose. We had some sort of wild yarn from Santa Cruz that he was carrying a million dollars in cash. You might mention that. Hang the statement on his chief of staff. It's probably hooey."

152

Had Mr. Patter been interested in the psychology of newspapers he might have given the subject close study as he plodded his weary rounds from one city room to another. He might have discovered a phenomenon so far unexplained by science, to wit: that city editors, high priests of truth, never believe anything that is told them. And discovering this he would have realized how desperately he had muddled his affairs.

His little campaign of denial had resulted in catastrophe. Within a very few hours the city's dormant interest in Pandorran affairs would be aroused once more, and the portrait of the shrinking Mr. Patter would be back on the front page.

He was spared the knowledge of how completely he had failed because he was emerging from the last of the newspaper offices

before the first account of his suspected activities had reached the street. But he knew, somehow, that his withdrawal from the public life of Pandorra had been a wasted gesture. His unobtrusive shadows were still waiting for him to come out of this building as they had waited for him to come out of the others. He laughed bitterly at the thought that these two eggs would never know their mistake. Fate had made him a conqueror. A conqueror he must remain until the end . . . which would probably be some time before noon on Friday.

Destiny, however, seldom moves in a straight line. Just at this point in the affairs of Mr. Patter it positively staggered. A painter who had been doing something with a ladder just inside the rotunda of the Clarion Building had had all day for the performance of such acrobatics as he might elect. But he chose the particular instant of the arrival of Mr. Patter's shadows for an ill-advised movement that upset his ladder. The shadows, painter and ladder were suddenly parts of a shapeless but shifting mass.

153

Mr. Patter, as some historians will later point out, no doubt, was not a lightning calculator. But he could see an open doorway and a riot as far as the next man. The conclusions he drew from these simple premises were logical and almost instantaneous. He took a flying leap over the spot where the painter and the shadows had gone into their huddle and a few seconds later had cleared the sidewalk and alighted in a taxicab.

"The West End Railway Station," he directed. "And make it snappy."

The taxi driver complied. He caught the green light at the first



three crossings, swung into West Boulevard and was making forty miles an hour when he came on to the bridge leading to the terminal. The Fate that had headed so resolutely toward Friday apparently had gone to sleep. It awakened again as Freddy came into the station.

Mr. Patter had freed himself of encumbering attendants well enough. He had outdistanced pursuit and for the first time 154 in days was his own master. But now he was wondering what good might come of it, for a clerk at the ticket window told him that the next train leaving the city in any direction was not scheduled for an hour. He knew well enough what might catch up with him in an hour.

He accepted this new disappointment philosophically. Come to think about it he had become reconciled to the inevitable at the moment when he saw the shadows waiting for him in the Clarion Building. He might have foretold then and there that he wouldn't be going to Iowa to-night—or any other night. He walked down the grand stairway to the street.

And then Destiny stumbled again.

Mr. Patter had been walking circumspectly and with downcast eye, unconscious of his surroundings, when there crossed the fringe of his vision a figure that instantly focused all his senses . . . a dapper little man in expensive but weirdly cut clothes. . . . A tanned little man who walked like a soldier. . . . And it came to Mr. Patter suddenly that this was very likely General Gonzalez.

He did not reach that conclusion immediately. The memory of

the dapper little man was elusive. Long before Mr. Patter had identified him in his own mind, he had associated him with trouble. And so it came about that he was close on the general's heels when that great patriot strode out of the station and down a long areaway to a freight office.

Mr. Patter stood in a far corner of the office and watched the general go through a transaction which involved the transfer of several yellow bills and the issuance of numerous records in triplicate. Still the general's name and address fluttered uncaught in front of Mr. Patter's mind. Then suddenly there came to him a vivid picture of that day in the lobby when the flash-lights had blazed at him. . . . There had been a man . . . a little man with a derby hat . . . sitting on a bench near the rubber plants . . . a little man who had later talked earnestly with Captain Black. That little man he knew now to have been Gonzalez. And this one dickering with the freight clerk was the same one.

155

Having identified him, Mr. Patter saw no further object in following him so he merely stepped aside when the general passed out. Then he walked over to the counter where the clerk was still fixing up his records and passed a bill across to him.

"Newspaper business," he said in a low voice. "Will you tell me what that old bird was after?"

"Sure," agreed the clerk. "He was paying demurrage charges on a carload of sash-weights."

"For the love of Mike!" ejaculated Mr. Patter. "What the what does he want with a carload of sash-weights?"

He turned away and started back to his hotel.

Fate, having concluded the stumbling exercises for the day, proceeded on toward Friday.

## Chapter Fourteen:

### *Good Advice from Mr. Mucket.*

At six o'clock Tuesday evening Mr. Appleby, the gun merchant, paused in the day's occupation to curse Pandorra from Guava City to Santa Cruz and to wish that misfortune—broken legs or better—might be the early lot of the great soldier and distinguished statesman known to him as Colonel Angeles.

He had had an appointment with Colonel Angeles to discuss many problems of ordnance—not the least of which was to have been the whereabouts of the down payment. He had waited for Colonel Angeles most of the afternoon and had called all the hotels in the city without result.

"I can't understand these people," he observed peevishly to his secretary. "Here they are with Liberty put right in their hands, and they sit down to think about whether they are going to take it or not. Ignorant, that's what they are. No ideals. And, I'm telling you something, this bozo Gonzalez will never get another rifle like those Gullicker 30-30's for the money."

"I wouldn't wait for him," counseled the secretary who had only an academic interest in the sale of arms to benighted republics. She looked at the clock and remembered that she was hungry. "I just wouldn't wait for him. You've done everything you can for him. If his army gets all shot up it won't be your fault."

157

Mr. Appleby took what consolation he could out of this.

"I'm looking further than that," he told her. "When I go into a

deal like this I don't think of the bird that comes to me to sign the papers. I think of what's back of him—the suffering people.

“The poor peons mortgage their haciendas and hand over their pitifully few centavos to a tax collector and then some ordnance colonel comes up here with the loot and tries to shake us down for the long discount. It's always the same. The supposed buyer finds out that he'd rather spend the money for gin than for bullets. Many a South American revolution would have gone all to hell if I hadn't looked after it from this end.”

The secretary looked once more at the clock.

“But of course if he doesn't come in and you don't know where he is . . . well, that makes it hard,” she pointed out.

He grinned and reached for his hat.

“I know where he is, all right. He's out at the Purple Buzzard, trying to imitate Santa Claus. I hope I can get there before he has traded Guava City for hooch.”

Mr. Appleby's guess had been correct.

At that very moment General Gonzalez was sitting at a preferred table under the silk and tinsel canopy of the Purple Buzzard rejoicing in the fact that the hat-check girl had just greeted him as “Bill.”

Señor Gonzalez had not forgotten his appointment with Mr. Appleby. The memory of it was one of his present irritations, associated as it was with a cablegram that had just arrived from

Santa Cruz. For things were not going so well in the Republic of Pandorra. Lacking arms and money, the impatient Insurrectos had sought to obtain both by the simple coup of a wholesale coalition with the Federalistas. The general found himself in the position of seeking munitions for an army that did not exist to fight for a cause that had gone out of business. And under the circumstances he did not feel capable of arguing with Mr. Appleby. When Mr. Appleby arrived just as Señor Gonzalez was getting around to teaching the blonde hostess some interesting things in Spanish, the Liberator was much annoyed.

“Good evening, Colonel Angeles,” greeted Mr. Appleby cheerfully enough. “I must apologize for having misunderstood you. I thought you said that you would meet me in my office this afternoon. It wasn’t until I was on my way out that I got to thinking you might have mentioned this place.”

“Your misunderstanding goes further than that,” stated General Gonzalez suavely. “I can’t remember saying that I was going to be anywhere.”

“No matter,” deprecated Mr. Appleby. “I just wanted you to know that I succeeded in getting another two per cent. discount out of the firm. The contract will be all ready for you as soon as you can post the initial payment.”

159

Señor Gonzalez shook his head sadly.

“That negotiation will have to be postponed,” he said. “News from my constituency is disconcerting. Just at this moment we don’t need guns so much as we need troops. *Mañana* will be time enough to talk about arms.”

Mr. Appleby looked at him through half-closed eyes. He was beginning to be just a little suspicious of the intentions of Mr. Angeles or whatever his name was.

“So the news is disconcerting, is it?” he murmured.

“That is to say it is excellent news,” Señor Gonzalez hastened to correct. “What I meant to impress upon you was the fact that as things are going the arms question is not now so serious as it was when I came up here.”

“The arms question is always serious where the sacred cause of Liberty is involved,” remarked Mr. Appleby. “Now I want to point out to you that for the price you can’t do better than those Gullicker 30-30’s. They’re a nice piece of goods . . . just like new and already packed in sewing-machine boxes. We have ’em where we can make a delivery in ten days . . . lay ’em right down on the dock in Santa Cruz.”

“I have every confidence in you,” his elusive customer assured him. “Your rifles are excellent. I saw them used in the Perez revolution two years ago and in the Alcatraz revolution the year before that. The best thought in Pandorra and the highest ideals have always been furthered by my country’s association with your excellent firm. But I am afraid that for the present we must suspend negotiations. I can not proceed until I hear something further from the men in the field.”

160

Mr. Appleby grunted. From where he looked at the situation it seemed evident that Colonel Angeles was taking the sacred cause of Liberty to another shop for outfitting.

“Isn’t our discount all right?” he demanded.

“Excellent,” agreed the Liberator.

“And don’t we give the same cuts that any other business house would give to the agent of a patriotic organization?”

“There has been no complaint that I have heard of.”

“You stand to put thirty thousand dollars or so in your own pocket—to present to the Pandorran Red Cross or what private charity you see fit to patronize. Do you want more?”

“Viewing the matter from a high moral plane, that makes no difference. What commissions I might receive I should hasten, of course, to turn over to our relief workers. But at the same time I point out to you the difference between a five or ten per cent. cut and a hundred per cent. cut. If we are not put to the necessity of buying arms, then we have a respectable ordnance fund on our hands. I merely mention it.”

Mr. Appleby nodded. It was plain to him now that nothing further was to be gained through argument with Colonel Angeles. Something had happened to upset a deal that had been within a few hundred thousand dollars of completion. He did not believe for a minute that the great movement in the cause of Liberty had expired. In a country like Pandorra it never expired.

161

The alternative inference was that Colonel Angeles had been reached and was now acting on his own initiative without reference to General Gonzalez. Somewhere in the background was a million dollars that by all the rights of patriotic effort and previous experience in revolutions, should belong to the Jefferson Arms Corporation. It was only too evident that some



one was overlooking this lien.

In the first place who had the million? The reports from Santa Cruz indicated that three prominent Pandorrans were in town: General Copal, General Gonzalez and Colonel Angeles. General Copal so far had not been heard singing in the night clubs—proof enough that the loot was not in his hands. Colonel Angeles might know something about it, but his program of celebration so far had not been sufficiently elaborate to indicate such large financial backing. That left General Gonzalez, the mysterious figure who worked in a picture show and hid himself on the front pages of the newspapers.

Mr. Appleby kicked himself. He must be getting old, he felt. He must be losing his cunning entirely when he should thus waste his time talking to underlings. General Gonzalez, of course, must have the money. Only a man with a lot of money or none of it could afford the eccentricity of an association with the Super-Babylon.

162

“I have an idea that the revolution still needs arms,” he said suddenly. “Our intelligence service in South America is very complete. We know that a warehouse full of guns is a nice little nest egg for a shrewd politician. I should hardly be so stupid as to mention these facts to one who knows them as well as you do.”

The pseudo Colonel Angeles yawned. He had been recalling the broad plazas of Guava City, the flower-decked esplanades, the fountains, the cool avenues under the palms and the tinkle of ice in tall glasses, but try as he would he could remember no such place as the Purple Buzzard. From the far side of the room the

hat-check girl was winking at him across Mr. Appleby's shoulder, and the blonde hostess was signaling him with a pretty white hand. It occurred to him that he loved these simple, whole-hearted Americans . . . these sweet unmercenary little girls who loved him for himself alone and called him Bill. Even with the fall of the capital into the hands of the Liberators, Pandorra would never seem quite the same as this.

"I'm afraid it's no use," he murmured sadly. "For many months we have been fighting the heroic fight. We have been suffering all the misfortunes of war—not excluding the victory that we could just as well have done without. We have sacrificed our personal comfort for a high national ideal if you know what I mean. Our motives can not be questioned."

163

"Of course not," admitted Mr. Appleby.

"On the other hand," went on Colonel Angeles, "there is a limit to which men can be pushed. We know now that the limit has been reached. Our army will go back to civil life and resume its suffering under the cursed régime that now sits in Guava City. We can do nothing until the army gets as tired of civil life as it now is tired of being an army.

"Under the circumstances it seems hardly advisable for us to spend a lot of money even on your Gullicker 30-30's which are undoubtedly a great bargain. And now if you will excuse me, Mr. Appleby, I shall say good evening and express the hope of seeing you next week. I have an important business conference."

Mr. Appleby arose, bowed and took his leave while the blonde hostess returned to learn more Spanish. But Mr. Appleby did not

step out into the Purple Buzzard's cinder strewn dooryard. Instead he stopped at the side of the head waiter and greeted him with a sizable offering. He was escorted through an office room and a corridor to a den behind the kitchen where Mr. Mucket was discovered in the serious business of getting drunk.

"Whatcha want?" snarled Mr. Mucket.

"I'm looking for this bird Gonzalez," said Mr. Appleby without bothering to waste time on any preliminary exchange of pleasantries. "If I went out to find him right now where do you think I ought to go first?"

164

Mr. Mucket looked up almost sober.

"You, too?" he questioned. "Ain't it possible to work up a racket in this town without havin' every bozo an' his brother hornin' in on it?"

"Forget it," admonished Mr. Appleby impatiently. "You know I'm not trying to horn in on anything. I've got some business with this Spick, see. His agent's trying to put the cross on me, and I'm going to headquarters."

Mr. Mucket blinked solemnly.

"You're goin' to have a hell of a time," he growled. "If you can bust through the guns you ought to find him now at the Morgan Hotel—right next to the Legation. But believe me, you'll have some competition. We ain't the only mob tailin' this bird. Beesey's out after him, and there's guys right on his heels we ain't never saw before."

“Dicks?”

“Naw, we’d know the dicks. An’ they ain’t body-guards because every now an’ then he tries to ditch ’em.”

Mr. Mucket’s indignation grew as he talked.

“We been figurin’ maybe we better knock these eggs off,” he confided. “Maybe if you was to wait till to-morrow . . .”

“This is important business,” interrupted Mr. Appleby. “I want to see him to-night. Anybody else looking for him besides your mob and Beesey and these strangers?”

165

Mr. Mucket hesitated.

“They’s a jane in it,” he said after a pause. “Her name’s Estelle Henderson or something like that. She lives at the same hotel he’s in. I been figurin’ she’s playin’ a game of her own. She goes in an’ out of the joint at almost exactly the same time he goes, an’ she keeps sneakin’ into the theater alley. She makes me nervous.”

“I don’t think I’ll bother to worry about her,” said Mr. Appleby. “It’s a pretty safe bet she can’t compete with three mobs. I’ll ride into town and see what I can stir up. If any of your lads telephone you might tell them to lay off while I’m working.”

“What business you goin’ to cut with this egg?”

“Sell him some hardware for his bare feet down in Pandorra. Why?”

“Nothin’, except you better get the job done by Friday,” commented Mr. Mucket, and he returned to his more serious business of getting drunk.

## Chapter Fifteen:

### *A (Possible) Greek Comes Bearing Gifts.*

Mr. Moe Eisenstark walked to Station One and took a look at the house. An outsider might have envied him a pleasant sight, for the entire main floor was filled with patrons each of whom represented a cash payment of fifty-five cents. The lobby behind Mr. Eisenstark was filled with votaries waiting for a chance to sit down, and the street outside the theater was blocked by a queue that taxed the energies and patience of a special detail of police.

Mr. Patter, who had come to the same station on his evening tour of inspection, saw all of this and ventured to congratulate Mr. Eisenstark.

“Looks pretty good,” he commented. “The publicity—or maybe the splendid picture of Miss Janice Yule—is certainly dragging in the customers. No use talking, the vocal cinema is what gets ’em.”

Mr. Eisenstark snorted.

“You should keep right on running revolutions,” he advised. “In the, now, movink-picture business you ain’t so hot. Some day maybe I tell you who saved this here picture, such as it is. . . . An’ it won’t be this Yule dumbhead. It’ll be Moe Eisenstark. If you ask me it’s a terrible picture anyway.”

Mr. Patter shrugged. The attitude of Mr. Eisenstark was of no particular moment. He had other and bigger things to worry about.

“The house is packed, anyway,” he mentioned. “And there’s a mob out in the street.”

Mr. Eisenstark looked at him pityingly.

“What difference does that make?” he demanded. “The reason the people is out in the street is because they can’t get in an’ the reason they can’t get in is because we got a house full of hold-overs. Some of these eggs has been in here since the afternoon show. I bet some of ’em brings their lunch.”

“There are always some hold-overs,” argued Mr. Patter.

“Some,” snorted Mr. Eisenstark. “Sure we always got some. Always there is a percentage of the guys that think when they pay fifty-five cents they get a ninety-nine year lease. But why should anybody stay here an’ look at this, now, tripe?”

“I think it’s a beautiful picture.”

Mr. Eisenstark seemed close to tears.

“I kin be thankful you ain’t a fifty-five-cent customer,” he retorted. “You gotta stand up. If you could sit down there’d be one more nut waiting in the line outside. Me, I think maybe I’ll come in here an’ holler ‘Fire’ after each show.”

“There’s nothing much I can do to change the situation,” said Mr. Patter patiently. “There’s nothing in the rule book that gives us the right to throw anybody out. . . . If we could spot the hold-overs, perhaps . . .”

“I ain’t arguin’ that,” said Mr. Eisenstark. “You can’t

throw 'em out. If you do they go over an' roost in some other theater an' make a line outside like the one we got now, an' we got to have the advertising. What I can't figure out is why they stay. Now that bald-headed guy over there in the corner . . . the one with the gray-checked suit. He's been here four hours. Myself I seen him come in. What's he waitin' for? He ain't lookin' at no picture."

Mr. Patter followed the direction of Mr. Eisenstark's glance, then turned hurriedly away.

"I couldn't say for sure," he answered. "But he looks to me like one of the mob who started the riot in here the other night."

Mr. Eisenstark nodded.

"I thought so," he observed. "In that case you can bet there's more gunmen hanging around here. I suppose they're still waiting for you."

He mentioned this sadly and with an eloquent shake of his head. It was plain that he resented these social connections of Mr. Patter. His manner rather than his words indicated his hopes that Mr. Patter might arrange to have assassins wait for him outside—preferably in the alley where they would not interfere with the line of prospective customers already jamming the sidewalk.

Mr. Patter nodded acquiescently. He, too, was of the opinion that the gunmen should be forced to stay somewhere outside the theater, but his ideas of what to do about the matter were hazy.

"I don't suppose you want another fracas in here?" he inquired in a tone that Mr. Eisenstark took to indicate



regret.

“We got enough of that kind of publicity,” Mr. Eisenstark demurred. “Maybe we could, now, make up a slide and flash it on the screen that you’re waiting to make a riot two or three blocks down the street.”

“I think maybe I’d better go home.”

“Nix. Not before so many witnesses you don’t start out of here. Is it a business if these, now, bozos should knock you off in the lobby?”

“A corpse is the only thing your architect left out of the decorative scheme,” mentioned Mr. Patter bitterly. “At what hour can I get killed without injuring business?”

Mr. Eisenstark sighed.

“We change the program,” he said. “We run this terrible thing with Yule in it first when we start off the last show. After it’s over you can duck out through the orchestra and out by the stage entrance. I take you myself.”

“I can find the way to the door,” suggested Mr. Patter.

“I ain’t so sure,” returned Mr. Eisenstark. “In my life I hire many ushers. . . . Anyways I take you out myself.”

A week ago Mr. Patter would have explained this offer of a personally conducted trip to the back door as one of Mr. Eisenstark’s idiosyncrasies. Now he knew that Mr. Eisenstark had no idiosyncrasies. Mr. Eisenstark never acted

without a motive and if Mr. Eisenstark decided to serve as usher in the aid of his chief of ushers it was because he had some dark and mysterious purpose. Mr. Eisenstark probably had arranged with the press photographers to get their cameras and flash-lights set at the stage door for a big action picture of his taking off. . . . “Gonzalez, the Liberator, Dies in Heroic Fight in Theater Alley.” Yes, that would be very much like Mr. Eisenstark.

Mr. Patter scarcely listened to the thrilling voice of the wraith-like Janice as in her great dramatic moment she proved herself to be just a good sweet girl, and not the Jezebel she had appeared to be when she was getting evidence to convict somebody of something. He saw her radiant beauty sweep past him as in a mist and his heart cried out to her for a repetition of the previous miracle. He needed her more than ever. Mentally he was groveling at her feet. But this time no warning voice came from the screen to rescue him and confound his foes. . . . Too late he remembered that she was on her way eastward from California and out of touch with his telepathic broadcast.

Eventually the picture ended. The hold-overs held over. The late-comers dashed into the aisles and lost their seats to later-comers. And under cover of the mêlée, Mr. Eisenstark led Mr. Patter up through the orchestra pit and on to the stage.

Mr. Patter had never been in this part of the theater before, and the weird atmosphere was not reassuring. Over to his left was a fire wall, a door in which gave a view of stage-hands putting together the pieces of *Moonlit Venice*, for a prologue. Mr. Patter took what comfort he could from the visible presence of stage-hands. But it was slight. They were

creatures of another world than his, a world in which, presumably, there were no lurking gunmen or plotters from Pandorra. He felt a tinge of envy as he considered them—gentle souls who possibly could look forward to dying in bed.

On Mr. Patter's side of the wall the area behind the proscenium arch was in a shadowy twilight through which red exit lamps glowed dully. It was an eery place even without the perils that lurked beyond the stage door. Voices whispered across the void from nowhere. Footsteps echoed in unseen corners. And ahead a vague form flitted for a moment through the hazy aureole of a blue light, and then was gone.

Mr. Patter was conscious of an amazing collection of junk at his left . . . the wreckage of a broadcasting station, it seemed to be save for a sort of periscope on the ground glass of which was reflected the big cinema screen in miniature.

"What's all this stuff?" he demanded, his mind for the moment distracted from Mr. Beesey and the relicts of Mr. Vest. "What's all the radio equipment for?"

Mr. Eisenstark grunted.

"You turn right here," he directed. "Look out you don't trip. The door's right at the end of this passage. I guess you can get out all right without me. Good-by and good luck."

172

Almost immediately Mr. Eisenstark was gone. Mr. Patter thought bitterly that Mr. Eisenstark had excellent judgment but no imagination. Mr. Eisenstark was not in the least concerned what might lie beyond the stage door. That was the business of Mr. Patter.

Mr. Patter opened the door cautiously and peered out. To his surprise the alley appeared to be empty. No chatter of machine-guns or rain of sawed-off shotgun slugs greeted him as he passed through the glare of the light above the exit. But he did not stop to consider this phenomenon. In a few seconds he had rounded the end of the building and was in the passage leading to the street.

About half-way through the passage he collided with a woman and tried to display no emotion of gratitude when he discovered her identity: Estelle Henderson.

“What are you doing here?”

“What do you mean by following me?” she countered indignantly. “Can’t a girl walk through an alley without having to explain her motives to every oaf in the neighborhood?”

“I am not every oaf in the neighborhood,” stated Mr. Patter, “and I’m not following you. I just came out of the theater. I always come this way.”

“I’m sorry I was so rude,” murmured Estelle. “Really I . . .”

“Don’t bother about it,” advised Mr. Patter, attempting to edge around her into the fairway to the street. “Honestly I’m in an awful hurry.”

173

“Please don’t be angry with me,” she pleaded.

And single-minded as he had been on the subject of eluding the snipers with which the night might well be filled, he stopped short. It was maddening, this feeling that Estelle Henderson had

once been closely linked with his destiny, perhaps in another existence. From the first she had reminded him of some one, and here in the shadows of the alley where her face was mercifully hidden, the resemblance seemed all the greater. His impatience at having encountered her suddenly disappeared.

“Listen,” he said. “I’ve got to get out of this. I haven’t time to be angry, see. All the gunmen in this end of town are having a field day, and I’m to be Queen of the May.”

“I was afraid of that,” she said with no hint that the news might have shocked her. “I was wondering if they might be looking for you.”

“What do you know about it?” he demanded suspiciously.

She seemed just a trifle disturbed.

“Intuition,” she explained lamely. “A woman’s intuition. Then, besides, I saw some suspicious-looking men to-night, and I was sure they were some of the gang that shot at you the night you took me taxi riding.”

Mr. Patter looked at her oddly. Mention of that shooting reminded him of many things that he had forgotten in the stress of circumstance, not the least important of which was the fact that trouble dogged the footsteps of Estelle. It reminded him also that the peril at his own heels had not yet been shaken off.

“I think it’s a perfectly romantic thing,” she said with a low quaver in her voice. “You live in the atmosphere of a medieval tragedy . . . bravos waiting to kill you . . . you eluding them and

fighting on with a kingdom as the stake . . . a kingdom and perhaps a woman's love. It's like a novel of the cloak and sword our meeting here in this crooked lane . . . we might almost be trysting in a little Old-World street in Spain."

He looked anxiously over his shoulder.

"I didn't come trysting," he remarked brutally. "I always come out this way."

"That is why I came here," she whispered coyly. "I knew I should meet you. I wished to warn you . . ."

He seized her by the arm and led her rapidly to the street. No lurking gunmen greeted him. The avenue seemed deserted of pedestrians. A taxi was cruising along the curb, and he thrust her into it. She moved over to make a place for him in the seat, but he did not enter.

"Aren't you coming along?" she demanded in aggrieved surprise.

"Oh, no," he answered. "I have an engagement to address a meeting of the local patriots. I merely wished to be certain that you got started for home in safety."

And then, before she could alter the situation, he had slammed the door and hurled himself into another taxi.

175

He was well away from the theater before a sedan loaded with the partizans of Mr. Beesey came rolling slowly around the corner.

En route to the hotel Mr. Patter lay back in the cushions and

congratulated himself on his maneuver with Estelle. Whatever her motives or her connections, it was manifest that safety lay somewhere outside her sphere of activity. It would be a simple matter now to stop at the side-door of the Legation, walk through the lobby and across the court and enter the Morgan Apartment Hotel unmolested . . . that was one advantage of a concentration of gunmen, it centralized the danger. All in all he had behaved quite skilfully in what might have been an unpleasant situation. . . .

So the cab came to its destination without incident. Mr. Patter paid his bill and alighted. He stepped fearlessly across the sidewalk to the door whistling a tune entitled: *Who Gave My Sweetie Those Big Black Eyes?* And then with a shock he became aware that a shadow had stepped out of the blackness behind him. . . . A footstep merged with his own as he crossed the lobby. . . . A sinister figure wound itself in the revolving door that led to the court. A hoarse voice whispered:

“General Gonzalez, I’ve been waiting for you. . . . It will be worth thousands of dollars to you if you listen to me.”

But Mr. Patter apparently could not think of a suitable answer. In addition to that he had fainted.

## Chapter Sixteen:

### *Astounding Behavior of Simple-Minded Arms Merchant*

Mr. Patter revived to discover himself in his own room submitting to first aid at the solicitous hands of Mr. Appleby. Mr. Appleby, of course, he did not recognize. It was comforting to observe that this stranger seemed anxious to restore him to health when so many strangers might have had other ideas.

“You’re coming around all right, General,” said Mr. Appleby.

Whereupon Mr. Patter came close to fainting a second time. The voice was the same he had heard when he came through the swirling doors at the Legation.

“It’s nothing,” Mr. Patter murmured apologetically. “Dizzy . . . working too hard. I’m not General Gonzalez. So many people think I am. My name’s Patter.”

Mr. Appleby smiled and nodded. “I shall call you whatever you wish to be called. I had a customer once who wanted to be called Jasper.”

“Do I know you?” inquired Mr. Patter.

“Not yet,” admitted Mr. Appleby. “My name is Appleby, and in my waking hours I work for the Jefferson Arms Corporation. My company supplies most of the firearms used in America.”

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” observed Mr. Patter, reviewing rapidly some of the armed men of his



experience.

But Mr. Appleby declined to argue.

“I know you are thinking of the Horst Gun Company, makers of the well-known Horst pistol,” he replied. “But don’t be too well taken in by what they have to say. What would you think if I were to offer you a genuine Gullicker 30-30—with bayonet, mind you—for ten dollars the copy delivered.”

“I should think you were just a little too late,” sighed Mr. Patter. “One rifle wouldn’t do me much good now. I need a whole lot of them.”

“That’s just my argument,” broke in Mr. Appleby. “That is just what I was saying to Colonel Angeles.”

“Who’s Colonel Angeles?”

The knowing smile broadened on the patriotic visage of Mr. Appleby.

“My error . . . I keep forgetting that you are Mr. Patter. Let us mention for the sake of argument that Colonel Angeles is supposed to be up here representing the insurgents in the great revolution which will restore Liberty to the people of the Republic of Pandorra.”

“I’ve heard of Pandorra.”

“And who has not? The whole world is concerned with the situation in that progressive nation. . . . Would you prefer to converse in Spanish?”

“I don’t know any Spanish.”

“Of course not. . . . As Mr. Patter you naturally would not. It is better of course to speak English.”

178

Mr. Patter said something under his breath which Mr. Appleby took to mean: “Oh, very well.” So he proceeded.

“You haven’t any idea,” he said, “of the troubles we run up against in the gun business. Without mentioning Colonel Angeles—because I promised that I’d say no more about him—I say even without mentioning Colonel Angeles patriotism and graft often run hand in hand.”

“What of it?” inquired Mr. Patter helplessly.

“What, indeed?” agreed Mr. Appleby. “When a man is a patriot and gives his All for a cause, he is entitled to get his out. You naturally expect him to drive a hard bargain, and to get the most he can out of the business not only for his constituents but for himself.”

“I knew a man in Ottumwa, Iowa, who could spit clean over a box-car,” ventured Mr. Patter helpfully.

“It is only right that patriotism should have some material rewards,” went on Mr. Appleby. “It is all very well to have ideals. You and I both have ideals . . . everybody knows that. But we are also practical men. That is demonstrated by the fact that we have succeeded where others have failed.”

Mr. Patter would have yawned at this point—a yawn seemed just the proper procedure—but he began to be concerned

179

about Mr. Appleby. Mr. Appleby might have ideals and also be a practical man, but the symptoms indicated that he might also be a goof of the first water. Mr. Patter listened to his talk on patriotism as he might have listened to a voice from another world, the while he pondered on the relative advantages of being shot at by gunmen and talked to death by maniacs.

“No revolution can be fought without guns,” came the original philosophy of Mr. Appleby crashing through Mr. Patter’s ruminations.

“Have you any samples with you?” demanded Mr. Patter.

“Not a one,” was the comforting reply. “But I can get some here to you to-morrow.”

“No hurry. A week or two from now will do.”

“Might just as well have them to-morrow. . . . Always glad to show them . . . especially that Gullicker 30-30. That’s a buy, if I do say it myself. . . . But as I was saying, I represent a company that is made up of business men. My people don’t expect to get something for nothing. They never have been able to get anything for nothing in all the years they have been in business. They expect to pay all the usual commissions . . . and I mean by that that they are ready to pay the biggest commissions paid by anybody. They don’t want, of course, to be shaken down by some crook who would take his country’s money and not buy any guns at all. . . .”

“Suppose you tell me all that to-morrow when you bring me the samples,” suggested Mr. Patter. “It’s frightfully interesting and all that. I never knew there was so much trouble

about selling guns. I thought you just had 'em and somebody bought 'em. But as I say I'll feel much more like hearing you tell about it to-morrow."

Mr. Appleby seemed acquiescent.

"Would it be impertinent if I were to inquire about what work you are doing at present?" he asked.

"I am drill-master for the house corps of the Super-Babylon Theater," said Mr. Patter mechanically. "We don't use any guns over there . . . nothing but little riding crops nine and a half inches long."

Mr. Appleby shrugged.

"I knew that I'd be getting somewhere if I came to talk with you," he declared. "You get an idea and you stick to it. . . . Well, nobody will ever say that Appleby can't play that game too. I'd like to have you know that I think the house corps at the Super-Babylon is the best in the city. It would have to be to keep the spectators in when the terrible pictures start to run."

"Terrible pictures!" Mr. Patter's tone was cold and menacing. "Have you seen the latest with Janice Yule?"

"Janice Yule! Why, that's just what I was talking about." He stopped short as he caught the light in Mr. Patter's eye. "That is to say it is just what I was going to talk about. There is one of the greatest actresses in the world. This Colonel Angeles I was telling you about . . . The colonel I said I wouldn't mention any more . . . Well, I lost out on that lad because he saw one of her pictures, and he just went off his head about her."

“Colonel Angeles,” repeated Mr. Patter, and the voice did not sound at all like his own. “I do not think I should like this Colonel Angeles. I gather from what you have said that you don’t like him. . . . And you are quite right. Who is Colonel Angeles anyway?”

Mr. Appleby took the query as a rhetorical question.

“Who, indeed? A mere nobody. I should have known in the first place, after all these years, that it never pays to waste time with second-string patriots. I should have come straight to you when I wanted information about . . . the pictures.”

Mr. Patter bowed. The sanity of Mr. Appleby seemed to be more evident.

“And I shall leave you with this thought,” observed the gun merchant. “To-morrow, perhaps, we can get on with the details of the business. In the meantime I wish to convey to you this little token of appreciation from your many admirers in this city.”

He reached into his breast pocket and drew out a sheaf of yellow bills, the like of which Mr. Patter had never laid eyes on before. He laid them on the table beside Mr. Patter’s bed and very close to Mr. Patter’s trembling hand.

“What’s that for?” demanded Mr. Patter.

182

Mr. Appleby concealed his annoyance, but this was merely because he had had much practise in concealing annoyance. For all that he had dealt much with patriots from the banana and vanilla zones he was basically a lover of the direct methods.

This artful pretense irked him. However . . .

“It’s for you,” he smiled. “You can do anything you want to with it. There are, of course, no strings attached to it.”

“But I have done nothing for it.”

“You have done everything,” proceeded Mr. Appleby patiently. “You and I are too well trained as men of the world to quarrel with the obvious as represented by a few hundred dollars. Let us say, just for form’s sake, that your work as drill-master at the Super-Babylon has attracted the attention of interests connected with a new theater project. Let us put it that these interests are hopeful that you will use your influence in getting for them just as nice a set of ushers as the patient goofs who clutter up the aisles at your own temple of the cinema. . . . You have lent prestige to Mr. Moe Eisenstark’s enterprise. You could do more for these interests of which I speak. So let us say no more about it.”

He arose, picked up his hat and stick and moved to the door before Mr. Patter could recover his wits.

“To-morrow then, Mr. Patter,” he observed.

“To-morrow,” echoed Mr. Patter hollowly. And presently he was alone and counting out the bills which seemed to represent roughly about five thousand dollars.

The emissaries of Mr. Beesey and the field agents of Messrs. Novak and Mucket in behalf of the estate of Mr. Vest, deceased, became aware as the lights flared in the auditorium of the

Super-Babylon, that Mr. Patter had eluded them. So they filed out into the street, and for want of better material shot it out with one another. There was only one casualty—a chauffeur named Tony Bilch, uninsured, who had belonged to Mr. Novak. Mr. Novak consoled himself with the thought that it wouldn't be hard to get another chauffeur as good as Mr. Bilch. From afar off some unidentified men of mystery watched the battle, discovered that Mr. Patter was not among those present, and decided to preserve strict neutrality. While the patrol wagons were blocking the street they were telephoning to the man named Joe and reporting that Mr. Patter, although apparently in no great danger, had disappeared. The man named Joe put through a call hurriedly to Margaret Banning.

“He’s home,” she assured him. “I saw him come romping through here just one leap ahead of a lad I’ve seen somewhere before but can’t place at this moment. . . . No, he’s not a hoodlum. It’s back in my mind that he’s a racketeer but not in the local police business. Higher class.”

“You sure our man got in all right?”

“Of course I’m sure. I went right over to investigate and ran into this weird jane I was telling you about . . .

184

Estelle What’s-her-name, the great unlifted face. She was mad enough to talk to me. Said our boy had shoved her into a cab and made her come home alone . . . show’s he’s normal, anyway. She said there was some sort of a riot cooking over at the theater, and I hear that it came off according to schedule.”

“It did,” admitted Joe.

For a moment Margaret assembled her facts.

“I’ll go over and give the scene another look-see,” she promised. “I’m sure about the man, but this Estelle has me guessing. She’s too awfully clairvoyant for a lady of her looks, if you get what I mean.”

“Forget her,” advised Joe. “If she’s all you say she is, she’s safe enough. She may know all about gunmen, but she won’t have the million dollars.”

Mr. Patter counted Mr. Appleby’s contribution seventeen times and reached seventeen different totals—all of them too astounding for belief. It terrified him to think of all that money lying before him as his very own. The promise of Friday seemed a more dreadful thing than ever, now that chance had made him wealthy. Once he had only his own life to think about. Now he had his own life and this collection of bank-notes—which was something entirely different.

He realized with a sickening feeling that with the arrival of the money his peril had increased. For, if the Vest mob had been willing to kill him for a million dollars that he knew nothing about, the same lads would be twice as enthusiastic to eliminate him for five thousand dollars in cash.

185

He was some time getting to sleep. The bundle of bills seemed to be more noticeable than a brick beneath his pillow. And when at last he dropped into fitful slumber it was to dream that the gunmen had decided to do something else on Friday and settle his case before doing it.

He awoke suddenly. There was a breath of cool air on his



cheek, and he remembered distinctly that he had closed the window. He heard a crash which he thought might be caused by the alarm clock falling from the writing-desk on to the floor. He heard a chair overturn and a muffled curse. Something told him that there was some one in the room.

He did not call for help. It came to him instinctively that help could not arrive in time. And besides his throat seemed to have swollen shut. He heard footsteps on the carpet near his bedside. Then a male voice remarked: "What the hell?" And there came a sound of smashing china and something fell heavily on the floor.

A push button clicked, and the lights flashed on. The amazed Mr. Patter became pajama-conscious as he looked into the eyes of the mouselike Margaret. And as he averted his blushing gaze he discovered that there was a man on the floor, a man who stared at the ceiling with disinterested eyes. The man, for some unaccountable reason, was Mr. Appleby.

## Chapter Seventeen:

### *The Dawn of the Well-Advertised Friday.*

Little Margaret, who still held her dainty right hand clutched about the handle of a water pitcher, stared down into the face of Mr. Appleby and seemed close to tears.

“I’m sorry,” she said tremulously. “I never meant to hit him quite so hard.”

Mr. Appleby shook himself with a movement like that of a dog emerging from water.

“Don’t mention it,” he advised huskily. “The regrets are all mine.”

“And that, of course, explains everything,” contributed Mr. Patter peevishly.

“There is very little to explain,” stated Mr. Appleby with as much dignity as one could expect in a dazed person trying to get to his feet in spite of wobbly knees. “Or to put it another way, the explanation is negligible.”

He was right about this point. When one has given a supposed Liberator five thousand dollars and feels disposed, purely in the interests of business, to take it away from him again, there is really very little that can be explained.

“Of course,” apologized Mr. Patter, “I don’t object to having people in my room. This is Hospitality Hall. But I was a little shocked to wake up and find the convention already in progress.

How did you get in?"

"Through the door," replied Mr. Appleby. This was not in strict accordance with the truth but withal a better story than any details concerning a trip up a fire-escape and through a jimmied window.

187

"And I followed this gentleman," stated Miss Banning. "I thought he was a burglar. That, in a measure, is why I crowned him."

Mr. Appleby looked at Margaret closely and was surprised to discover that she was a stranger. That she could have followed him through the door seemed almost unbelievable since he had come in through the window. That she should be lying immediately gave her a personality that did not seem to fit in with her frightened manner and her quavering voice. However, the last thing that Mr. Appleby would have cared to undertake at that moment was the cross-examination of Miss Banning.

"It was a natural mistake, I suppose," he admitted. "Anyway, there is no harm done. My name is Appleby. I had some business with Mr. Patter earlier in the evening." He bowed.

"My name is Margaret Banning," said the girl. "And I'm sorry I hit you with the water pitcher, but it was the best thing I could find at the time."

Once more he looked at her sharply.

"Was the door unlocked?" inquired Mr. Patter, breaking the spell.

“Oh, of course,” smiled Mr. Appleby. “I thought at the time how nice it was that the door happened to be unlocked. I wanted to get the hour of our appointment to-morrow set straight, and I didn’t relish having to knock and arouse the whole corridor.”

“It wouldn’t have made any difference,” trilled Miss Banning. “Almost any key will open a door in a hotel like this one. . . . The locks are hopelessly old-fashioned. But here I am standing here like a simpleton when I ought to be running away to hide. I suppose Mr. Patter would like some rest.”

“So you know Mr. Patter?” gasped Mr. Appleby.

“A little,” admitted Margaret with downcast eyes. “Of course I don’t know him well enough to be hitting strange gentlemen with water pitchers in his own room. That’s the result of my impulsiveness. It’s always getting me into trouble.”

Mr. Appleby’s grunt was capable of many interpretations, but he modified it quickly.

“Don’t mention it at all,” he groaned in an attempt at cheerfulness. “Anybody would have done the same thing. Next time I’ll have myself announced by a bell-boy. . . . And I suppose we had better be going.”

So they went. And as he walked groggily to the elevator Mr. Appleby knew that he would be unable to make any further attempt to rescue his five thousand dollars.

Came Friday the dread day, bright and clear.

Mr. Patter arose to face with great bitterness the fact that people with five thousand dollars may be killed just as easily as people who haven't five thousand dollars. He wondered what he was going to do about it and reached no conclusion that seemed worth a second thought.

189

He might, of course, have appealed to the police. But he recalled with great bitterness that the police are more concerned with crimes that have been committed than with those which are about to be committed. His murder undoubtedly would be avenged to the fullest extent of the law and he tried to feel cheerful about that.

Where the gunmen would strike was a problem that he could not solve. He rather hoped it would be in the theater after the second show. Then, if the deed came off as scheduled, he could die with suitable applause. If the deed did not come off as scheduled he might make a dash through the barrage in the alley and by some freak of fortune catch the night bus for Detroit. There was little hope in the plan for catching the bus. He had learned the futility of all attempts to dodge his varied shadows. On the other hand, the second show did not start until about ten o'clock and that would give him about all the time he could hope to get out of Friday.

He wondered how he might go about conveying this suggestion of time and place to Messrs. Novak and Mucket and felt forced to admit that the plan was at best nebulous.

And on that same glad morn in another quarter the throbbing eyes of Mr. Appleby peered out from under a wet compress to greet the sun. Mr. Appleby knew nothing of

190

what was in store for Mr. Patter. To him Friday was just another day, albeit a day made dismal and accursed by the interference of a female whose motives he was far from understanding.

Mr. Appleby's stratum of thought was not far removed from that of Mr. Patter. For while Mr. Patter had to worry about the prospective loss of five thousand dollars, Mr. Appleby considered the loss as something accomplished and unpleasant. In addition to that Mr. Appleby had a pain in his head which attested to the strength in the slim right arm of the gentle Margaret.

Mr. Appleby shut his eyes and reached for the telephone that stood on the table beside his bed of pain. He informed Mr. Patter a moment later that he was not going to discuss the armaments of Pandorra that day . . . a fact that was no news to Mr. Patter.

At the Purple Buzzard Mr. Novak stirred himself from slumber on the divan in the back room. He cursed at Mr. Mucket whose face lay pillowed in his arms on the table amid a vast wreck of bottles and glasses.

"What day is this?" inquired Mr. Novak.

"What week is it?" countered Mr. Mucket.

"I think it's Friday," pursued the feudal heritor of the eminent Vest.

"I gotta hell of a headache," retorted Mr. Mucket. "If you're askin' me, I'd say maybe we better quit drinkin'

our own hooch an' hire us a bootlegger. Then at least we got the satisfaction of not knowin' what's in it."

"It's Friday," iterated Mr. Novak. "An' Friday's de day when old General Whosit says he's goin' to have a million kopecks all laid out an' waitin' for us."

Mr. Mucket did not seem to be keenly interested.

"I don't want a million dollars," he wept. "I want a flock o' aspirin tablets. Oh, baby! I just get to sleep an' you come aroun' talkin' about goin' to work. Hell! I'd just as soon be a street-car conductor."

Mr. Novak lay back on his couch and considered the ceiling. His mental processes were not much clearer than those of Mr. Mucket, and argument tired him. Mr. Mucket did not wish to go to work at once. Very well, then. The work could wait. Plenty of time for it. They could have some more sleep. Very good idea.

Mr. Novak snored. Mr. Mucket rested his head amid the broken glass and also snored.

At an hour when most of the city was at breakfast, Margaret Banning let herself into the office of the person known as Joe and found him waiting for her.

"Well," she reported as she dropped wearily into a chair facing him across a broad mahogany table, "I've had a hectic night. I wish you'd stick around town when our subject is trying to get himself murdered. I've been calling every telephone number in the book. . . ."

Joe smiled.

“I came in as soon as I found you were trying to reach me,” he reminded her. “What’s the matter. Are we out of employment?”

“Not yet. We are still in it . . . by the skin of our teeth, I guess. Your operatives are a fine lot. They lost this lad last night, and I found him just in time to crack a gentleman on the head with a water pitcher. Gee, what I could have done with about a foot of lead-pipe!”

“And who was the object of this solicitude? And what about it anyway?”

“Name’s Appleby.”

“Appleby! Jefferson Arms outfit. . . . That ought to settle the question as to whether Mr. Patter is really General Gonzalez or not. Mr. Appleby is engaged in the promotion of world peace through the sale of gas-pipe rifles to patriots who might otherwise shoot themselves in the feet. He knows his customers.”

“He isn’t going to sell any rifles to-day . . . not if I’m any judge of a bump on the knob. I heard his skull crack into four pieces, but when I switched on the light I saw it was the water pitcher instead.”

Joe grinned patiently.

“Is there any reason why I shouldn’t know what you are talking about?” he inquired.



“Not at all,” agreed Margaret. “You know the beginning of the story. I telephoned it to you last night just before you went fishing or wherever you went. This Appleby is the boy I had spotted as a racketeer. I wasn’t far wrong.”

193

“He’s the one you saw following our man through the Legation?”

“The same. . . . I didn’t know who he was then. He introduced himself afterward. I don’t know whether he followed Mr. Patter home or picked him up by accident at the hotel. Anyway, they were moving one after the other through the revolving doors when I discovered them.

“I went back to Mrs. Morgan’s Apartment Hotel . . . that’s the name of the place on the stationery . . . to investigate just as I said I would. The Henderson woman wasn’t around, or at any rate she wouldn’t answer her phone. So I decided to call it a night. I was just stepping into the court when I saw this Appleby lifting himself up on to the fire-escape. Two guesses where he was going . . .”

“Back to pay another visit to Mr. Patter.”

“That’s the way I figured it without a road map. I couldn’t very well trail him on a fire-escape so I went into the hotel and up the stairs. I got into Mr. Patter’s room before Mr. Appleby did. I only had to pick a regular old button-hook lock while Mr. Appleby had to jimmy a window.

“Mr. Appleby came in eventually and started for Mr. Patter’s bed, and I hit him with one of those ice-water pitchers they always have in hotel rooms. I used to wonder what

194

the things were good for.”

“I wonder if you weren’t just a little bit hasty.”

“I’ve been wondering that myself ever since. I thought I was preventing a murder. But I frisked Mr. Appleby after I had floored him, and he wasn’t heeled. The whole business is just perfectly crazy.”

“What do you suppose Appleby came back for?”

“He says he wanted to make a date for a conference to-day. . . . Do rifle salesmen always visit their customers through fire-escape windows?”

Joe shook his head.

“It’s beyond me,” he admitted. “I can’t see Appleby in this thing . . . not quite. He must have known that our man didn’t have the million dollars with him. Appleby would have had it without resorting to the fire-escape otherwise. As I analyze it you have brought the affair to an inconclusive issue. If you had to smite Mr. Appleby you should have put him into a hospital. That would eliminate one of the unknown factors.”

“Well, a poor girl can only do what she can do. I’m beginning to think that this million-dollar business is all hooey. I feel as if I’d been hoaxed into a part in a press-agent stunt.”

“At least there are enough realists in the cast to do a bit of shooting now and then. . . . I see by the papers this morning that Janice Yule is due in town to-day. If she has her eye on the loot we ought to get some action very shortly.”

“Action is what I crave after the tedium of batting people on the head. What do you suggest I do next?”

Joe looked at her almost with kindness.

“We’ll put you in a minor rôle for the next act,” he promised. “It’s about time some of our sleuths earned their keep. We’ll pick up Mr. Patter before he has any chance to meet Miss Yule. And once we get our hands on him, we’ll try to persuade him to tell us what he has done with the spoils.”

She shrugged.

“I like him,” she said. “If there’s going to be any rough stuff, count me out.”

“We shall be mild but firm,” he assured her. “And I hope personalities are not too far advanced. It would be nice, for instance, if you could manage to be at the theater and convey to Mr. Patter the suggestion that he had better leave at once through the alley exit. Then you could blow a whistle once if he turned right and twice if he turned left. We’ll have two carloads of men waiting so we shan’t slip up no matter which way he turns. We can’t afford a failure because I don’t suppose we’ll get more than one chance at him.”

Margaret smiled wearily.

“All right,” she acquiesced. “I accept the part. But you only get the million. You don’t hurt him. He’s mine, and I want him back. I give you warning I’m only doing this because it will give me a right to know what’s going on. Double-cross me, and I’ll pay you back the first time I can find one of those ice-

pitchers.”

Mr. Beesey saw the dawn of Friday.

“Say,” he remarked to Horace Hoosick, his latest chauffeur, “this bird Copal who hires us says he won’t shake loose from another nickel till we bag this here General Kinsella. Run aroun’ an’ tell him we put on the whole works to-night.”

## Chapter Eighteen:

### *And the Crowded Evening.*

Margaret Banning stood amid the palms in that bigger and better Taj Mahal—one refers of course to the Super-Babylon Theater—and she argued with her conscience.

Across about an acre of white marble tiling, Mr. Patter stood in his newest and finest uniform, pale and motionless under a mauve spotlight at the foot of the stairs. Along the golden rail that curved upward behind him were divers grenadiers and lancers and what have you, all of them armed with the little baton that adds to the chic of the movie usher, provided he requires such addition. For this was anniversary night, and all the riches of the Super-Babylon were on display to the fifty-five-cent customers. To-night for the first, and possibly the last, time, Mr. Patter was contributing his bit to the pageantry as commander of the guard. Miss Banning thought that he looked very beautiful, and she felt saddened to think of what must happen to his lovely uniform in a fair to middling jamboree.

Conscience, picking up the argument where she had dropped it to look at Mr. Patter, informed her rather curtly that this somewhat dizzy young man was none of her personal concern. Conscience lectured her at some length regarding the loyalty one owed to one's work and mentioned it as a loyalty that is proof against all claims of sentiment.

198

“You have given your word to go through with this thing,” remarked Conscience. “It wouldn’t be square to drop out now at this critical moment.”

“Raspberry!” replied Miss Banning.

“You can’t dispose of me that easily,” retorted Conscience.

“You have Joe’s promise that this sap won’t be harmed. And what are you going to do about it?”

“Joe’s funny,” observed Miss Banning. “I think all this rot about a million dollars is silly. Nobody with a million dollars would ever be caught coming into a place like this twice. And whether or not Joe can keep a promise in a pinch remains to be seen. . .”

“You’re a square shooter, and you gave your word,” iterated Conscience.

Margaret Banning sniffed.

“All right,” she agreed. “Have it your way. But kidnaped or not, he doesn’t get out of my sight.” And then by way of a codicil:

“And if any other mobs mix in, I shall certainly feel free to exercise my own judgment.”

The addendum about the other mobs came into the thought of Miss Banning with an apparent spontaneity that was far from actual. The idea had been suggested to her, although she did not realize it, because of a figure that had crossed into the fringe of her vision. One of Mr. Beesey’s boys, he was. Miss Banning probably would not have been able to identify him by name or club associations, but she had seen him once in an alley riot, and subconsciously she remembered him.

Miss Banning’s interest in this man might have been definitely focused, and the course of Mr. Patter’s life might thereby have

been changed, save for the fact that as he flitted out of sight at the entrance of the lobby another mysterious figure flitted in . . . a woman wrapped in a Spanish shawl . . . a woman who walked furtively and sought such shadows as one may find in a place illuminated by a hundred thousand incandescent lamps. Miss Banning started and whispered “I told you so” to Conscience as she recognized Estelle Henderson.

There was nothing about Miss Henderson to arouse one to a sense of peril. Miss Henderson could not be said to constitute any peril in herself, and as a harbinger of evil she lacked atmosphere. However, Miss Banning looked at her, and an alarm sounded in the mind of Miss Banning: Four—eleven! Very distinctly.

Special Guard Mount for the second show was completed presently. The fifty-five-cent customers and pass-holders charged forward in their customary stampede to fight with the hold-overs for seats. The mauve spot blinked out, and Mr. Patter gathered his coat about him with the tired gesture of one who has looked upon the world and found it nothing much. In slow dignified steps he made his way across the lobby and under the palms Miss Banning intercepted him.

“Don’t high-hat me,” she begged. “I just came to tell you that somebody is going to knock you off.”

200

“That’s no news,” replied Mr. Patter in a dry voice.

“I’ve seen them collecting,” said Miss Banning in a tone so well selected that she almost convinced herself. “You must get away from here now . . . with me.”

“I don’t see it that way,” argued Mr. Patter. “I’ve had enough of carrying women out of fights.”

“With or without me, then. But you’ll have to go now.”

Mr. Patter was quite well aware of this. If the clans were gathering he had better be somewhere else—anywhere else—immediately. The truth was so obvious that he was disposed to argue it.

“I’m going to go, of course. . . . Can’t have any more riots in the theater. Moe is getting nasty about it. But I suppose I ought to take off the uniform. Shotgun slugs ruin good clothes.”

In point of fact Mr. Patter long since had lost consciousness and for more than an hour had been functioning by means of reflexes. But Miss Banning saw none of that. She was aware that this boy was facing death without a thought of the inconvenience it might cause him. With his number up he paused to consider the interests of others. For some reason Miss Banning felt that she wanted to cry.

“Listen, boy,” she crooned to him, “forget the uniform. Moe Eisenstark has it insured. You just beat it out through the alley entrance . . . now.”

201

“I don’t think I want to die in an alley,” was the very fair objection of Mr. Patter.

“Lord love you, you don’t have to die in an alley. . . .” The tears were clouding Miss Banning’s vision now. “The main stem is none too good for you. You can walk right out the front door if you want to. Maybe it would be better to go that way. Joe’s mob



ought to be equal to any competition. Give me five minutes to let them know what you're going to do."

Mr. Patter had a lucid moment just then. It occurred to him that this young woman whom he had once classified as a gray mouse might be more descriptively ticketed under the general heading nuisance.

"All right," he replied. "Front door . . . five minutes."

Whereupon he left her and walked straight to the side-door and out into the alley.

A mirror ruined his strategy. Miss Banning, well on her way to the front door, caught the reflection of the purple uniform and guessed instantly that she had been hoaxed. So as Mr. Patter stepped across the threshold she was immediately behind him.

Mr. Patter turned left. Miss Banning put a whistle to her lips and blew one long blast. Then, on sober second thought, she blew two short blasts. That, she judged, would bring in both of Joe's contingents, and the prospects were that they might need the pair.

202

In front of the theater and in the darkened portals of the Western Guaranty Building, across the alley, Mr. Beesey's assorted characters loitered as casually as possible, determined to carry out their promise to General Copal. They had done very well in preparing their ambush . . . so well in fact that their presence was not suspected by Joe's right-hand squadron which roosted uncomfortably in some limousines at a near-by curb, nor by Joe's left-hand squadron which occupied a similar strategic

position at the mouth of the rear passage-way. Neither party had discovered at the time of Mr. Patter's exit, that Mr. Novak and Mr. Mucket, in person, and ten hoodlums out of Mr. Vest's estate, lay appropriately alongside the ash cans toward the end of the alley.

A messenger came flying to Mr. Beesey to report the glad tidings that the target was uncovered. But before he could deliver his message, the whistle of Miss Banning cut through to the ears of the men in the limousine. Mr. Beesey became aware of an armed mob suddenly leaping toward him, and without questioning motives he opened fire.

Simultaneously Messrs. Novak and Mucket broke cover and rushed for the alley entrance, unaware that the left-hand reserves of the man called Joe was close at their heels.

"It's another sell-out," cursed Mr. Novak to Mr. Mucket. "Beesey is butting in again in spite of all I told him."

203

"Let him have it," advised Mr. Mucket. "They ain't no time like now."

So it came about that Mr. Patter, stepping squarely into the path of half the men who were hunting him, was knocked down and very nearly trodden underfoot. The main tide of battle swept over him, and when he arose again it was to do battle with stragglers who fought without animus or direction.

The exit door had swung closed behind Margaret before she realized its character. She realized that she had acted impetuously when she tried to open it again. After the fashion of

exit doors it was closed for keeps. And the shotgun slugs were slicing the atmosphere into *art moderne*.

For a moment she lost sight of Mr. Patter. That was at the time when he lay face down amid the passing hoodlums. When she turned back after her discovery in connection with the door, it was to witness a miracle. The gladiator whom she had undertaken to nurse had turned out to be as genuine a gladiator as a painful wallop on the nose could make him. Mr. Patter had found a half-brick on the pavement, and he was putting it to good use. He was bitterly indignant. After all, it is one thing to get killed with neatness and dispatch by machine-gun bullets or even by slugs from a shotgun and quite another to be brushed aside by one's own assassins and kicked in the face.

A head passed within reach of Mr. Patter's arm. He swung his brick. Right there, although historians probably never will give him full credit, Mr. Patter achieved the first casualty of the evening. Without stopping to count it he broke the skull of another itinerant gunman and settled down to a workmanlike job.

204

The guns were still guffawing at the upper end of the alley and the attention of the combatants was focused on the source of the noise. The eliminations from the combatant ranks due to Mr. Patter's half-brick went virtually unnoticed.

Miss Banning said something unladylike under her breath. For just a moment the rage of the battle surged within her and she yearned for an ice-water pitcher of the type that had done so well in the case of Mr. Appleby. But it was only for a moment. She realized that all plans had gone wrong. At least three mobs

were trying to eliminate one another out on the sidewalk. It was too much to suppose that Joe's uplifters had escaped entanglement. The kidnaping seemed to be most definitely off.

"Listen," she commanded in Mr. Patter's ear, "we've got just one chance. Beat it for the passage at the end of the theater."

Mr. Patter swung his brick mechanically and knocked out another man. He hadn't heard her, and when he suddenly moved toward the now deserted passage he thought it was his own idea.

Escape might have been a simple matter had it not been for the police. Still imbued with the thought that gun fighting should cease until midnight of election day, the zone squads charged down on the Super-Babylon in force. They made the quickest trip in the history of the department—so quick that they joined the *mêlée* before the unofficial warriors were out of ammunition.

205

They tumbled out of their cars, shooting as they came. And the gunmen, aware that there would be another time for personal argument, broke and ran . . . broke and ran in the only direction left open to them, which was the direction just taken by Mr. Patter and Margaret Banning. The fugitive pair had just reached the side-street when the stalwart mobsmen bore down on them.

"That cuts it," remarked Margaret. "I thought we could get away clean, but it's no use. They probably have cars parked all along here."

Her quick eye ranged the scene. A truck was pulling away from a doorway half a block away.

“There’s our only chance,” she said. “If we can get into that thing and pull up the tail gate we may get away. They won’t be looking for us in that.”

And Mr. Patter, still the perfect automaton, acted on the suggestion at once. When he became somewhat conscious of his surroundings he was lying on the splintery floor of a van with the girl beside him. The streets were still echoing to police sirens, shotguns and automatic rifles. But the hue and cry seemed farther away and that was a comforting thought.

## Chapter Nineteen:

### *Scandalous Doings in Railroad Yard.*

Mr. Pete Kinooch, the truck driver, had only an academic interest in gang wars. He was a stolid soul who felt no lure to deeds of high emprise in another man's riot. Let those who would clutter up the streets with clinical material. That, he believed, was no skin off the nose of Mr. Pete Kinooch.

So whereas some people—their names escape us—might have turned back to investigate the reason for all the shooting, Mr. Kinooch merely put his right foot down heavily on the accelerator, the while he voiced vain regrets that his truck was capable of only thirty-five miles an hour.

Mr. Kinooch was unaware that he carried passengers. He never discovered it, for the passengers had no ideas to offer him regarding his possible course. They were willing to leave that important matter to the undoubtedly excellent judgment of Mr. Kinooch.

Mr. Kinooch had just discharged a load of freight at an automobile supply house. He found it pleasant to consider that his next load would be going to a place on the opposite side of town.

His immediate objective was the freight depot of the L. B. & C. Railroad, and nothing in the horizon of Mr. Kinooch seemed farther from gunplay than the cool sheds where grapefruit and sewing-machines and pianos and what-not stood in their crates awaiting distribution to the eager trades-men. It seemed to Mr. Kinooch a simple thing to step on the gas and get

there at a lively clip. But Mr. Kinooch had forgotten that when one drives a truck at top speed through city streets he may attract attention.

Long before Mr. Kinooch realized that anything was amiss, Margaret Banning and the recumbent Mr. Patter, caught the roar of an oncoming motor. Margaret hoped that the pursuers might be interested in the truck for its own sake, but she realized that she was asking a great deal of her luck.

However, it was not necessary to wait for enlightenment on the matter. Mr. Kinooch had the advantage of previous acquaintance with his road, and three quick turns through alleys gave him the distance that he never could have coaxed from his motor in a straight run. Presently he was clattering over an acreage of tracks and Margaret nudged her companion.

“We’d better get out here,” she whispered. “We’re in a lot of railroad yards, and we won’t find it any darker no matter where we go. . . . The boys behind us are getting pretty close.”

So when Mr. Kinooch slowed up a bit for another series of tracks, they dropped off. They were squarely in the headlights of the car behind.

Mr. Patter was not too befuddled to realize what the lights meant. He picked his torn knees out of the cinders and dragged Margaret to her feet. Then he led the way down a long aisle between rows of box-cars.

A car came to a screeching stop at the crossing where they had alighted, and a spotlight pricked the gloom in search of them. They huddled under a gondola, and the beam swept past them.

Then the car started up once more in pursuit of the truck.

“Well,” inquired Miss Banning when she was able to get her breath, “where do you suppose we go from here?”

“Hard to tell,” replied the awakened Mr. Patter. “I don’t suppose we had better stay here indefinitely.”

“Who do you suppose those men were?”

“What difference does it make? The most useless thing in the world is the calling card of a guy who’s shooting at you.”

“Everybody in the world seems to have been shooting at us,” she murmured wistfully. “I think it’s the most beastly thing about the great American civilization that you can’t even go wandering around a railroad yard at night without attracting a lot of attention.”

“Hush,” said Mr. Patter. “We have company.”

“Where?”

“Over beyond the next row of cars.”

“I don’t see anybody.”

“I saw a cigarette-end.”

“Probably only a cop.”

Mr. Patter sniffed as loudly as the situation permitted.



“Only a cop,” he repeated. “The cops were shooting more than anybody else, and there were more of ’em. I guess maybe we’d better move on.”

“We’d better find out who this is?”

“What difference does it make?”

“A lot. . . . It’s easier to dodge one pistol bullet than a spray of shotgun slugs. Go over and look at him.”

“I’m not interested.”

“All right then, you stay here and I’ll go.”

Mr. Patter cursed. The Patter instinct, strong within him from birth, prompted him to let Margaret or any other volunteer go ahead with the silly business of identifying strangers in the dark while he slid with grace and speed beneath a number of box-cars to the fence and safety. On the other hand, the code of the cinema cried shame at the thought.

“I’ll go,” he growled. He unfastened his gold-braided cloak and detached from his person several yards of silver chain. . . . The process was a bit noisy, but it was covered in part at least by the shunting of freight cars at no great distance. Locomotive bells came echoing out of the gloom and now and then the blackness glowed with the ruddy light from an open fire door.

“Be careful, won’t you?” remarked Margaret solicitously. “If you don’t look where you’re going—you may get knocked down by a switch-engine.”

“Do they still kill people with switch-engines?” he inquired bitterly. . . .

But before she could think up any good answer for this he was gone.

The light, he judged, had been about three tracks over and about four car-lengths to his left. Hence his first maneuver was to veer off abruptly to the right. Footsteps crunching in the cinders would be plainly audible despite the weird noises of the yards. It seemed good strategy to do such track crossing as had to be done at some point as remote as possible from the suspected whereabouts of the mysterious stranger. . . . Omaha, he thought, might be a good spot for it—or better yet, Denver.

He had progressed about a hundred yards in this direction when a wandering locomotive, doing something to a train of empties, barred his course. He swore. One regrets to mention it, but Mr. Patter swore. It was as if the locomotive had suspected him of a willingness to procrastinate and was making sure that he would retreat no farther. Very well, he would get on with the business. He would abandon all thought of the circuitous approach in favor of the bold frontal attack. He would show anybody who cared to look that he knew no fear. And besides, the man with the cigarette would probably be gone by this time anyway.

Abruptly he veered to the left and crawled beneath two flat cars to find himself looking up at a train of box-cars on the third track. Here came the evening’s first inspiration.

211

The mysterious stranger had been on the ground. It was reasonable to suppose, therefore, that an aerial attack would

catch him off watch. Mr. Patter swung himself to the ladder at the end of the first car and presently was flattened on the roof and crawling toward the end of the train.

He was not exactly gifted in this form of scouting. He lacked the instinct for it, to say nothing of the costume. It is embarrassing to tear one's tight purple breeches on loose nails in the top of box-cars and to rip off one's gold frogs on splintery planking.

Moreover, the success of the expedition seemed imperiled by another unfortunate circumstance. The man with the cigarette was still there. He seemed to be pacing back and forth alongside a coal car, and the rapidity with which the cigarette glowed and dimmed conveyed to Mr. Patter that he must be under a nervous strain. However, it was evident that his nervousness, whatever the cause, was not going to spur him to flight. There was a fixed idea in his tigerish march . . . not to say permanency.

One box-car away from him Mr. Patter's keen eyes caught the shadowy outline of the man himself. He was little more than an amorphous blot. It was impossible to discover whether or not he wore a uniform. But it was a sinister certainty that he was not a railroad man. He carried no lantern, and he started  
whenever a switch-engine crashed into a waiting train. 212  
Mr. Patter was deeply gratified to note that he seemed to be alone.

The aerial route ended at the very gondola before which this man paraded, and once more Mr. Patter whispered bad language into the deaf ear of night.

All his strategy had come to naught. For, unless he could leap

one car-length forward, he must surrender the tactical advantage of height and attack on level ground. He found the ladder and lowered himself gingerly to the gondola which he was surprised to find completely filled with sash-weights.

Mr. Patter was a man of simple tastes, which probably explains why the discovery of this cargo should have brightened his whole evening. He picked up one of the billets and found it pleasantly cool in the hand and hefty. . . . If one could smite the good smite with a half-brick, how much better would be his work with one of these. He maneuvered around the edge of the car to the side where the man with the cigarette still proceeded with his endless march. And then, flattened against the pile of metal and seemingly a part of it, Mr. Patter raised a cautious head.

The cigarette was directly beneath him and when it glowed Mr. Patter could see something of the white hand that held it. The walker stopped suddenly as if listening. He made a sudden movement, and Mr. Patter caught the dull gleam of a weapon. Whereupon Mr. Patter reached forward and swung the billet in a wide arc. The weight crashed down through a straw hat. The fitful glowing of the cigarette ceased as it fell into the cinders.

213

Mr. Patter lowered himself over the side of the car and with a sense of panic struck a moving body as he reached the ground.

“Don’t shoot,” chirruped a familiar voice close to his ear. “It’s only me. I got tired of waiting. Did you get him?”

“I guess so. . . . I got something with a straw hat.”

Together they moved forward and knelt beside the crumpled form of a man who lay face down between the tracks.

“He’s still alive,” diagnosed Margaret. “Breathing not bad . . . heart so-so. . . . He’ll come around all right.”

“That will be a great comfort,” stated Mr. Patter. “What’ll we do with him?”

“It all depends on who he is. If he turns out to be the president of the railroad I suppose we had better leave him right where he is and go away from here. If he’s a gunman it might be just as well to tap him again . . . harder this time.”

But the decision was influenced largely by the man on the ground who moaned and rolled over so that a portion of his face became visible amid the wreckage of his hat.

“Are they gone . . . the assassins?” inquired the victim as he looked up at Margaret.

“I hope so,” she said. “They were gone when we got here.”

214

“Assassins!” The word struck the ear of Mr. Patter with surprising force. This man, then, was no hoodlum. Neither was he a policeman. Hoodlums and policemen and such practical souls would find a more descriptive term than “assassin.”

“How did you happen to be here?” came the querulous voice.

“We were taking a short-cut for home, just as we always do,” replied Margaret glibly. “It’s usually so safe here in the yards.

And we heard a cry, and we rushed forward.”

“We saw some one running,” contributed Mr. Patter, entering into the spirit of the thing.

“How many did you see running?” queried the victim.

“Oh, several,” said Mr. Patter.

“Oh, yes, several at least,” declared Miss Banning.

“My deliverers!” breathed the man on the ground. “And you did this thing for me, a stranger.”

“It was nothing,” protested Mr. Patter. “I could have done much better if my arm hadn’t been jammed against the side of the car. . . I mean maybe I could have maimed one of them.”

“And serve him right if you did!” was the indignant comment of Miss Banning. “But sir, what brought you here, so far from the path through the yards? Were you lost?”

“Yes and no,” was the barely audible reply. “I came here to look after a valuable property and to meet a man. And now I am going to sleep again.”

215

“You must tell us where you want to be taken,” urged Margaret.

“We ought to know who you are and all that sort of thing,” suggested Mr. Patter.

“There is no time,” said the man on the ground. “You must do something else for me at once. In my breast pocket you will find

a wallet filled with papers. I want you to take them and keep them for me. They must not fall into the hands of my enemies. In the wallet is a bill of lading. Have this stuff removed to a warehouse and meet me or my agent to-morrow at the Purple Buzzard cabaret. . . . And now you must hurry before they come back with more assassins.”

“But we can’t leave you here alone,” cried Margaret.

“You must. These men want only my bill of lading, and I have a decoy set in another pocket. They will not harm me once they get it, and with luck I may escape them.” His voice staggered into a jumble of sounds and he began to snore softly.

Mr. Patter began to search for the wallet and in doing so turned the man over. The white face which seemed almost luminous against the black was visible for the first time. Mr. Patter gave a startled exclamation and bent forward in amazement.

“For the love of Mike!” he ejaculated. “Do you know who this is?”

216

“No,” replied Miss Banning.

But Mr. Patter knew.

The man in the cinders was General Miguel Gonzalez, the eminent Liberator, late of Pandorra.

217

## Chapter Twenty:

### *Lovely Lady Laughs Out of Turn.*

Margaret Banning removed what was left of the hat-brim from the forehead of General Gonzalez and studied the face carefully. Fortunately, Mr. Patter could not see the glance that she directed toward him in the dark.

“I begin to remember him now,” she said. “He was the lad who got the reception from the Friends of Pandorran Liberty as General Gonzalez.”

“I suspect that’s who he actually is,” admitted Mr. Patter.

“Pooh-pooh!” said the girl. “I might have believed that a week ago. Just now the critical opinion of all the gunmen and cops in the neighborhood seems to be unanimously in favor of you for the job of being General Gonzalez.”

“I’ve told you often enough I’m not.”

“Oh, yes, I know that . . . I’m merely pointing out what others think. You must have noticed that yourself.”

He did not feel capable of going on with the argument.

“And what are you going to do with the old boy’s papers?” she went on.

“I’ll do what he wanted done!” It was Colonel Whosit of His Majesty’s fusileers speaking now. In the movies one always did what helpless men asked one to do even when the



helpless men had caused one a lot of trouble.

“Don’t you think maybe it would be safer for me to take the wallet until we got clear of this mess?”

“Certainly not. . . . A sacred trust is a sacred trust. If I am killed you must carry on. But until that time I must do it myself.”

“I suppose you’re right . . . but anyway there was no harm in asking. . . . Let’s drag the old lad over to a switch shanty and leave him there. The watchman will find him when he comes to punch his clock. And then let’s go home.”

Janice Yule stepped from her private car with a smile on her lips and a bale of roses in her arms. She was all prepared to be surprised by the fanfaronade of flash-lights and to capture with her sweetness and charm the dozens of reporters who would be waiting, breathless, to welcome her. She alighted on the damp tiles of a platform well-nigh deserted and discovered by way of a welcoming committee a lone woman—the one woman out of all the city’s thousands whom she wished least to see: Estelle Henderson.

“Oh, hello,” greeted Janice. She was still smiling, but this was merely because she had set the mechanics of the smile in motion and had forgotten to shut them off. “Sweet of you to come. . . . Where are the newspaper boys?”

“There aren’t any newspaper boys,” replied Miss Henderson.

Miss Yule’s smile contrived to stop of its own accord.

“What’s the matter?” she asked peevishly.

“Some sort of a riot over at the Super-Babylon,” explained Estelle with a shrug. “It might have been on account of your latest picture but probably wasn’t. Every able-bodied gunman in town is out . . . so are all the lights and window-panes in the neighborhood.”

Miss Yule seemed interested. After all, it implied no loss of prestige that she had been overlooked in a first-class riot. The competition was what any critic would have classed as keen.

“What started the row?” she demanded. “Moe Eisenstark’s ushers?”

“You’re not far off at that,” admitted Miss Henderson grudgingly, as she fell into step beside Miss Yule on the march down the platform. “You may have read in the papers about General Gonzalez of the Republic of Pandorra . . . Well, anyway, the general has been hiding out here disguised as an usher. The boys have made several attempts to knock him off. Once they almost got him when I was with him, but I escaped without a scratch.”

“What a pity,” commented Miss Yule enigmatically.

“I don’t like that,” snapped Estelle. “If you mean . . .”

“What I mean is a party can’t be too careful going out with parties they don’t know so well,” explained the talented actress.

“But then I suppose the poor lad was lonesome.”

If Miss Henderson saw any poison in this one, she let it go by.

“I can’t be any judge of his taste,” she said demurely. “It may be good. It may be bad. Naturally I couldn’t say. He’s a great admirer of yours.”

“What!”

Janice Yule, loveliest of the blondes, at whose feet a number of alleged kings had knelt to declare their hypothetical adoration, stopped in her tracks.

“You don’t mean to kid me?” she suggested.

“Who would attempt to insult an intelligence such as yours,” returned Miss Henderson sourly. “For some reason or another this boy thinks he’s in love with you. He told me a cock-and-bull story about rescuing you down on the Mexican border.”

“I don’t recall that one . . . but I meet so many people.”

“I thought the story sounded like one of those they used to do up in two reels.”

“It may be true at that. Let me think.”

“Gladly.”

“It may be true. . . . What I mean is, well, maybe it is true. See what I mean?”

“Now that you put it so lucidly it’s fairly obvious. You mean he

might have rescued you from bandits and such without your knowing anything about it . . . while you were unconscious so to speak.”

“Well, something like that.”

“I must say,” said Miss Henderson, “that it sounds very reasonable.”

221

“There must be some truth about these here press-agent stories they make up about me,” went on the beautiful Janice. “Now just before I started to come out here the boys was in with a plot to have me all mixed up in an international conspiracy. I said it was out—account of how it was such hooey, if you know what I mean. But it all begins to turn out right. The guy is a general, you say.”

“Who? Gonzalez? Yes, he was a general a short time ago. He may be a corpse just now.”

“Ain’t that the hell of it!” Miss Yule sighed prettily. “But even as it is, somebody ought to be able to whittle a story out of it. I’ll say we was engaged to be married, and I’ll send him the damnedest blanket of roses that was ever crammed into a hearse. It’ll say ‘Janice’ on it in letters a foot and a half high. . . . Boy, what the papers will do to that!”

“It ought to be romantic and touching.”

“A knockout if you ask me. I know a swell speech to go with it. . . A speech I had in *The King’s Bedroom*, my first great talkie: ‘No! I shan’t put in a claim against his estate. It was his love I wanted. . . . His money is but cold compensation.’ . . . Being a

greaser general I don't suppose he had any dough anyway. . . .”

“Somewhere in his kitty,” came the thrilling voice of Miss Henderson, “he had salted away a million dollars.”

“Honest!”

222

“It's the truth. That's the reason why so many people take turns at trying to eliminate him, I suppose.”

“Gee! I hope he lives. It ain't often anything big like that comes into a girl's life. You know how it is with an artist. You gotta live all shut up on account of the scandal . . . always watching your step and never meeting nobody except ham actors and managers and pants pressers who think they're producers.”

“Are you telling me this or are you reciting on your own account?”

“Both. Where was I? . . . Yes, a girl doesn't get much of a chance in Hollywood. And then along comes some bird like this soldier who falls in love with a picture and has a million dollars. Baby, that's true sentiment.”

Miss Henderson seemed to share little of this enthusiasm.

“I might point out to you,” she said, “that when you get hold of the million—if, as seems hardly likely, the various gunmen let him get away with it to-night—anyway if you ever find yourself with your hands on it, look it over and somewhere in it you'll find the first centavo that this boy ever earned.”

“You talk as if you didn't like the general.”

“Don’t get that into your head. I do like him. He may lack something in brains; I’ll not dispute that with you. But he’s a gentleman. He has been uniformly kind to me even when I have been rude to him.”

There was a tremor in Miss Henderson’s voice.

“I hope he gets away,” prayed Miss Yule. “I want him to know me better, and I hope he saves the million dollars while he’s at it.”

“I hope he gets away with or without the million—and preferably without,” said Estelle on the verge of tears. “I don’t know why I’m telling you this except for the fact that I came down here just for that job. You and I don’t kid each other much, Janice. We know where we stand. You’re laughing at me now because I love this boy and he loves you. . . . That’s what you get out of our association, the privilege of laughing. On the other hand, I think you are a vain little nitwit who ought to be back in the hashery.”

“You can’t talk that way to me.”

“Don’t high-hat me, Jenny. I’ll talk to you any way I please, and what are you going to do about it?”

“Well, anyways you might be decent. I never went around calling you names.”

And few of the readers of the cinema magazines would have recognized in this pouting and disgruntled young woman the thoroughly poised and haughty queen of Hollywood.

“I only want to impress on you that this is one business where I’m going to see you be decent. If the general lives and I can get him I’m going to get him whether you like it or not. If he falls for you as hard in person as he does for your shadow, then you’re going to play square with him. There’s going to be no gold-digging. And if I haven’t made myself clear I’ll go into it further.”

“All right! All right!” conceded the beauty sullenly. “But if he’s dead the publicity is mine. I thought up the idea, and I’m entitled to it.”

Miss Henderson did not answer her, and they passed out through the concourse to the carriage court where Mr. Eisenstark’s limousine was waiting for them.

And what of Mr. Patter?

That same question occurred to Mr. Patter himself as he stood beside Miss Banning and surveyed the snoring form of General Gonzalez.

“That will do for him,” he said. “And now all we have to do is just what we’ve been trying to do all evening.”

“It ought to be easier now. The tumult and the shouting seem to have died. As I see it, we shall pick our way across another mile of tracks, doing what may be done to prevent our getting run over by switch-engines, limited trains and other such things. We ought to come out on the river-front just under the Eighteenth Street bridge. Then we cross the bridge to the L station, hop a train and go home.”

“All the gunmen hang out in the river joints around Eighteenth Street,” demurred Mr. Patter.

“Not to-night they don’t,” argued Miss Banning with her customary logic. “You know darned well that all the gunmen in town are somewhere between here and the Super-Babylon Theater.”

225

Automatically they began to pick their perilous course across the grillwork of iron toward the unseen bridge.

“But look at me,” groaned Mr. Patter with a sudden sickening thought. “Look at the get up. I can’t board an L train in a rig-out like this.”

“I don’t see why not,” disputed Miss Banning. “We can talk in a loud voice about having been to a masquerade.”

“I won’t ride in any L train,” stated Mr. Patter flatly.

“All right,” conceded Miss Banning. “We’ll see if we can find a taxicab somewhere. If not we can always steal an automobile. . . . What’s that thing you’re carrying?”

“It’s a sash-weight that I found in a gondola back there,” explained Mr. Patter. “It’s the one I used to knock down the friend whom we later rescued from his numerous enemies. As a weapon it certainly has its advantages. I’ll never be without one of these things again.”

“I wish I had thought to get one for myself,” ruminated Margaret. “I can see that a thing like that would have many points over an ice-pitcher. . . . It’s so, well, indestructible.”



They jogged on and on over acres of cinders and tremendous patterns of steel rails and half an hour later were walking bravely if a bit uncertainly over the Eighteenth Street bridge. A lone taxicab stood by the Elevated station and they hailed it joyously.

The cab stopped at the Legation and Margaret paid the bill. On the sidewalk Mr. Patter attempted to bid her a courteous good night.

“Nothing doing,” she announced flatly. “I have an investment of one dollar and twenty-five cents taxi fare in you, and there will be no farewells on this side of the building.”

“I can duck into the court through the alley and save the parade in these clothes,” said Mr. Patter.

“And you can get knocked off by any fourth-rate oaf who happens to be waiting in the alley,” she pointed out. “Cancel that idea. I’ll see you through your own front door before I rest about my one dollar and twenty-five cents.”

He shrugged helplessly and followed her through the revolving doors into the Legation. After all he could stand the ordeal. There wouldn’t be many lobby customers about at that hour of the morning . . . none who knew him, probably . . . and then with a sudden groan he came to a sudden halt.

Directly in front of him on a broad divan was Janice Yule. She had been talking with Estelle Henderson. But Mr. Patter was hardly conscious of Estelle. He saw the flame-filled eyes of the goddess turn lazily around and survey his tatters.

“General Gonzalez,” he heard Miss Henderson whisper, “the general . . . and alive!”

But it wasn't until long afterward that he remembered having heard. All his attention was focused on the lovely Janice, and as he looked at her she suddenly threw back her golden head and laughed . . . laughed so loudly that the girl at the switchboard woke up and stared at her reproachfully. Mr. Patter lifted his scarred chin, wrapped the torn remnants of his purple and scarlet cloak about him and strode out. Afterward he had no definite recollection of what became of Margaret Banning or how he reached his own room.

227

He was never to know how hysteria had seized upon Miss Yule at precisely the wrong moment. He was never to know how she lay awake most of the night thinking of how impressively handsome he looked in his tattered uniform and fitting him in as the hero of every moving-picture she had ever seen.

All Mr. Patter knew was that Miss Yule had come across a continent in answer to his unspoken plea for her, and having come, she had looked at him and had laughed.

228

## Chapter Twenty-One:

### *Oh, Who Will Buy My Sash-Weights?*

It may be recalled here that no mention was made of General Pedro Copal as one of those who rose to meet the dawn on the glad Friday. That was because he did not rise to meet the dawn on Friday. Saturday noon, in fact, found him still in bed but on the way to recovery from an amazing drunk.

A bell-boy brought him the morning newspapers along with some cracked ice and other necessities, and General Copal defied his headache long enough to glance through them. They contained nothing much of interest. . . . They never did, these North American newspapers. There were some odds and ends about a riot. He laughed at the thought that he might be tempted to read anything about such childish amusements as riots—he, a warrior, who had just come from a zone of battle. However, his pulsating eye came to rest on a somewhat unbeautiful picture, and for the moment his criticism failed him. Here, at last, was something noteworthy. The picture, in spite of all that press photographers, engravers and printers could do to it, was still a fair likeness of Mr. Bull-Neck Beesey. And under it was a touching bit of news to the effect that Mr. Beesey, full of gin, holes and remorse, was now in the hands of the police surgeons but, unfortunately, about to recover.

229

Sobriety came quickly to Señor Copal after that. He cursed Mr. Beesey fluently in Spanish and less fluently but no less heartily in English. It was becoming apparent to him that he had rested his weight upon a slender reed in the matter of recovering the golden loot. Time was shortening, and he still lacked the million dollars. As soon as he could get around to it, he arose, picked

up the telephone and called the headquarters of a detective agency.

Came presently Thomas U. Henshaw, president and chief of the Henshaw Secret Service, and Señor Copal showed him the sad news in the morning papers.

“I seen it,” commented Mr. Henshaw. “Needn’t get excited about it . . . another little rum war, I suppose. You don’t have those things down in your country. . . .”

“Theese is not rum war,” contradicted Señor Copal sadly. “Deeper . . . much more deeper. The man Beesey works for me. It is e-sad to e-say but now he is no good to me.”

“So you started all this. I was wondering what made the boys get out the hardware so close to election. What’s the racket?”

And, in free translation, Señor Copal said something like this:

“I hired him to get back from the traitor, General Gonzalez, sometimes erroneously called ‘the Liberator,’ some documents and other material of vast importance to our cause in the Republic of Pandorra. The work I would have you do is of much the same nature. You were recommended to me as the responsible head of an established business, and I have been told that you are under a large bond.”

230

Mr. Henshaw admitted this.

“Very well, then,” pursued Señor Copal. “I shall outline the situation. If you are willing to undertake this great work we shall sign a suitable contract placing you under obligations to

turn over to me the valuables we seek or else forfeit your bond. And then I shall tell you where to look for these things.”

Mr. Henshaw nodded and thought, justly enough, that Señor Copal was not nearly so drunk as he seemed to be.

“In the first place,” proceeded Señor Copal, “our part in the Pandorran revolution has been handicapped by our lack of artillery. We have an excellent gun foundry and no end of iron, but we are short on manganese.”

Mr. Henshaw scratched his head. A manganese as he remembered it was a little animal which looked like a ferret but could be tamed . . . or was that a mongoose? No matter.

“Manganese is used in the manufacture of steel alloys,” went on Señor Copal, “and it is highly essential. Now this man Gonzalez, a trusted general in our army, came up here to buy manganese. He bought large quantities of it. But he had difficulties. The steel trust of *Los Estados Unidos* attempted to prevent the export of so much manganese. The steel makers believed that if they could cripple our gun factories the need must of necessity be supplied by the local manufacturers. So General Gonzalez was forced to pick up this stuff a little here and a little there and have it cast up in a form that would deceive the snoopers for the steel trust.

231

“This material was purchased with Pandorran money for Pandorra, and when we try to get it back we are trying to take only what is our own. That is the work in which I wish to enlist your many talents.”

Mr. Henshaw bobbed his head once more.

“You’re on,” he said. “But I’d like to point out that the rough stuff is finished. Beesey is in jail, and that shows that the cops aren’t going to allow any gun fighting until after election. Why not buy this bird off?”

“I was about to suggest something of the sort,” agreed Señor Copal. “In war one can’t regret too long the funds that are stolen by traitors. One must look to the larger issues. I have some funds in the banks of this city. I put them there when I was collector of the port of Santa Cruz fifteen years ago . . . just for safe keeping, you know. I am willing to pay thirty thousand dollars for this manganese.”

“I think I could do pretty well as your agent on terms like that,” said Mr. Henshaw. “I’ll sign your contract.” And he did.

232

“Now then,” proceeded Señor Copal. “This stuff has been molded with other minerals to give it body and now reposes in the form of sash-weights in a gondola the whereabouts of which is known to General Gonzalez. I did not know that until I received a cablegram from Pandorra day before yesterday just before I got drunk. I should like to point out to you that time is limited, and that General Gonzalez may succeed at any moment in making a bargain with the trust.”

“Don’t let that worry you,” advised Mr. Henshaw. “It is our motto to proceed on a piece-work basis. ‘Speed’ Henshaw is what they used to call me in the U. S. Secret Service and I have lived up to the name. One of my own men will be calling on the general in the next hour.”

“You know then where to find him?” Señor Copal’s admiration was not feigned.

“Everybody in town knows where to find him,” he replied. “He generally hangs out at the Super-Babylon Theater.”

“Fancy that now,” (or words to that effect) remarked General Copal in Spanish. “Spends his time at a moving-picture theater when he might as well be drinking. I always did say that General Gonzalez was crazy.”

Mr. Patter, of course, had only a general idea of the persons interested in his removal or surveillance and less than nothing of the causes involved. On Saturday morning before the entrance of Mr. Henshaw into the field the situation might have been called a bit muddled, but at least three groups were still identifiable: The operatives employed by the man named Joe, quite a number of whom had escaped the diligent police and quite a number of whom had been distributed equitably among the hospitals. Second: Mr. Beesey’s little Beesey bodies, hired by General Copal to rid the world of General Gonzalez and now largely disrupted through the failure of an attempt to rid the world of Frederick Franklin Patter. Third: The legatees of Mr. Vest, hired by General Gonzalez to remove General Copal, and now in a position similar to that of Mr. Beesey’s guild through having attempted instead to remove General Gonzalez in the person of Mr. Patter. Many of the gunmen languishing in jails or operating rooms were wondering what it was all about. And who could blame them?

The morning newspapers told a weird tale of carnage. It was

pretty generally known that three mobs had taken part in the battle of the Super-Babylon. Most of the city's able-bodied surgeons had been mobilized to pick slugs out of the valuable carcasses of Mr. Beesey's boys and Mr. Novak's boys and a number of seeming orphans whose names might have been recognized by Joe's chief of staff. Some sixty per cent. of the combatants, including the police, had been wounded.

234

That there had been no deaths seemed to have been due to poor shooting. Some of the papers went so far as to advocate musketry courses in the public schools.

Mr. Patter, in a hurried reading of the communiques, looked in vain for some mention of the visiting Liberator whose straw hat he had crushed with the window-weight. He had expected to see some mention of "an unidentified man found wandering in dazed condition in railroad yards." But General Gonzalez, if alive, had contrived to escape this publicity. Mr. Patter folded up the newspapers, looked at General Gonzalez' bill of lading to make certain that it had not been part of a crazy dream and then forced his weary bones to take him out of the hotel to a cab stand where he embarked for the freight yards of the L. M. & Y. Railroad.

And General Gonzalez, what of him?

Toward morning the general had awakened to discover himself lying on what had some similarity to a field of battle but turned out to be merely a railroad yard. He groaned, stretched his arms and legs and groaned again. His head ached, and his brain wasn't functioning very well. He seemed to have come through a nightmare in which a number of gunmen were seeking his life . . . an enemy had struck him down and would presently be back . . . an enemy had struck him down and had run away. Now what



could have been the purpose in any such performance as that? He remembered. He had been rescued by somebody —by two somebodies, one of them a girl who, since it had been dark, might be considered beautiful, the other a ghostly figure in the uniform of Pandorra.

At this point in his reminiscences the general sat bolt upright and forgot the pain of his bones. He cursed. It must have made him dizzy, that blow on the head . . . very dizzy indeed, for he seemed to recall having given his precious document into the hands of this stranger for safe keeping. *Dios!* Was it possible that the silly fool who had done this was actually General Gonzalez, the Liberator? He felt in his breast pocket and decided that it was not only possible but quite likely.

A moment later he was on his feet and staggering drunkenly across the path of engines and flying box-cars. Somehow he got home, treated his wounds internally with cognac and awoke at noon not greatly improved. He called the freight station. The clerk who answered the telephone was polite but apparently not much interested in the whereabouts of a carload of sash-weights.

The shipment had been removed from the yards in trucks, he eventually reported. . . . Everything had been regular. . . . No, he couldn't say where the trucks had gone. . . . And what of it? Did any one think there might be something underhanded in the transfer of a load of sash-weights?

Señor Gonzalez sincerely hoped that his optimism might prove justified. On the other hand, he did not dare to think of it. He resumed his internal treatment and went back to bed.

Mr. Patter journeyed back to his hotel, aware for the first time that spring was at hand and vast quantities of gunmen in jail. Life for the nonce was a pleasant thing. This mouselike Margaret had proved to be a good little soul. General Gonzalez had proved to be singularly human after suffering a rap on the head. Presumably Bull-Neck Beesey wasn't so bad as a lot of people supposed. As Mr. Patter considered the matter it occurred to him that Mr. Beesey had never harmed a hair on his head, despite his boyish gun play. Messrs. Novak and Mucket, now that their mob had been scattered, seemed good lads, if impetuous. Comedians, both of them, with their talk of a million dollars. And as for Janice Yule . . . well, as for Janice Yule he was not so sure. He still adored her. He was sure of that. He must go on through life as one of those strong silent men who spend their time in noble works such as rescuing carloads of sash-weights, and all because he had tossed his heart to her. Some day when somebody got around to writing his biography there would be a chapter of speculation as to the identity of this woman—for the biographer would realize that only a woman could have wrought this iron man into such fine steel. And none should ever know unless of course he should write something about it in a letter to be found next his heart after death . . . a letter which perhaps might bring as much at an auction sale as the signature of Button Gwinnett.

He was still looking into this sad but important future, albeit with a little trepidation, when he came to his room. He was working in the details when there was a knock at the door, and he admitted Mr. Henshaw and a comrade whose sterling qualities had left no imprint on his face.

Mr. Henshaw introduced himself and broke the glad news that

the name of the comrade was Sixtus Savanay, sometimes known as Operative Number Six-and-Seven-Eighths.

“You are known as Frederick Patter?” Mr. Henshaw inquired.

Mr. Patter admitted the truth of the indictment.

“Well, I got business with you,” announced Mr. Henshaw, quelling at once all suspicion that the call might have been something of a social function.

“Come in and sit down,” invited Mr. Patter. “And while I don’t wish to seem impolite I feel I should tell you that a whole lot of detectives not connected with your agency are keeping pretty close tab on this room.”

This was not entirely true but sufficiently plausible to bring a nod from Mr. Henshaw.

“You can frisk us if you want to,” Mr. Henshaw stated. “We represent a guy who’s tired of the rough stuff. If I’d had anything to do with it in the first place there wouldn’t been any. Get me? All right, then, we got a proposition. We represent General Copal.”

“Who’s General Copal?”

238

Mr. Henshaw smiled.

“Well, it’s all right with me if you want to play safe,” he acceded. “We won’t worry much about who is he. What’s more important is what’s he willing to do.”

“Oh, of course. . . . And what’s that?”

“Well, I’ll tell you: I know all about how this revolution is going down in Pandorra. It ain’t going so good. What I mean to say . . . it’s kinda busted up. Now you and me both know why it’s busted up.”

He got no verification of this important fact from Mr. Patter. But lack of response did not deter him. He proceeded:

“It’s busted up account of the boys not having the stuff they thought somebody was going to get for ’em up here. . . . See what I mean?”

“Not in the least.”

“Well, I’ll tell you the whole works. No use beating about the bush. The stuff they need is the stuff you bought for ’em.”

“I never bought anything for them.”

Mr. Henshaw shook his head.

“Your business is your business,” he admitted magnanimously. “Maybe you got some reason for acting dumb. But I’ll tell you something; you’re missing your big chance, General Gonzalez.”

Mr. Patter drummed on the arm of his chair impatiently.

“I’m tired of all this,” he declared. “I’m tired of being held responsible for war in Pandorra and war in the United States. I’m tired of listening to people who come here preaching to me. I’m not General Gonzalez. I never bought

anything for his dinky revolution, and I'll thank you to get out of here and give me a rest."

The sincerity of his tone almost convinced Mr. Henshaw. The great detective got to his feet and picked up his hat in silence. He was half-way to the door before his eye lighted upon an object that rested incongruously among the photographs, hair brushes and what-not on Mr. Patter's dresser.

"There it is," he exclaimed triumphantly. "That's what we want . . . a carload's the order. A whole carload and no foolin' and we'll pay thirty thousand dollars for it."

Mr. Patter gulped. Mr. Henshaw handed him a card with an address on it and passed out with Comrade Savanay at his heels. Mr. Patter turned from the door to stare perplexedly at the object on his dresser.

"Now what the hell," he inquired of himself, "will a banana revolution do with a carload of those things? Do they fight wars with sash-weights?"

## Chapter Twenty-Two:

### *Talented Conqueror Falls in Love.*

Once, in the days of the snipers' campaign in the Sierra del Toro, General Copal—he was then a second lieutenant of mule cavalry, if such it may be called—was known far and wide as Copal of the keen eyes. By his command he was known by many other titles which need not be repeated here. The keen eyes of Copal became a national legend in Pandorra and there sprang up about him a sort of folklore—half fact, half myth. Many of the exploits attributed to him were of little consequence, it is true. We refer particularly to the story of how he saw a copper centavo in a crack in a sidewalk a block and a half away . . . any soldier in the Pandorran army could have spotted the centavo at a greater distance than that although he probably would have doubted the evidence of his senses. But there were authenticated incidents tending to show that Copal's eyes were something between a meter-base range-finder and a scissors instrument. What there was to be seen Copal saw. All that, however, was before he began to drink the American *vin du pays*, a strange and not entirely pleasant beverage known to the natives as "hooch."

On Saturday morning, when Señor Copal enlisted the service of Henshaw, the great detective, he discovered that he was moving in a sort of perpetual twilight. He could read the newspapers only under a strong lamp and then very slowly—a fact which may have been due to failing sight or to his sketchy knowledge of English. At any rate the condition alarmed him, and he sent for the house physician.

"Eyes?" queried the doctor. "And what have you been

drinking?”

“What’s that got to do with it?” retorted the innocent Pandorran. “It’s only in your quaint old song that one does his drinking with his eyes.”

“Don’t kid yourself. The eye-strain from looking into prohibition is the curse of this country. I may take it, then, that you have been storing away some of our local hooch.”

“It is not that I like the ’ooch but there is nothing else to be had.”

“So many connoisseurs have found themselves in the same difficulty. However, I suppose one must take things as one finds them. And you are very lucky.”

“Lucky? I think not I can see only with the greatest difficulty.”

“That’s what I mean. You are lucky to see with the greatest difficulty. You are lucky to be seeing anything at all. I’ll have a prescription filled for you down at the drug store, a simple restorative that ought to work in a couple of weeks. And in the meantime lay off of the bell-boy’s gin. If you must buy hooch get it through me. I know a real good bootlegger.”

He went away leaving General Copal in a fit of dejection from which he had not entirely emerged at the time Mr. Henshaw returned with his first report.

242

“Well,” said the great detective, “I found this bird right away, and we had the talk. He’s got the stuff, all right, and I think maybe we can make a deal. I knocked him over with the proposition that we were willing to buy him off.”

“He says he will sell?”

“Not yet. I’m fast. Speed Henshaw is what they used to call me when I was running down lead-pipe thieves in the old days. But I ain’t quite that fast. The bird didn’t want to talk to me at all at first. I had to be smooth and work into it gradual.”

“But I must know what he intends to do. There is even less time than I thought. I must get out of this country and go back to Pandorra where I can get a drink without going blind.”

“Easy, easy. . . . We’ll find out what he intends to do. You can’t rush him. You ought to know that. At first he even denied that he was General Gonzalez.”

Señor Copal started.

“Are you sure he wasn’t telling you the truth? It would be like the old fox to put out a decoy to draw the bullets.”

Mr. Henshaw sniffed.

“Listen,” he admonished. “I ain’t exactly new at this business. The papers have been full of General Gonzalez since the day he got here. What do I care what he says? No young squirt like him is going to bunk me.”

243

“Young?”

“Well, if he ain’t a young squirt what is he? Him a general! No wonder you’re getting a tough break with your revolution. Probably nice enough lad but no brains, no experience. . . .”



“No experience? Is he still wearing a gray mustache?”

Mr. Henshaw guffawed.

“Say that baby won’t grow any kind of a mustache for another three years,” he scoffed. “That’s what I’m telling you. . . . Half baked.”

“There’s something wrong here,” groaned Señor Copal. “I think you found the wrong man.”

Mr. Henshaw threw out an impatient hand.

“Have it your way,” he said. “After all, as I get it, it ain’t the general you want, it’s the sash-weights.”

General Copal nodded.

“All right, then. . . . That proves it. This bird has the sash-weights. I saw one of ’em in his room.”

General Copal was conscious of a headache. In some fashion this unspeakable Gonzalez was giving him a lot of trouble . . . probably had had his face lifted, the old goat. The sash-weight, however, was something tangible. It seemed to be favorable evidence. . . . It was possible of course that in a weird country like this, people had sash-weights lying around in all their rooms as a sort of decoration. On the other hand, Henshaw seemed to know what he was talking about.

“Go and get me the e-sash-weight,” he commanded suddenly.

“What are you talking about?” returned Mr. Henshaw. “Are you

going to buy this carload a piece at a time?”

“I must have this sample,” explained Señor Copal patiently. “A simple analysis which I can perform myself will show us at once whether or not this is the right man.”

“Impossible!” snapped Mr. Henshaw. “I’m telling you he’s the right man, ain’t I? Well, then . . .”

“You must get me this sample.”

“Listen! That’s out. He won’t talk about giving it to me. I know. I been wrangling with him all morning. It’s no use.”

“Where is this weight?”

“In his room at the Morgan Hotel.”

“Take it out of his room.”

Mr. Henshaw seemed scandalized.

“I won’t do nothing of the kind,” he stated indignantly. “I said when I come into this case that there ain’t going to be no rough stuff. I’d be a fine sap tryin’ to compete with all the other mobs in town, wouldn’t I? All you gotta do is sit tight. When he gets the carload of junk we’ll talk turkey to him. That’ll be time enough.”

But after he had gone Señor Copal felt the old doubts sweeping over him once more. Gonzalez the deceitful must always be Gonzalez the deceitful. It embittered Señor Copal to think that a patriot could so far demean himself as to

masquerade as a callow youth and steal a million dollars.

“I’ll have to look into this,” Señor Copal observed to himself. “If I could count on this nincompoop to be wrong the case wouldn’t be so complicated. But I’m afraid I can’t be sure that Mr. Henshaw will do anything I expect him to do . . . even to make the proper errors at the proper time.”

It was terrifically complicated for an aching head, but Señor Copal, who was not without intelligence, was able to grasp certain salient points of the situation. Item 1.—The golden loot of the Oro Hondo had not yet been marketed; if General Gonzalez had come unexpectedly into a million he must certainly have heard of it for Gonzalez would not be reticent. Item 2.—General Gonzalez himself was not negotiating the exchange; here he had to deal with suspicion and the dubious facts in Mr. Henshaw’s report. Item 3.—The agent, if any, had control of or knew the whereabouts of the cache inasmuch as a sample of it reposed in his room. Item 4.—The agent knew that the stuff was valuable, else he might have leaped at once to consider General Copal’s offer as delivered by Mr. Henshaw. Item 5.—This agent must be having some trouble disposing of his sash-weights, possibly because of American interference and as a result of this might be willing to sell General Gonzalez out.

All in all the business was worth looking into. Señor Copal set out for the Morgan Hotel.

246

Much has been said about the length of the nose of Cleopatra. Since the subject has been opened one might note in the same

file the horse that was lost for the want of a horseshoe nail with disastrous results to a number of people, including presumably, the blacksmith.

If Napoleon had known about the sunken road to Ohain at Waterloo . . . If the watch of the young student of Sarajevo had been five minutes late . . . If General Pedro Copal had never tasted of American hooch . . . There is fascination in considering these possibilities but little profit.

Take, for example, the case of General Pedro Copal: As Copal of the keen eyes he had come through life dependent upon one of his senses alone. What had been pleasing to the eye had been pleasing to Copal and vice versa, not that it makes any difference: we merely mention it. Had he remained in Pandorra the even tenor of his ways might have continued unchanged until the glad day when somebody stood him up against a white wall in the cool of the morning. But he did not remain in Pandorra. He did come to the United States. He did experiment with post-prohibition potables. And so came love to whisper strange messages in his sunburned ears.

Señor Copal, before this psychological digression, was on his way to the Morgan Hotel. He arrived there directly and without mishap. He inquired at the desk for General Gonzalez and was informed that no such person was registered, besides which he was out at the moment.

247

Señor Copal tried a five-dollar bill and learned that if by any chance General Gonzalez should be registered at the Morgan Hotel it probably would be under the name of Frederick Patter whose room number was readily given. Señor Copal sat down

to wait for Mr. Patter.

He did not mind the waiting. It reminded him somewhat of old Santa Cruz, this lobby . . . particularly the artificial palm nearest the door. It looked exactly like an artificial palm he had once seen in Joe's Bar. . . . And as for the business of sitting down, what of it? Most of his life he had spent sitting down, for in Pandorra the routine of fighting is largely a rest between battles. The best general is the one who can think up most reasons for welcoming the glad *mañana*.

So Señor Copal sat and watched the blurred crowds through his dizzy eyes and presently allowed himself to day-dream. Then suddenly came a voice that brought him half out of his leather cushions—a voice that echoed through what passed current for his soul . . . “Like golden bells,” he told himself, unceremoniously plagiarizing from the original Mr. Patter who had so expressed himself on a similar occasion,—“Beautiful golden bells.” Love was close at his hand at that moment. 248 He swung about almost rudely and gazed at the occupant of the adjoining divan . . . a woman in some dark clothes, the exact color of which he could not make out. A visiting queen, undoubtedly. . . . He stared at her unaware of what he did. And so presently beheld the astonished eyes of Estelle Henderson.

General Copal arose dizzily and walked to her side. The woman to whom she had been talking had moved toward the elevator. The general sank into the vacant chair.

“Please don't go,” he requested of Miss Henderson in fluent Spanish. “I am a stranger in this land. Let that be my excuse. Señorita, who are you?”

For just one moment Estelle's subconscious being reached out for her old hauteur. Then she smiled.

"I do not know you, Señor," she replied in his own tongue—or rather in its high-school approximation. "You probably have mistaken me for some one else. My name is Estelle Henderson."

"The name of course means little to me," he admitted regretfully. "My own name is Pedro Copal, and in my own land, the Republic of Pandorra, I am a general in command of the right wing of the Insurrectos."

Miss Henderson started perceptibly, but Señor Copal probably would have overlooked her emotion even had he been able to see it. He continued hesitantly.

"Soon I shall be back in the field, fighting for the liberation of my country from the yoke of despots. And I can not go without telling you something that has come to my mind. I think you are the most beautiful woman in the world."

249

Estelle's code was rigid enough but quite without an appendix covering such cases as this. She looked at Señor Copal sharply but could discover there none of the tribal markings of the lounge lizard. Oddly enough he seemed to be sincere, and her first reaction was one of shock. No one before had ever told her she was the most beautiful woman in the world. Not even her own mirror had been quite up to that.

"You mustn't say such things," she told him in a trembling baritone. "Some women might think you were trying to be impertinent."

“I have never said such things to any woman before,” he assured her. And apparently he believed that, also. “All my life I have risked much to gain a little. I have seized opportunities without hesitation whenever they presented themselves. In this case I took the chance of displeasing you because without that risk I knew I must give up all hope of meeting the most beautiful creature I have ever seen. May I take you to luncheon?”

“I ought to say no,” replied Miss Henderson, “but I’m saying yes.”

Later that afternoon Mr. Patter returned to his room and discovered that his sash-weight was missing. He felt a little annoyed but not greatly alarmed. One could always get a sash-weight. It seemed to be a matter of no importance.

250

General Copal, homeward bound with the stolen weight in his pocket, reached a similar conclusion by a different route. A beautiful woman had smiled at him, and a new force had come into his life. He was once more Hell-for-Leather Copal, the talented conqueror. He would have this gold that Gonzalez was seeking to hide from him. He would have a country at his feet. . . . And Estelle Henderson would sit at his side as he made himself king of Pandorra. Nothing could stop him now. . . . Nothing.

251

## Chapter Twenty-Three:

### *Star to Sacrifice All for Million Dollars.*

General Pedro Copal did not waste time in congratulating himself upon having accomplished a task that Mr. Henshaw, the super-sleuth, had declared to be impossible. Had there been no such lovely creature as Estelle Henderson in the midst of the fog that served him for vision, the general might have found occasion to feel proud of himself not only for the acquirement of the sash-weight but for other feats of investigation . . . for there had been such feats.

He had discovered, for example, that Mr. Patter was not Señor Gonzalez, and he was pleased at this inasmuch as it proved that his judgment of Mr. Henshaw had not been in error. Mr. Henshaw was really that kind of detective, and the corollary presumption seemed logical—that Mr. Patter was the kind of agent that Mr. Henshaw thought he was not. If the sample tested out correctly he had no doubt that he could persuade Mr. Patter to accept a sure fifty thousand dollars in place of a problematical million—particularly inasmuch as the fifty thousand dollars would go into the pocket of Mr. Patter whereas the million would come out of the pocket of Señor Gonzalez.

As for the technique he had followed in obtaining the sash-weight, he did not give it a second thought. Keen brains met such difficulties as a matter of course. That this difficulty had been insurmountable had resulted in his giving a bell-boy ten dollars in place of the projected five. He had told the boy that he wished the weight as a souvenir of his association with Mr. Patter, and for ten dollars a bell-boy will believe nearly anything.



Estelle Henderson, leaving the hotel after luncheon, looked out upon a world that had suddenly become filled with sunshine and roses, not to mention the music of birds. For Estelle had received verification of what every woman knows—that she was—or maybe is—the most beautiful woman in the world. Estelle had experienced none of General Copal's sudden passion. She liked him immensely. Any girl would admire a man of such excellent judgment and such refreshing candor. But if Love meant anything to Estelle Henderson it suggested the worried face of Frederick Patter. Somehow she was conscious of failure in the case of Mr. Patter. Frequently she had wondered if their beautiful friendship was ever going to be anything else. Now she discovered that it might not be so hard to give him up. A romantic conqueror with prospects might be roughly classified as an ace in the hole.

So Estelle was smiling when she tripped lightly across the sun-spangled court. She was almost gracious when she collided with Margaret Banning in the Legation lobby. And she ascribed Margaret's detached and somewhat cool acknowledgment of her greeting as evidence of excusable jealousy.

253

Margaret was not jealous of Miss Henderson. On the other hand, she had discovered in the rain-threatening chill of the early afternoon none of Miss Henderson's beautiful visions. Miss Banning left General Copal's choice for Miss World and proceeded to the writing-room where, according to schedule, she found the man called Joe. Joe apparently had not yet located the missing million and he seemed depressed by the thought that so many of his operatives would be such a long time in jail.

Miss Banning's sympathy was negligible.

"Don't tell me your troubles," she advised him. "I have plenty of my own. If your armed oafs go around shooting themselves in the feet that's their lookout."

Joe did not seem entirely pleased.

"They say the whistle signals were mixed up," he told her shortly. "What about that?"

"Of course the signals were mixed up," she admitted. "How could they be otherwise with a mob of nitwits like that listening for them. That mob would mistake the Angel Gabriel's trumpet for taps. . . . Anyway, what of it? Both bunches of yokels got into the riot didn't they? The answer is pretty obvious. If two squads couldn't turn the trick what could one have done?"

Joe sighed wearily.

"Forget it, Maggie," he advised. "You're right enough. But our chance has gone glimmering, and it won't be back. Where did you go last night?"

254

She gave him a detailed report of the skirmish in the railroad yards.

"This old lad that our boy knocked out is the man of mystery for the present instalment," she told him. "I think he's the one who was given the reception by the Friends of Pandorran Freedom. Maybe somebody told him there was going to be a convention of General Gonzalezes in the freight yards last night, and he came as a principal. On the other hand, he may have come merely as

an agent, and that gums up the business frightfully. I can't see why our General Gonzalez should assault his own agent. . . . I tried to get the bill of lading I told you about, but Freddy wouldn't give it to me and I hadn't any chance to find out what sort of stuff it covered. However, I have a hunch that I'm going to follow."

"And be fairly quick about it," advised Joe. "There's getting to be entirely too much competition for this million dollars. Just let a few more people hear about it. . . ."

"Bosh!" commented Miss Banning. "Nobody's going to hear about it." Which shows that even an intelligent young woman may sometimes be mistaken.

Out of a fretful sleep awakened Janice Yule. Now, as when she had come here in a vain search for rest, the white face of Frederick Franklin Patter was before her. . . . A knight had come riding. A hero right out of a book . . . an iron man with a not entirely negligible million dollars . . . and he loved her.

255

He loved her! Miss Yule repeated this phrase somewhat dubiously. She could not rid herself of the memory of how he had looked when her musical laugh echoed through the lobby of the hotel. Perhaps—perish the thought—he had jumped at the conclusion that she was laughing at him, whereas, of course, she had been laughing at something that Estelle Henderson had said. . . . What was that bright thing Miss Henderson had said? . . . She forgot it, now, and anyway it hadn't been exactly what she said but the way she said it. . . . And besides, Mr. Patter had certainly looked like something out of a custard-pie comedy.

Miss Yule was a bit finicky that afternoon about her choice of dresses and cosmetics, and brought her maid to the point of resignation. At another time this petty wrangling might have played havoc with her delicate nerves. Now she paid no attention to it. What was the exodus of a maid—or for that matter of a half-dozen maids—as balanced against the love of a truly good and great man with a million dollars? Miss Yule who had never taken any prizes for mathematics was able to figure that one out easily.

The lovely blonde had been told that Mr. Patter would be at the Super-Babylon Theater. This was a little disconcerting inasmuch as she had intended to be a day late in keeping her engagement with Moe Eisenstark. But she sacrificed her personal interests and called for Mr. Eisenstark's limousine.

256

It was Janice Yule out of *A Daughter of the Hearth* who gave a shy hand to Mr. Patter in response to Mr. Eisenstark's introduction. . . . Just a little innocent girl blundering along from trouble to trouble in her wish to do right . . .

In the dim indirect lighting of Mr. Eisenstark's office she seemed to be still a bit of shadow that had somehow detached itself from the silver screen. Mr. Patter longed to take her in his arms and stroke her beautiful hair and comfort her. It was not quite clear to him why she might need the comforting, but the idea occurred to him none the less.

A less gifted soul than Mr. Patter must have realized at once that Miss Yule had sensed his many qualities and was more than pleased with him. Mr. Eisenstark recognized this state of affairs much as he might have recognized the kick of a mule. He slid out

of the office and looked into the face of Karl Kolan, the publicity agent, with startled eyes.

“I’m a liar if this jane ain’t tryin’ to, now, make him,” commented Mr. Eisenstark. “She ain’t never seen him before, an’ she starts right in to give him the works.”

“Fair enough,” was Mr. Kolan’s enthusiastic critique. “You can’t tie that for a story, can you?”

“Good publicity all right,” admitted Mr. Eisenstark. “But how did it happen? . . . That’s what gets me. She’s got the marry-me-at-once-you-big-strong-bozo look in her eye right now.”

257

“What the what should we care how it started?” was the fair query of Mr. Kolan. “Me, I’m writing a piece for the papers right now.”

There was something intangible about Miss Yule as Mr. Patter saw her. . . . In the first place her voice was hardly more than a whisper. It did not seem to be hers at all. In the second place she had a trick of holding her head down and peering up at him with her big brown eyes half hidden by a floppy hat.

Had she known it the beautiful Janice could have won the theoretical conqueror then and there had she ventured one sentence in an ordinary conversational tone and abandoned her pose of shyness long enough to present the profile that Mr. Patter had watched night after night on the screen.

As it was, she seemed to be a goddess whom he knew intimately

and yet did not know at all. And while thinking of this he found time to remember that she was a goddess who had laughed at him.

“I have heard much of you,” she said in a crooning little voice. “I have wanted to meet you.”

“And I have always wanted to meet you. I feel that I have always known you. . . .”

It came to him that he must have looked fairly ludicrous in the wreckage of his uniform.

“I wonder if we couldn’t have a good long talk some time,” Miss Yule was saying. “Lessee. . . . How about Monday night? Six o’clock. Legation Hotel.”

258

“Monday night or any night,” he answered. “I think you are very kind to me.”

“Honest, it’s a pleasure to meet a real man,” she whispered coyly. “Although I’m a star, which some people say is the greatest in the business, away, deep down I’m just a little girl like any other little girl. You mustn’t believe what the press-agents say about me. I got nothing to do with that.”

Mr. Patter looked at her with an expression that Miss Yule could not have analyzed even had she been given to such efforts. Her language, he observed, was something quite different from the lines he had heard her speak in the talking cinema. He felt a panicky desire to retire and meditate, and presently he did.

That afternoon the world, which despite its rough exterior is still a place of sweetness and light, thrilled to a bit of news that true romance continues to flourish.

“JANICE YULE TO WED PANDORRAN CONQUEROR”

ran the head-lines in the afternoon newspapers.

“Million-dollar dower to Moving-Picture Queen—Report.”

## Chapter Twenty-Four:

### *Destiny Favors Purple Buzzard.*

Bright and early on a Sunday morning Destiny rose from her couch of clouds and picked up the newspapers.

“Ho-hum,” she observed as she glanced at the head-lines, “I see that Janice Yule is trying to improve on my technique again. It’s time something was done about this. A hard-working Fate has enough to contend with without amateur competition.”

She walked over to her filing cabinet and looked up a number of records having to do with Janice and Mr. Patter, and the theoretical million, and Margaret Banning, and Estelle Henderson, and the various Conquerors from Pandorra, and Messrs. Novak and Mucket, and the man named Joe and the Purple Buzzard. . . . And she smiled the acid smile that Destiny wears so constantly.

“All the elements for a pleasant jamboree,” she remarked to herself. “To-morrow is Monday—and an open date. We shall see what we shall see.”

Whereupon she sat down again and began to pull certain strings. . . .

Mr. Patter picked up the Sunday newspapers with the irritated air of a man who knows what he is going to be told in the way of news. Mr. Patter had seen the late editions of the afternoon papers. He had seen the early city editions of the morning papers. And he was shocked at their unanimity in



error. All were agreed that he was about to find a million dollars—presumably the same million spoken of so eloquently by Messrs. Novak and Mucket—and that he was to give it to Janice Yule as a nuptial gift.

For all that this latest trouble was now more than twelve hours old, Mr. Patter still seethed.

It was all over now, he supposed. The beautiful Janice would undoubtedly blame him for this silly story. He would be fortunate if she ever spoke to him again. . . . He remembered how her eyes had flashed in *Wedded in Haste*. Somebody had spread scandalous stories about her in that picture—a dirty trick. And her righteous anger had been a model ever since for all women who are satisfied with nothing but the best in vocal indignation. Mr. Patter shuddered to think of it.

And the million! He forgot the prospect of his next meeting with Miss Yule as he cursed the Fate that had put him into the world without the million he was supposed to have. He recalled how many times his life would have been an architect's model for serenity if it had not been for this oversight. . . . He could have turned it over to Messrs. Novak and Mucket, for example, and gone about his business uninterrupted by gunmen. Right now he might lay it at the feet of the—supposedly—outraged Queen of the Shadows as a slight compensation for the blundering of reporters that had linked her name with his—or rather with the name that was supposed to be his.

He didn't bother to think about plans for the raising of some such purse by Monday night. He had given that idea his attention on a previous occasion and nothing had come of it.

Mr. Patter had shaved one side of his face when the telephone-bell rang to announce the arrival of the reporters. He wiped the lather from the other side, hastily seized his collar, tie, coat and hat and left via the freight elevator. The hotel saw no more of him that day and his numerous telephone callers—among them Miss Janice Yule—were irked, not to say piqued.

Miss Henderson saw the glad tidings with something of a shock. Then she threw herself face down on her bed, tore the pillow-case to shreds and kicked with a diligence she had not displayed since babyhood.

“I’ll tear that wig off of her,” she confided to the bolster. “I’ll scratch her face and black her eyes.” And you will be horrified to know that she referred to Miss Yule, the perfect blonde.

Messrs. Novak and Mucket, still a long jump ahead of the zone squads, saw the newspapers that morning at the Purple Buzzard.

Until this moment they had been concerned only slightly with the affairs of General Gonzalez as represented by Mr. Patter.

They thought, with some logic, that they had done pretty well in managing to stay alive and out of jail. A million dollars is, of course, a million dollars. On the other hand, you can’t exactly lose what you have never had, and the uses of a million dollars to a dead man are, to say the least, problematical. However, the hue and cry had died down somewhat. A large portion of their competition had been eliminated by the police and other agencies . . . and here was the million popping up again. Some goof was going to give it to a jane for a wedding present.

“Why, it’s our own million bucks that this egg is going to give away,” commented Mr. Novak indignantly after he had read a paragraph or two. “Can you tie that?”

“Going to give it to a girl,” snorted Mr. Mucket. “If that ain’t the berries! I can see this jane any night for fifty-fi’ cents, an’ she ain’t no bargain at that. But this stiff has to go turnin’ loose a thousan’ grand for her. A hot idea, if you’re askin’ me.”

“Our money,” repeated Mr. Novak. “A fine lot of saps we turned out to be.”

“Just because we got to spend all our time wit’ the police he does it,” growled Mr. Mucket. “That’s why.”

“Life is like that,” philosophized Mr. Novak. “Somebody is always bootin’ you in the pants when your back is turned.”

“Tha’s the best time to boot anybody in the pants,” commented Mr. Mucket.

“What I mean is this guy ain’t no sport. . . . There ought to be a law against that kind of business.”

263

“Well, they’s nothing we can do about it except take it on the chin. . . . When the hell do the cops take a vacation anyway?”

Mr. Novak dropped his paper to the floor and banged on the table with both fists.

“Cops or no cops we gotta protect our rights,” he declared.

“We’re the guys found this here million. It’s ours. We’re going to get it. No slob like this here General Kinsella is going to make a

bum out of me. . . .”

“Well, it’s all right with me,” agreed Mr. Mucket. “Only we can’t get any guns until Monday.”

“Monday’ll suit me,” said Mr. Novak. “It’ll give the cops one more day to get tired.”

Destiny pulled up that string and tied a knot in it to remind her of a piece of work well done.

Possibly a million yearning souls who knew Miss Yule to be the exponent of the good, the true and the beautiful forgot their breakfast that morning to discuss her reported engagement and to pray that she might be as happy as she had been in *Her Lovely Wedding*. There were others whose interest in the affair would have been quite as great had the lucky girl been the eighth-floor scrub-woman of the First National Bank instead of the ornamental Janice. In the latter group were General Gonzalez and somebody named Appleby who had a poignant sense of wrong and a distinct consciousness of the loss of five thousand dollars.

264

Mr. Appleby, whose head still ached from the impress of the ice-water pitcher, wept bitterly when he thought of all he had done to improve working conditions for the soldiery of the Pandorran revolution. What good had come of it at last? He had a warehouse full of Gullicker 30-30’s and a debit entry of five thousand dollars. The money that should have come to him for material to liberate a suffering republic would go to Hollywood and thence by easy stages to Reno. It was too horrible to contemplate.

Mr. Appleby, had he been any other man—say Mr. J. K. Higginbotham or Quintus P. McHolocaust—probably would have written off the deal and peddled his Gullicker 30-30's in Czecho-Slovakia or Patagonia. But Mr. Appleby was something more than a mere gun salesman. He was an idealist. He cared little—hardly any worth mentioning—for the profits that might come to him through the arming of the Insurrectos in General Gonzalez' revolution. His interest lay deeper than that. It was the broad humanitarian principle of lending a hand to a people awake that motivated him. Wherever souls were rebelling against tyranny and brave men were leading troops against despots . . . right there was Mr. Appleby. In the present instance he had felt himself almost a part in the revolution of—what was the name of the place? . . . Oh, yes,—Pandorra. At the moment he was suffering. His skull seemed too tight for him and his brain throbbed. But he conquered all personal feeling and picked up the telephone to call one Hiram Kelly, American agent for the Gonzalez contingent and local associate of Colonel Angeles. He found in Mr. Kelly's irritation an echo of his own.

265

“What does it all mean?” inquired Mr. Appleby.

“I'll bite,” responded Mr. Kelly. “It only takes one gold digger to bust up a revolution. Me, I was all set to be Plenipotentiary to France. And maybe I was going to get a good mahogany concession and an oil field. Now all I get is the air.”

“I have five thousand dollars invested in this cause,” stated Mr. Appleby. “Where do I get off?”

“Five grand! Who got it?”

“Gonzalez.”

“Funny. . . . He never said anything to me about it. And that’s just about what he owes me.”

“He got it. And I want to see him.”

“If you’re thinking of sending him over another five thousand dollars, send it by messenger with me as the messenger.”

“I’m thinking of sending him arsenic.”

“In that case maybe I can fix it up for you. He’ll be at the Super-Babylon to-morrow at three o’clock. The first day he went there he saw a blonde walking off the screen, and he’s been going ever since hoping to see her come back.”

Probably the only man in the city who knew nothing at all about the engagement of Janice Yule was General Pedro Copal who wouldn’t have cared much anyway. Señor Copal had just received a chemist’s report on the analysis of the sash-weight, and he was well satisfied.

266

General Gonzalez’ interest in his namesake at the Super-Babylon had been purely academic up to and including the night of the battle in the freight yards. The boy, apparently, was doing everything that could be done to uphold the honor of the name. At any rate he was contriving to stay alive under somewhat trying circumstances. The general was well pleased with him though not—in the nature of things—anxious to meet him socially.

On Sunday morning this interest in Mr. Patter received a decided impetus. There was, of course, the matter of the million dollars. . . . General Gonzalez usually came alert when anybody mentioned a million dollars. . . . And on Monday at noon there was, moreover, a report from operatives whom the general had hired to trace his missing bill of lading.

The principal sleuth was probably no intellectual giant, but he had found it relatively simple to trace a carload of sash-weights in a freight yard, and out of the freight yard to Hooley's warehouse.

"The stuff was taken there the morning after the riot," he said. "It's still there. Storage is paid for a month in advance. Hooley's warehouse is at Twenty-Eighth and Moon. Five-story brick joint. Modern. Fire-proof."

267

General Gonzalez snorted.

"Who brought it there?" he demanded.

"Four truck drivers named Eddie," replied the sleuth. "I traced them, too. All good hard-working fellers. They wouldn't steal your sash-weights."

"Who paid the storage?"

"I'm getting to that, ain't I? One thing at a time. This here's a report.

"The boys put the weights in a bin on the first floor . . . and that's where they are now. . . . I seen 'em myself. Then I goes nosin' around a little, and I find out something about who is it

hires the trucks. You'd never guess in a million years. General Gonzalez."

"What?" shouted General Gonzalez.

"No other," the sleuth assured him. "I looked it up careful. That wasn't the name he gives to the warehouse company. It was some other name. I got it here in my book. But when I looked up the address I spotted the bird from his picture in the papers. Then I gets a clerk from the warehouse to come over to the Super-Babylon Theater with me, and he says it's the same guy. And that's the piece."

"It's very good," murmured Gonzalez, deeply perplexed. "Send in your bill."

General Gonzalez reached the Super-Babylon Theater without having found an answer to his puzzle. If the bogus Gonzalez had moved the sash-weights then it was reasonable to suppose that the bogus Gonzalez had taken part in his rescue and had received from his own hand the bill of lading. But what had this bogus Gonzalez been doing in a railroad yard at that time of night. There was something sinister about the whole business.

268

The general went at once to Mr. Eisenstark.

"I am Colonel Angeles," he said. "I wish to see General Gonzalez."

"So do I," admitted Mr. Eisenstark.



“Isn’t he here?”

“He ain’t.”

“Where is he?”

“Out counting his million dollars, I suppose. Kissing it by-by before he gives it to the, now, dumbest of the Doras.”

Mr. Gonzalez saw red.

“How long has he been gone?” he demanded.

“Days,” replied Mr. Eisenstark. “He’s got a contract. But what of that? Moe Eisenstark can always find some place new contracts.”

Mr. Gonzalez said a hasty good-by. His fears seemed close to realization. In some fashion this scoundrel, the bogus Gonzalez, had penetrated the secret of the sash-weights and something had to be done about it right away. The indicated treatment seemed to involve the services of Messrs. Novak and Mucket.

On the way out he encountered Mr. Hiram Kelly.

“Wait a minute,” said Mr. Kelly.

269

“I can’t talk to you now,” replied the general. “I’ve got important business to attend to.”

“So have I.”

“It’ll have to wait.”

“Appleby’s on his way over here.”

“Who’s Appleby?”

“The gun salesman. . . . He says he gave you five thousand dollars.”

“*Dios!* Will you talk sense? Nobody gives me five thousand dollars. Everybody steals my money. Nobody does anything about it, and my agents stand around and talk and talk. . . .”

He moved across the lobby.

“Where are you going?” inquired Mr. Kelly.

“I’m going to kill a man,” roared Señor Gonzalez.

“Will you be back here afterward?”

“No! I hope I never see this nightmare again.”

“Would you care to tell me the name of the bozo you’re going to knock off?”

“I’m not going to kill him personally.”

“Of course not. I understand that. Nothing personal.”

“I’m going to get somebody else to do it. That’s why I go now to the Purple Buzzard.”

“Excellent! You couldn’t pick a better place for a murder. And who did you say is the boy who is getting the lucky number?”

“General Gonzalez,” replied General Gonzalez, and he laughed oddly.

Mr. Kelly for the first time since the beginning of the interview seemed worried.

270

“My car is outside,” he said. “I’ll take you out there. Wait just a second at the door.” He turned and ran into Mr. Eisenstark’s office without knocking.

“General Gonzalez was to have met a party here to-day,” he told Mr. Eisenstark. “He wants to leave word that he has to go out to the Purple Buzzard right away. Business. . . . Send this bird out, will you? It’s life and death and all that sort of tripe.”

He dashed away again.

Came Mr. Appleby to sit patiently under the potted palms in the foyer while contemplation of the architecture made his headache steadily worse.

Came Miss Janice Yule to the office of Mr. Moe Eisenstark to breathe her indignation into the only ear that happened to be at hand.

“For two bits I’d walk out of this dive and never come back,” she stated.

“I’ll make it a dollar. Go four times as far,” mentioned Mr. Eisenstark. “What’s eating on you?”

“This Gonzalez. What right has he got to stick me up on a date? And after us being reported engaged and everything. How does

that look? Making a boob out of me.”

“He ain’t the guy made a boob out of you. . . . Anyway he ain’t stuck you up. He left word for you. Life and death business makes him go out to the Purple Buzzard. That’s what would make anybody go to the Purple Buzzard. He says you’re to go out there right away.”

271

“I won’t go. What does he think I am . . . orderin’ me around? Ain’t I got anything to do but chase after him?”

“Don’t tell me. I should worry where you go. I know, now, where I wish you’d go. Stay here and listen to yourself in the rotten release we just get stung with. Stay here and make that personal appearance you say you’re goink to make. Stay here . . .”

“I’ll not stay here. I gotta right to a day off even if I am doing this here personal appearance. I got a right to be with my feeannecy—or anyway that’s what the story is. . . . How do you get to the Purple Buzzard?”

Came Estelle Henderson, also to the office of Mr. Moe Eisenstark.

“Where is Janice Yule?” she inquired. “I thought she came to this office.”

“She did, an’ she’s gone,” explained Mr. Eisenstark patiently. “There is now fifty restaurants in this block, not including hot-dog stands, an’ she’s got to go out to the, now, Purple Buzzard with this General Gonzalez.”

Miss Henderson gulped and went out. From a telephone booth in the foyer she called the number left her by General Pedro Copal.

“We’re going out to-night,” she informed him. “We’re going to a nice little place called the Purple Buzzard.”

272

“I am delighted beyond words, my beautiful one,” replied General Copal.

Destiny took a look at the strings she had been pulling and decided to call it a day. The strands were tangled in a hopeless snarl, and there are times when even a hard-working Fate grows weary.

“It’s no use,” she said. “This is a mess and no mistake. They don’t seem to be putting the same material into these threads that you used to see before the war.”

273

## Chapter Twenty-Five:

### *Humble Dumb-Waiter Protects Liberty.*

Mr. Patter's reason for journeying to the Purple Buzzard was simple enough. At Mr. Patter's birth it had been arranged that he should go about blundering into trouble wherein and when as found. A more immediate reason was the answer he had received from Mr. Eisenstark when he called up the theater seeking to deliver a message to Miss Yule.

So Miss Yule had gone to the Purple Buzzard, had she? And she had gone with this Gonzalez—Mr. Patter was half-minded to call him “this fake Gonzalez,” so thoroughly had he cloaked himself with the Gonzalez identity. Well, after all, what of it? Who could blame the girl for breaking the engagement after reading all that tripe in the press? He could almost see himself sitting beside her sharing her indignation and echoing her condemnation of somebody called Freddy Patter who had got her into all this.

And then a thought even more unpleasant stirred itself in Mr. Patter's mind. By this time Miss Yule must have learned who was who among the Gonzalezes. The last shred of romance must have been stripped from him, and he who had met her as a conqueror would next appear before her as a moving-picture theater usher.

It occurred to Mr. Patter that his best course would be to go home and stay there, communing with his shame in loneliness. But one could not sit at home and experience the sad thrill of being squelched by Janice Yule. If one had to feel the ultimate poignant stab of despair the best place for this

performance seemed to be the Purple Buzzard. It would be rather dramatic, he thought; a finish worthy of the rôle in which he had been cast by the freakish mistake of the press photographers. He should step into the cabaret with all eyes upon him. And he should bow low in response to the angry accusations of Janice Yule. Always the gentleman . . . that would be Frederick Franklin Patter. He should even contrive to smile although the whole assemblage would be aware that his heart was breaking. And in the end he should step up to this caricature of a Liberator and say:

“I just came over here this evening to return your pig-iron. Here’s the warehouse receipt.”

He smiled as he thought of the pig-iron. If it hadn’t been for the pig-iron he might have arranged to get to the theater in time to intercept Miss Yule. But even so he figured that the time had been well spent. . . . He was almost gay as he climbed into a taxicab.

General Gonzalez was deep in conference with Messrs. Novak and Mucket when Miss Yule arrived at the Purple Buzzard. An appreciative management recognized her instantly and did not bother to mention the fact that General Gonzalez as such was unknown to this shrine of genteel hilarity. Later, as soon as Colonel Angeles should have done with his haranguing of the boys in the private room, he could be introduced to her and explain that possibly she had been in error. In the meantime she would serve very well as a sort of museum piece for the committee on entertainment. There hadn’t been a real notable at the Purple Buzzard since the Prohibition Commissioner had

paid it a personal visit a year ago.

Miss Yule was escorted to a semi-private alcove near the dance-floor and immediately set upon by a number of hostesses. The orchestra ceased playing *The Spring Song* disguised as *When You're Mine* and began to play *The Spring Song* disguised as *When I'm Yours*, the theme melody of Miss Yule's most recent picture—one forgets the name. Miss Yule went through the routine of telling the people how much she hated all this publicity and how she had come to this little cabaret for a quiet evening. And the hostesses admitted it must be very trying. All in all Miss Yule was glad she had come to this lovely place. If General Gonzalez (and her interpretation of General Gonzalez was Mr. Patter) failed to show up she thought she could get through the evening anyway.

In the meantime General Gonzalez (née Gonzalez) was facing Messrs. Novak and Mucket across the table in the rear room.

“We was thinkin’ of gettin’ him anyway,” stated Mr. Mucket.

276

“It is, of course, a matter of very little concern to me whether you get him or not,” said General Gonzalez. “I am interested in the matter only on the broad basis of humanity. He has come by a lot of money that belongs to the Republic of Pandorra.”

Messrs. Novak and Mucket looked at each other but did not interrupt. They had their own ideas concerning the property rights in this case, but there seemed to be no object in arguing with this good old bozo who was so free with the drinks.

“I say,” repeated the general, “that this money belongs to the



Republic of Pandorra, and the man we are talking about has come into its possession illegally. It would be to the best interests of my country, of course, if something were to happen to this scoundrel. At home I should have him stood up against a wall before a firing-squad. I do not see why such a punishment should be any less worthy in this country.”

“That’s the idea,” congratulated Mr. Novak. “But, Colonel Angeles, if we knock off this General Kinsella, who gets the money?”

“The money is a minor consideration,” stated Colonel-General Angeles-Gonzalez convincingly. “All I am interested in is a warehouse receipt that he is carrying somewhere on his person. The receipt will mention that he has stored a quantity of pig-iron. In the language of our revolution the term pig-iron means, of course, arms and ammunition. I want that receipt. Any money you get is yours, and I’ll pay you ten thousand dollars apiece as a bonus.”

277

“That’s fair enough. We’ll get him this evening,” Mr. Mucket reassured him.

There was a certain coy shyness about the Purple Buzzard. It sought to provide the quiet atmosphere plus the loudest jazz band within twenty miles of the city limits. It catered simultaneously to students of mob psychology and seekers after privacy and dim nooks and shadowy bowers. Spotlights glared through the silken hangings above its dance-floor. And in the booths that lined the little terrace on three of its sides, the lights were shaded to amber and the shadows were thicker than a

customer's tongue at midnight.

Ideally situated, this place for murder and any of the minor felonies. Anything at all might go on in the booths without being detected by the mob on the dance-floor and no weapon smaller than a one-pounder could have been heard over the rattle of cowbells in the orchestra.

In one of these booths—alone save for a continuous train of adorers, male and female—Janice Yule languished over a bottle of home-grown champagne and forgot that she was waiting for the great Pandorran conqueror.

In another pigeon-hole, some twenty feet on her right, sat Mr. Patter peering through a screen of palms to the dance-floor in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. Across the floor Estelle Henderson was listening indifferently to General Pedro Copal's near-sighted appreciation of her beauty. Half of her attention was given to the dancers among whom she expected to see Mr. Patter. The other half was focused upon Señor Copal's technique in the matter of getting drunk.

278

Señor Copal had no ulterior motive in getting drunk. In the atmosphere of the Purple Buzzard it had seemed to be the proper thing to do, and he was doing it with all the zeal he had shown for the other simple customs of the United States. But something of his determination must have detached itself from him and floated across the arena, for the same idea occurred to Freddy Patter.

Mr. Patter knew very little about post-prohibition hooch. So few people do. But he found a willing mentor in the person of a

waiter named Flaccus Glooper. He imbibed large quantities of gin disguised with fruit juices, ginger-ale, melted ice-cream and beige formaldehyde. And as the evening wore on he wept over something that he could not remember that had been done to him by a girl whose name he tried in vain to recall.

After much discussion of their problem Messrs. Mucket and Novak reached the conclusion that the best way to shoot General Gonzalez was to shoot General Gonzalez, which in the main, was the same idea they had had on the preceding Friday.

They had a few more drinks just to give the plan the benefit of cool calm consideration, and then they shook hands with the man they knew as Colonel Angeles and started out to look for their quarry.

279

They were in no hurry. The night was still young and this here General Kinsella would be no harder to find at two o'clock in the morning than at ten P.M. They wandered out of the back room and along the palm-lined terrace, glancing now and then into the booths in search of friends and possible allies. And so it came about that they discovered General Copal holding the cool hand of Estelle Henderson.

“Looky here,” advised Mr. Novak. “Here’s a guy I seen some place before.”

Mr. Mucket looked. Miss Henderson hastily removed her hand from the general’s clasp and gazed haughtily at the intruders. What she might have said she kept to herself for she had recognized the pair from their newspaper photographs.

“What do you want?” demanded General Copal.

“The same’s you got’ll do,” said Mr. Mucket magnanimously.

“Waiter, get a couple of chairs.”

General Copal half rose, then thought better of it and sat down again. He could not recognize either of these men, and he had a suspicion that he had never seen them before. On the other hand, he placed no great confidence in his eyesight.

“Do I know you?” he inquired in Spanish and then in English. “My name is Copal . . . General Copal.”

280

Mr. Novak laughed aloud.

“Copal,” he repeated. “Can you beat that, Mucket? His name is Copal.”

“I don’t see any jest about that,” observed General Copal, although his method of saying it was a bit more involved than that. “Is it that you have come here to insult me?”

“Oh, nothin’ like that,” protested Mr. Mucket at once. “The joke of it ain’t one you could see . . . naturally.”

“Oh, naturally,” agreed Mr. Novak. “You see we was old-timers in Vest’s mob.”

He paused as if this explained everything. But you have to go into details with these foreigners. They’re dense.

“We was members of Vest’s mob,” repeated Mr. Mucket. “Vest was hired by somebody to do a job, see. But things got sort of

mixed up. He gets killed, an' we take up the work. But when we come to think it over we figure they's more jack in knockin' off the guy that hired Vest than in pullin' the job he wanted done."

"That's the way of it," chimed Mr. Novak. "We never seen the guy we was goin' to kill. After we changed our minds there was no sense in it, see?"

"And there's where the joke comes in," laughed Mr. Mucket. "The name of the guy we was supposed to bump off was General Copal."

"What!" exclaimed the general.

281

"Knew that'd get you," said Mr. Novak. "It's all true. I ain't kiddin' you . . . Vest showed me a picture of you once. Looked just like you. Tha's what looked so familiar . . . your face, I mean."

Mr. Mucket was still laughing. Mr. Novak found time for an occasional chuckle. Miss Henderson was pale and quiet to the point of immobility. General Copal's lips worked convulsively.

"And who wanted me killed?" he managed to inquire.

"Guy named Kinsella," confided Mr. Novak.

"You don't mean, perhaps, Gonzalez?"

"Have it your way. You foreigners never will get names straight."

"Are you working for Gonzalez now?"

“I should say not. We could tell you a whole lot about what we’re going to do with Gonzalez. The bozo we’re workin’ for now is Colonel Angeles. He’s around here some place right now.”

“An’ it’s all legal,” broke in Mr. Mucket. “The colonel tells us so. In his country we’d get medals for it. We’re going to bump off a lad that’s got a million dollars which come out of this here Pandorra. . . . I give you three guesses what his name is.”

Further small talk was interrupted by the arrival of the waiter with some drinks. Messrs. Mucket and Novak drank hurriedly, bade their host good night and staggered out.

Estelle Henderson broke into tears.

282

“They’re after that million again,” she wept. “That means they’re going to kill Freddy Patter. . . . You don’t mind if I call him Patter, do you? That seems to be his name to me.”

“I should worry what you call him,” replied Señor Copal graciously. “Anyway, don’t worry about him. He’s not the one they are going to assassinate. The victim, although they don’t know it yet, is General Pedro Copal. I must go now and meet this Colonel Angeles face to face. I shall probably have to kill him. Wait for me. I’ll be gone only a minute.”

General Copal arose to find his legs a bit flexible. He strode out on to the balcony and demanded of the waiter where Colonel Angeles might be found.

Miss Henderson did not wait to see what direction he took. She derived little or no consolation from his assurance that he was

eventually to be shot at by Messrs. Novak, Mucket and associated hoodlums. Somewhere in the Purple Buzzard was Freddy Patter. And as usual his life was in danger. She must warn him. She, too, ran out on to the balcony and had made half the circuit of it before she discovered Miss Janice Yule temporarily alone.

She halted. Mr. Patter, she realized sadly, would not be far away from this, the lady of his choice. She turned abruptly and entered the cubicle.

“Well,” demanded Miss Yule icily, “what’s the big idea?”

283

“They’re going to kill Freddy Patter,” wept Miss Henderson.

“Who’s going to kill who?” retorted Miss Yule. “Are you talking about this General Gonzalez?”

“Some people call him General Gonzalez. I always called him Freddy Patter. . . .”

“If he’s the same as Gonzalez I can tell you who’s going to kill him. Me! I’m going to do it. The big stiff! Here it is nine o’clock and no sign of him.”

“I’m not fooling, Janice. Heaven is my witness I wouldn’t be coming to you if I could find any other way out. But I don’t want him shot.”

“Looks to me like this is a good place to get out of right now,” diagnosed Miss Yule. But before she could put the idea into action there was a pistol-shot and the lights went out. Miss Yule

fainted and above the din rose the voice of Estelle Henderson shrieking for help.

The waiter took General Copal, via the winding route, to the back room. It was empty.

“The colonel was here a minute ago,” he said. “He was talking to some of the boys. Stay here, and I’ll see if I can find him.”

“Maybe I’d better go, too,” suggested Señor Copal.

The waiter shook his head.

“Naw,” he deprecated. “Stay where you are. No trouble at all. I kin see you come from his country. He’ll be glad to see you.”

284

He went away and was gone for ten minutes during which the ire of General Copal rose steadily. He had no idea who Colonel Angeles might be. Nobody of consequence, probably. Else he must certainly be something more than a mere colonel. That, he felt, might be classed as an excellent turn of luck. A colonel would never be missed. He was roused from his study of the situation by the voice of the waiter at the door.

“Here’s Colonel Angeles,” he announced. And he stepped aside to admit a dark-skinned man whose military calling was evident even in the disguise of formal attire.

“You!” gasped General Copal.

“You!” gasped General Gonzalez.



“You!” roared General Copal, recovering from his surprise.

He fired pointblank at General Gonzalez, and his poor marksmanship proved the value of American alcohol in the protection of Pandorran revolutionists. He did not get a second shot for General Gonzalez dived into the dumb-waiter shaft and broke his leg. General Copal, shifting to resume the attack, was knocked down by somebody rushing through the room from the kitchen.

“Do your murdering to-morrow,” advised the phantom without stopping to audit the havoc he had wrought. “There’s prohi  
dicks front and rear and all around. It’s a raid.”

## Chapter Twenty-Six:

### *The Fifty-Fifty Charm of Miss Yule.*

Mr. Patter had reached that mood of bitter self-reproach experienced sooner or later by every man who is at all introspective. He had looked himself squarely in the face reflected by numerous gin drinks and had decided that whatever his claim to the name Gonzalez, he was no Napoleon. A Napoleon, now, would never have sat idle while another man was whispering things to Janice Yule. Having come to the Purple Buzzard Napoleon would not have procrastinated. He would have carried out his plan. In contrast to Napoleon, Mr. Patter had quit and was thinking about going home while still sober enough to find the door.

Then came the pistol-shot.

Afterward the events of possibly five minutes seemed merged as one in the memory of Mr. Patter. He was on his feet through no fault of his own and simultaneously he glimpsed through an opening in the palms the spun-gold hair of Janice Yule. With her was not a man, but a woman. The lights went out. A brass-voiced house man charged across the dance-floor announcing that the place was raided. Hoarse voices sounded somewhere off stage. There came the smashing of window glass and the flickering of flash-lights.

“Stay where you are, everybody,” ordered some one who apparently had the right to command. And there was silence broken only by the splintering of furniture, a chorus of curses, and the voice of Janice Yule as he had heard it a thousand times in the talkies. “Help! Help! Freddy, where are

you?”

Mr. Patter picked up a bottle and started for the booth in which he had last seen Janice. Some one else was in motion along the terrace—some one whose pistol glinted dimly in the reflection from a distant flash-light. A second flash revealed to Mr. Patter the strained face of Mr. Mucket. A third flash revealed the form of Mr. Mucket unconscious on the floor. Mr. Patter’s onward rush was delayed by the necessity for discovering some weapon to replace his bottle. He groped about and found another bottle which he exchanged almost immediately for a candlestick on the theory that bottles are not durable.

When he got back on to the balcony the competition had increased. Men, who apparently had come into the building through a near-by window, were milling about with no particular aim except to obstruct Mr. Patter. He swung his candlestick. Unseen hands caught at his coat and tore it from his back. Unseen fingers sought to gouge out his eyes. He found comfort in the enemy stratagem that provided a head for a target no matter where he swung his cudgel. So eventually he broke through the barrier and stumbled into the alcove whence issued the wailing of Janice Yule.

“Forget it!” he advised in a hoarse whisper. “I’m here. Let’s get out of this.”

287

“Pick her up,” echoed the familiar voice in his ear. “She’s somewhere on the floor at my feet.”

He did not stop to inquire who this person on the floor might be. It was Janice who wished her to be rescued. That was enough

for him. He fumbled about on the floor until he found the limp body of a girl. He threw her over his left shoulder, gripped his candlestick in his right hand and resumed command.

“There’s a little stairway down to the dance-floor at the back of this balcony,” he said. “I spotted it when I came in here. It’s only about eight steps. We’ll go that way. The dicks are all on this terrace and up toward the front of the house.”

“Maybe we can get out through the kitchen,” murmured the beautiful contralto.

“Won’t make much difference if we don’t,” he replied, conscious of a considerable weight on his shoulder. “We’ll get somewhere out of the way of bullets and let ’em raid.”

“It’s not a raid. I know it’s not. . . . It’s murder. And they’re after you.”

“I prefer my own theory. It’s more pleasant. Anyway, let’s be going.”

And they went.

The descent to the dance-floor was simple. Mr. Patter tripped on the top of the stairs and fell the entire distance with his burden on top of him. He arose in a daze and allowed himself to be pushed aside by a throng of patrons blocking one another’s way to the exits.

All sense of direction was gone and as soon as he heard the reassuring voice of Janice Yule close beside him once more, he stumbled into a long passage that gave into a room to which the

sounds of battle barely penetrated. He closed the door, sniffed an atmosphere laden with powder smoke and wondered if he had not better retreat. Instead he dropped the unconscious lady to the floor and wiped his brow on his tattered sleeve.

“I guess this will do for the present,” he said. “I don’t know where we are. No use fighting that mob again. And this jane weighs a ton.”

“I think you’re wonderful,” Miss Yule’s soft voice assured him. “The way you charged down the stairs into that riot was magnificent. You cleared a path for me six feet wide. I shall never forget it.”

Mr. Patter wondered why this should not have thrilled him to the depths of his soul. He decided that something had happened to his soul . . . too much introspection, perhaps, or gin.

“It’s lovely of you to say so,” he said mechanically.

“This night will live in my memory always,” she murmured. “To-morrow, perhaps, you will go away. But you will know that wherever I am, I am thinking of you. . . .”

This, of course, was the moment when Mr. Patter should have taken her in his arms. He was about to live up to the conventions. And then somebody found the light switch. He halted with his hands outstretched. He gasped and took a step backward.

Janice Yule with whom he had been conversing so intimately for the past ten minutes lay in a heap on the floor where he had dropped her. And the woman in front of him who had narrowly

escaped being clasped to his heart was Estelle Henderson.

“What the what!” he observed dazedly.

The lovely Janice groaned, sat up and interrupted in a tone that reminded him of the song of the peacock.

“What’s going on here?” she demanded. “Estelle, what do you mean by letting this happen to me? Who dropped me on the floor?”

“Janice!” murmured Miss Henderson, and the still befuddled Mr. Patter marveled that the voice of Miss Yule should be proceeding from the lips of Estelle.

“Don’t try to shush me,” raged Janice. “You’re responsible for all this. If you’d told me in time I could have got out. But you had to stick around on account of this big sap. I don’t care what happens. We’re finished. See?”

“You don’t know how true that is,” Estelle told her patiently. “I’m pretty tired of being your invisible half. . . . I’ve got a new job. I’m going to marry General Pedro Copal.”

“I don’t get this,” broke in Mr. Patter.

Estelle smiled maliciously.

“You wouldn’t,” she said. “You’re just beginning to realize that when you fell in love with Janice on the screen you fell in love with me, too. I’ve been her voice in the last three pictures at the Super-Babylon. . . .”

Mr. Patter scratched his head and wondered if the gin had had anything to do with this. He remembered that once he had heard a cow conversing with a young woman in a talking picture. Miss Henderson undoubtedly was describing some similar affair.

“Miss Yule’s voice didn’t screen well,” went on Miss Henderson.

“Anyway my voice ain’t all molasses like yours,” screamed Miss Yule. “And there’s eight guys who’ll listen to me to every one who gives a hoot in hell what you say or how you say it.”

Estelle seemed not to have heard.

“So Moe Eisenstark hired some voices, including mine, to speak the dialogue of the pictures into a microphone behind the stage. Once—when the gunmen came in through the stage door and I warned you—I thought you knew.”

“I never recognized your voice until to-night,” said Mr. Patter.

“I have a slight cold in the head which approximates the effect of the amplifying apparatus,” Miss Henderson explained. “But I don’t blame you, boy. I meant what I said before the lights were turned on. I shall always remember you . . . and I consider it one of the finest things in my life that I was privileged to be half of the woman you loved.”

291

“Blah!” said Miss Yule in her own character.

Mr. Patter looked from one to the other hopelessly. Then from somewhere in the echoing corridor outside came a new voice . . . the voice of a woman speaking coldly and dispassionately:

“Take your hands off me! I’ll shoot anybody who interferes. There’s a man in here, and he’s my property. What have you done with Freddy Patter.”

“Margaret!” shouted Mr. Patter, and he ran out of the room.



## Chapter Twenty-Seven:

### *Metamorphosis of the Ugly Duckling.*

The riot, plainly visible under the electric lights, was not materially different from the riot which had engaged Mr. Patter's attention in the dark. He saw the situation not as any continuity of action, but as vivid pictures in each of which somebody was struggling with somebody else.

Out on the dance-floor a number of men, apparently plain-clothes police, were herding together a group of screaming women and cursing men. Three fights were visible on the balcony, and the sound of smashing furniture from the dim reaches behind the palms told plainly that the festivities were by no means localized.

These things were of no moment to Mr. Patter. Somewhere out in the mêlée was Margaret Banning. Now and again he heard her voice, and he pushed toward her with unerring instinct.

He found her amid a group of warriors who seemed to be offering her no harm albeit they were barring her passage toward the corridor from which Mr. Patter had just emerged. He realized of a sudden that the candlestick was still in his hand. He knocked a ruffian down with it. And then another. The other ruffians seemed astonished and stepped back as he sprang to Margaret's side.

He found time to realize that this was not the gray mouse he had previously known. Her weird spectacles were gone. She had emerged from the drab cocoon of her workaday clothes and stood before him in a filmy evening dress the color

of flame. Her face was flushed, and her eyes were alight. . . . The sight was so astonishing that he dropped his guard and received a splendid wallop on the jaw.

“Come on,” he said to her in a voice which strove to combine mastery and awe and made a mess of it. “I’ll get you out of this. . . .” He swung the candlestick and missed another ruffian by half an inch.

“Oh, don’t, Freddy,” cried Margaret. “Please don’t start another fight.”

“You come along with me,” he growled, and once more he described a dangerous arc with his weapon. Later he was to wonder how he escaped being shot. At the time the possibility never entered his mind, and apparently it had escaped the attention of the battling hoodlums as well. As he lunged forward these men stepped back respectfully and allowed a waiter to take a ringing blow on the top of the head.

He heard Margaret’s little cry almost in his ear and it occurred to him that there was more annoyance than fear in it. However, he had no time then for any analysis of a woman’s reaction to mob violence. He wrapped a shielding arm about her and half led, half pushed, her into the back room.

She was smiling at him when he paused to notice it, and there was admiration in her eyes and something else.

294

Estelle Henderson interpreted the look before Mr. Patter. She crossed over and took Margaret’s hand.

“Glad to see you again,” she said with forced airiness. “Sorry I can’t stay longer, but I have a date to be married to General

Copal and I'd better be going. I suppose it's safe to go now."

"Safe!" ejaculated Mr. Patter. "There's still a riot going on out there."

Miss Henderson smiled.

"I thought it was a riot myself until Miss Banning stepped in," she said. "Now I guess it's plain to be seen what the trouble is. And I apologize to Miss Banning. I underestimated her."

Janice Yule straightened in her chair, a somewhat disheveled picture of sullen rage.

"I want to get out of here," she stated. "The goof here got me into this. Now he can figure out some way to steer me out."

"Tut! Tut!" said Margaret. "Such a way to celebrate an engagement!"

"Engagement!" retorted Miss Yule bitterly. "The way that engagement is going to be celebrated is by me firing a press-agent. Me with the world to pick from, and they figure I'd fall for a sap like this."

"And the million dollars?" inquired Miss Banning.

"A bird who ain't got two bits ain't got a million dollars," announced Miss Yule with mathematical exactitude. "And now, how about it? Are you going to get me out of this or have I got to tell the police that you lured me here to this dive?"

“Can’t you climb out a window or something?” inquired Mr. Patter helpfully. “I think I’ve cracked every head out there, and some of the boys may be getting sore.”

Miss Yule stared at him in scorn.

“Oh, all right,” he acceded hastily. “I’d kill all the policemen between here and the front door just to help you out.”

“Say what do you mean by that?” snapped Miss Yule.

Margaret Banning interrupted the wrangle with a gesture.

“It won’t be necessary for Mr. Patter to continue his assault and battery,” she said. And then she opened the door and called down the corridor.

“Joe, where are you?”

“Here,” answered a male voice from the near distance. “What do you want?”

“Call off the bloodhounds. Miss Yule wants to go home. Get her a taxi, will you?”

“I’ll send her in my own car,” replied Joe.

Miss Yule tightened her cloak about her hips, raised her chin to the angle prescribed in the big scene in *Lovers Always*, and passed out into the dark, closely followed by Miss Henderson.

Mr. Patter stared at the candlestick in his hand and then at Margaret with the air of an actor who has seen his big

moment stolen by a lady of the chorus.

“What’s it all about?” he demanded. “How are you going to get her past the police?”

“Police?” she repeated, and then she smiled and came close to him.

“There aren’t any police,” she assured him. “This mob belongs to Charles Joachim if that means anything to you.”

“Not a thing,” he replied, a little irritated.

And she nodded as if this confession were no news.

“Joe—I mean Joachim—is the president of the Oro Hondo Mining and Milling Company which holds concessions in Pandorra,” she went on. “These men of his are private detectives whom he hired to hunt for a million dollars.”

“Everybody’s hunting a million dollars.”

“But they weren’t hunting a million dollars to-night. At least they weren’t when they came out to the Purple Buzzard. They came here to keep you from being killed by Novak and Mucket. . . They’ve caught Novak. Mucket seems to have got away.”

“They’ll find him under the fourth potted palm to the right as you leave the stairway on the balcony. I hit him with a bottle. I didn’t mean to be brutal, but he had a gun.”

Margaret clasped Mr. Patter’s right arm and squeezed it. She led him to the chair that Janice Yule had vacated and pushed him

into it. He sank into the cushions without resistance and showed new surprise when she rumbled his hair.

“You’re a darling,” she observed apropos of nothing. “And your name really isn’t Gonzalez, is it?”

“No,” he admitted. “My name is Frederick Franklin Patter. I’ve been telling everybody that for weeks, but nobody wanted to listen.”

“I found it out to-night. I’ve been stupid, Freddy, just stupid. I should have known all along that you weren’t any South American revolutionist.”

“And who are you?”

There was plenty of sincerity in the question. Margaret Banning whom he had known yesterday had been an entirely different person from the splendid creature who sat on the arm of his chair. Miss Banning’s smile disappeared and for just a moment the old wistfulness came into her eyes.

“I was afraid you’d be asking that,” she said. “I’m Charley Joachim’s niece, and I undertook to help him find his stuffy old million.”

There was a long moment of silence.

“I suppose you won’t care to speak to me again.”

Mr. Patter swung about suddenly in his chair and clasped her with an arm which she made no attempt to displace.

“Listen,” he told her, “I thought I was in love with a girl I took to be Janice Yule. She turned out to be two women, and I couldn’t love either or both of her. . . . You were somebody yesterday and somebody else to-day, and I could love you individually and collectively.”

“It’s sweet of you to say so,” she answered, and then she kissed him or he kissed her . . . no matter.

Outside, ambulances were arriving, and men with broken heads were being sorted out for delivery to hospitals or police stations as conditions warranted. In the cabaret of the Purple Buzzard the patrons, shocked to find that the raid had been no raid at all, were seeking their hats and coats. . . . Half an hour ground on. . . . Margaret stirred herself in the arms of Freddy Patter.

“And as I was saying,” she proceeded, “we were going on the theory that you were a very nice type of Spig revolutionist until to-night when somebody received a photograph of the real General Gonzalez from Santa Cruz. It was a novel idea, sending for the photograph, but it worked. Once I saw it I was able to guess the meaning of our affair in the freight yards. In an hour we had traced the ore, and Joe had plastered the warehouse with an injunction. The stuff is really his property, you know.”

“He can have it,” murmured Mr. Patter, his voice muffled by her fragrant hair. “What’s a million dollars?”

“There’s a reward, of course. Quite a big one. Ten per cent. or something like that. And you get it. I told Joe all about how you slipped it away from Gonzalez. He thought it was real skilful.”

Mr. Patter seemed to be even less impressed by ten per

cent. of a million than he had been by the million.

“He can have that, too,” he observed.

“In your eye, he can have it,” stated Miss Banning. “We’re going to need that to get married on. . . .”

Another long pause. The lady straightened herself again.

“You certainly led me a merry chase,” she said accusingly.

“This very afternoon I was still running around in circles. I got a tip that you had sold out to Copal.”

He hugged her then; as if seeing the light for the first time, he laughed a hearty guffaw.

“Copal tried to buy the sash-weights from me,” he explained.

“But of course I couldn’t sell them because I thought they belonged to General Gonzalez.”

“That’s mother’s honest boy!”

“But he seemed so anxious that it nearly broke my heart. And I had no way of telling what General Gonzalez’ sash-weights were made of.”

“Of course not.”

“So I took some money a man named Appleby gave me when he was trying to get me to buy arms for Pandorra. And I bought another carload of sash-weights. I sold them to General Copal for thirty thousand dollars.”



### *Stricken Republic Loses Valuable Liberator.*

Quiet descended upon the Purple Buzzard. The voices in the cabaret were stilled, and from the park outside the roaring of automobiles eager to be up and away had ceased to sound.

"I'll have to give back all of Copal's money except what the sash-weights cost me," said Mr. Patter.

Margaret nodded.

"If and when you find him," she observed. "I think, somehow, that we'll never hear from Señor Copal again. He'll probably sell your junk to some other Pandorran hero." She hugged him impulsively and sighed.

"I suppose we might as well go away from here," she said reluctantly. "The hour is growing late, and there are other and better speakeasies. We can talk at the Legation, and to-morrow we can talk some more. . . ."

"To-morrow we can be married," corrected Mr. Patter. "I think maybe I can get out of my contract with Moe Eisenstark."

"I shouldn't wonder," agreed Miss Banning.

They arose and started for the door. Midway they were halted by a groan which seemed to be emanating from the dumb-waiter. Mr. Patter mumbled something under his breath.

“Just our luck,” he commented. “We’ll never be out of trouble. Who do you suppose that is?”

“Miss Yule,” guessed Miss Banning brightly. “The lovely Janice Yule—the voice of the dumb-waiter. . . . Come on, it’s probably only another of your victims and anyway Joe’s mob will investigate.”

But Mr. Patter was already across the room. He pulled on the ropes and presently dragged out into the light the haggard form of General Gonzalez . . . a meek and suffering General Gonzalez who was plainly broken-leg conscious.

“Oh, hello!” greeted Miss Banning. “And where have you been while the affairs of Pandorra were being settled?”

The general cursed.

“Copal did it!” he announced. “He shot at me, and I had to dive in there to save my life. I was not armed. Otherwise, of course . . .”

“Of course!” conceded Margaret.

“I couldn’t help but hear everything you said,” moaned the general.

“I shall blush,” she said coyly.

“I don’t mean that. . . . I overheard about the sash-weights.”

“It must have been unpleasant with a broken leg and all.”

The general, who had been lowered to the comfort of his favorite chair, shrugged expressively.

“It was a good trick if I could have done it. But I am an old soldier. I take the bad with the good.”

“Still a million dollars is a million dollars. . . .”

302

The girl’s voice was almost apologetic.

“Nothing is a million dollars until you get it in cash,” the general pointed out. “My loss is only the loss of a carload of sash-weights.

“I was tricked, of course. I thought that this artful young man was something of an oaf. I did not realize that he was a keen antagonist.”

“That’s my personal discovery,” said Margaret proudly.

“I don’t bear him any ill-will. . . . Maybe he hit me on the head in the freight yards. I thought it was one of Copal’s gang of ruffians. But as I see it now Copal probably had nothing to do with it.”

“Nothing at all,” admitted Mr. Patter.

General Gonzalez nodded.

“That explains so much. . . . Well, anyway, I’ll forgive you if you’ll help me out of this. I have work to do, and I can’t afford to be locked up in jail.”

Margaret looked at him with obvious sympathy.

“I think you’re an old reprobate,” she said, “but a nice old reprobate. That’s why I hate to tell you bad news. We got a cablegram from Santa Cruz to-night which says that your revolution is completely finished. The Federalistas are in Santa Cruz. All of your generals have been granted an amnesty and have gone over to the government. You wouldn’t be allowed to land if you went back. So probably your work will have to wait indefinitely.”

303

“Who said anything about Pandorra?” demanded the general. “I never intended going back . . . not after I really got acquainted with this country. . . . I bought this place. In your expressive language it is known as a speakeasy, and I find that business is much more suited to me than soldiering. There is more money to be made here than in Pandorra. And we try to run a nice place. Come around some time when you want a good dinner and real stuff right off the boat.”

“I’ll bear it in mind,” said Margaret. “Is this the work you were talking about?”

“No,” confessed the general. “It is an affair of the heart. I saw one of your beautiful women on the screen. Some day I hope to marry her. . . . Her name is Janice Yule.”

Mr. Patter shook his head.

“I hate to disappoint you. But I had the same idea, and it’s bad medicine. Miss Yule isn’t a woman. She’s a syndicate and something over fifty per cent. of her is already spoken for.”

They carried General Gonzalez out to a waiting ambulance. And just about the time he was losing consciousness under the ether on the operating table General Copal was leaving the Union Station on his way south, accompanied by his prospective wife and, at a decent interval, by a carload of pig-iron.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine:

### *Recalling the Story of the Talking Cow.*

Frederick Franklin Patter—in his own name—married Margaret Banning as he had threatened.

There was no great to-do about it. The Gonzalez situation had been removed from the front page, and few city editors were interested in Mr. Patter per se . . . even when he became the husband of old Joachim's favorite niece.

Probably only three persons in the city were much concerned with Mr. Patter's matrimonial venture. One of them was Miss Yule, another Moe Eisenstark, and the third the luckless press-agent who had arranged for the romance between the actress and a million dollars.

"It's damn' poor taste if you ask me," declared Miss Yule. "He might at least wait till I got out of town."

"I wonder where goes my contract now," moaned Mr. Eisenstark. "All at once I lose my South American hero and my captain of ushers. You can't, now, trust these here revolutionists."

The press-agent said nothing at all. He felt that he had already said enough, and there seemed to be no prospect for improvement.

The happy couple went somewhere on a honeymoon and came back. Mr. Patter invested his newly acquired wealth in a moving-picture theater and startled the world with the

announcement that it would have no colored lights, no pipe organ and no ushers. Whether or not it would dispense also with patrons was something that only experiment could determine.

The day before the grand opening Margaret stood beside her husband in the projection room and watched the trial run of the feature picture. It was a beautiful thing . . . the simple story of a country maiden who wins the heart of a South American conqueror and in the end gives him up despite his wealth and position, because she loves a hundred-per-cent. American boy who appreciates her sweetness. The leading lady was Janice Yule—or at least her face and figure belonged to Janice Yule. The voice was not identified although two competent critics thought it was not quite up to the words and music once furnished by Estelle Henderson.

“I think this picture is a lot of tripe,” remarked Margaret.

Mr. Patter smiled condescendingly.

“The public doesn’t know the lady as well as we do,” he reminded her. “She makes work for the girls at the box office . . . and personalities don’t mix well with business.”

“She’s a rotten actress.”

He stopped this phase of the critique with a kiss.

“You’re not jealous of her, are you?” he asked.

“Jealous of that arsenic blonde! I should say not.”

And so the incident failed to produce any worrisome results.

Some one called Mr. Patter and he went out, leaving Margaret alone in the iron dog house. She smiled beatifically and proceeded with painstaking thoroughness to change all the labels on the phonograph records furnished with Miss Yule's pictorial triumph.

Mr. Patter came back. The picture had finished. Margaret had switched off the lights. She seemed strangely happy, and he kissed her again.

"Tell me," she said, "didn't you mention at some time or another a funny story about these speaking cinemas? Let's go away from here some place where you can tell it to me all over again. I want to hear about the talking cow."

THE END



## Transcriber's Notes

- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.
- In the text version, italicized text is delimited by \_underscores\_ (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)

[The end of *The Voice of the Lobster* by Robert J. Casey]