

ON GOVERNMENT ORDERS.. TRUE TALES OF THE SECRET SERVICE BY AN EX-OPERATIVE..... THE HOUSEBOAT OWL

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In a modest little brick cottage, on a quiet side street of one of the larger cities, lives an elderly gentleman whom I met through my newspaper work. Our acquaintance soon ripened into a close friendship and I have spent many pleasant evenings with him in his cozy library smoking and talking. The old gentleman, whom I will call Capt. Dickson, his real name being too well known, had spent his life in the service of his country—the service which upholds the integrity of our money and postage stamps and bonds and securities and safeguards our public officials. Worn gray in the service, he had retired, seeking out this quiet corner in which to spend his declining years; he had surrounded himself by his books and the curious collections of souvenirs he had gathered in his long service of detective work for railroad and express companies and for the national government. In the first months of our acquaintance, Capt. Dickson studiously avoided talking of his adventures, but as our friendship ripened he would lay aside his reserve, and over a pipe and a glass of rare old sherry, he would spin yarns of the things he had experienced in his long and interesting career. As nearly as possible, I have followed his exact language in recounting these adventures, neither condensing them, expurgating, nor editing them.

"I was never a sentimental man," ventured Capt. Dickson one evening, settling back in his chair and displaying his Kentucky ancestry by hoisting his feet upon the table, a characteristic attitude with him when in full repose, "but on one occasion I fear I let a love affair prevent me from doing the full measure of my duty. It is a long story, and I will relate it to you as you may judge for yourself if my action was not for the best. That belief is balm to my conscience when it strikes me for this dereliction.

"A few years ago, as you will remember, there was quite a scandal over the discovery of a gigantic swindle through bogus cigar stamps. The trick was turned by a large cigar factory in a certain eastern city. I worked on this case from start to finish and it was a pretty feather in the cap of the secret service department. The printing plant of the counterfeiters was captured, together with all of the operatives, and a large quantity of tax paid stamps for boxes of 50 and 100 cigars. The president of the factory, a highly respected banker, was involved and sent up for a term of years along with the other criminals.

"Only one person escaped who was known to have been connected with the scheme. This was the engraver of the plates from which the stamps were printed. The engraving was excellently executed and denoted skill and what the artists call 'feeling.' There is an individuality about the work of every artist, just as there is a distinctive quality to every person's handwriting. Perhaps you have noticed this in the picture in the funny papers and in the comic sections of the dailies. One familiar with these drawings can name the artist every time without seeing the signature. This rule holds good quite as much in engraving as in any of the other drafting arts.

"In the files of my library are samples of the work of every engraver ever employed by the bureau of engraving and printing, as well as of every employe of the large printing companies who make postage stamps and bank notes and foreign governments. These samples are labeled and filed away with data regarding the engraver and a photograph, if that is obtainable. The government has to keep a constant watch upon these men, for from their ranks come the most dangerous and troublesome counterfeiters with whom we have to contend.

other points, he was as mute as an oyster on this subject. "Some years had passed since I accepted an invitation to visit a college mate in one of the cities which lie on the Mississippi river. I was determined to recollect the name, and did not even let the department know my whereabouts. I did not want to be disturbed with professional matters during this vacation. It was a delightful place to visit, a rare old southern household where every member of the family made the visitor feel that each was individually honored by his presence, and I soon forgot my work, the department, and everything connected with it, in the real pleasure of my vacation.

"One afternoon I strolled down to the river front to watch the negro roustabouts unload the cotton bales from a big river pocket. A pretty houseboat was tied up near by, and while I smoked contentedly, seated on a recumbent bale of cotton, a carriage drove down the steep, rock-faceted surface of the levee and stopped at the gang-plank, scarcely 20 feet from my position.

"A man and woman alighted from the carriage. It was evident they were very much in love and small was the wonder. The man was a handsome fellow—young, intelligent and every inch of him a gentleman; but I took small notice of him, forgetting his presence in the marvelous beauty of the woman. She was slender, graceful and beautiful. Every movement was bewitching. They were lovers, but not the kind that arouse amusement and, too often, disgust in the minds of the spectator. They were interesting and appealed to every spark of sentiment in one's nature. They were the kind of lovers the poet had in mind when he said 'all the world loves a lover.' I watched them in rapt fascination, a feeling of tenderness swelling over me as I compared their blissful companionship with my own lonely, outcast life.

"The boat bore the simple name Owl, wrought in glittering letters at its bow. I studied it with renewed interest after the charming couple had gone aboard. The boat was the possession of a wealthy man. It bore an air of ease and comfort and culture and affluence from its steel hull, the dainty pennant flying from its flag-staff. The wharf master told me the boat belonged to a wealthy Chicago manufacturer, a man whose name was known in financial circles throughout the country. For that reason, I will call him Mr. Cameron. He and his bride were spending their honeymoon on the boat, making a cruise down the Mississippi and around the coast to his winter home on the gulf. They had stopped over at this point to visit with friends.

"That very night I met the couple at a reception given by my chum's sister. Although receptions, as a rule, are a weariness of the flesh to me, I frankly enjoyed this one. There was enough of a admittance to myself the reason, I had spent a great portion of the evening chatting with Mrs. Cameron. She was a talented woman and an engaging in her conversation as in her appearance, which is saying a good deal for her conversation. She and her husband invited me to visit them on the house-boat, an invitation which I accepted the very next afternoon, for they had quite captivated me.

"They had been married only two months, and there was that ingenuous manner about them, so charming in the newly married if not overdone. The boat was a floating palace in miniature, and yet there was the home atmosphere about it. I have always been an admirer of the artistic, and the interior of the cabin was in perfect taste. The walls were hung with rare paintings and original drawings of the best artists. Mrs. Cameron, I learned, was an artist herself, and she pointed out to me several of her pictures all of which denoted a high degree of skill.

"Our friendship progressed with amazing swiftness and before many days I was on a footing of charming intimacy with the owners of the house-boat. Never did I enjoy a friendship more, and I spent many pleasant hours with Mr. and Mrs. Cameron. One afternoon Mrs. Cameron was making fudges in the dainty kitchen, which opened, through a butler's pantry, into the rear cabin where Cameron and I were playing seven-up on the dining-room table. Tiring of the game, Cameron brought out a decanter of wine, and as we sipped at our glasses and blew smoke wreaths toward the ceiling, he began to speak of his wife's work as an artist.

"He told me she had made quite a success of it before their marriage. She had not followed it alone for pastime, but imbued with that spirit of independence which is becoming so general among our American women, she had wished to demonstrate that, with her own hands, she could make a living independent of the resources she possessed. She had branched out in commercial work, he said, and had made quite a snug sum in this way.

first picture in the collection was a copy of the White House portrait of President Washington, done in pen and ink. As I looked at the intricate network of lines something about it seemed familiar, seemed to suggest a picture I had seen somewhere, and I scrutinized it closely, a vague sensation of uneasiness dawning in my mind. There were a number of pen sketches of heads and figures and landscapes, a few pastels and water colors, and, towards the back of the portfolio I came upon some samples of commercial work—letter heads, cards, pamphlets covers, and the like—and, to my utter amazement, a delicate piece of steel engraving, a coupon for a breakfast food company, in one corner of which was a bust of the Goddess of Liberty which immediately suggested the head of Henry Clay on the counterfeit cigar stamps, used by the factory in the eastern city.

"Every instinct of my professional training was aroused. My hand shook so perceptibly I had to rest it upon the table to avoid attracting Cameron's attention. A strong suspicion flashed over me which made me thoroughly ashamed, and I cursed my in-

glance at the two side by side was sufficient. The same name had made both. I was staggered, sick at heart, and disgusted with the world and life and people, more especially with myself.

"My first impulse was to make a clean breast of it all to the chief, but, on second thought, I decided not to do so until I had made an investigation on my own account. I secured a leave of absence and went to the city where the cigar stamp fraud had been perpetrated. Here I learned much that disconcerted me. Mrs. Cameron, whose maiden name I had not heard, had lived there and had had her studio there. The banker's trust company had been her guardian, the executor of her father's will. She had lived in a stately old mansion, near the home of the bank president, with a maiden aunt. The aunt had died, while the niece was abroad, and I found that the time of the departure of the niece had been consonant with the exposure and arrest of the counterfeiters.

"There was no doubt that Mrs. Cameron had executed the plates from which the bogus cigar stamps had been printed. Whatever she had known, the criminality of her act I have never learned. I have always hoped that she had not, and finally I have come to believe it. What representation the banker made to her when he had her execute the plates will never be known. He died in prison of heart failure just about the time I made these discoveries.

"This is the only time I have ever broken faith with the service. I could not deliver Mrs. Cameron to the merciful law courts, guilty or innocent. My sentimentality would not let me. It may have been wrong, but I have never regretted my action in this case. If it were to do over again I should follow the same course. What do you think of it? What would you

do if you were in my shoes? I had never before been so thoroughly ashamed, and I cursed my in-

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and went abroad, where she remained until her return for our marriage. I believe my jealousy of the time she gave to it had something to do with her decision, although she has never admitted that to me.

"I could not help asking when his wife had abandoned her artistic work. He said it had been three years since. I returned the engraving to the portfolio and Cameron restored it to the cabinet where it was kept. I couldn't entirely recover my equilibrium. The incident had upset me completely and I could not shake off the suspicion which had come to me upon seeing the engraving. I felt like a criminal, heartily ashamed of my doubts, but I could not get rid of them.

"Mrs. Cameron came into the room at this point, her face full of rich color. She had finished her fudge-making and wanted her husband and me to pass judgement upon it. We went out on the deck, where, on a dainty table, the plates of candy were cooling. I forgot my misgivings in the pretty pride which Mrs. Cameron exhibited over her handiwork. She was more charming than ever in the simple house gown she wore, her face pink with the bending over the stove. I thought I had never seen so beautiful a woman. If she had not been married I am sure I would have fallen in love with her. I admired her extravagantly, but I did not love her, for I have never been a man who could love another's wife.

"This was to be our last evening with them. On the morrow I was to return to Washington and the house-boat, Owl, was to resume its journey down the Mississippi. My vacation was at an end.

"Cameron stepped into the cabin to get a fresh cigar and Mrs. Cameron went into the kitchen about the same time, leaving me alone out on the deck by the table with the candy. Underneath the plates, to protect the abletop, were several sheets of newspaper. My glance fell upon these papers and

my eyes became riveted upon the corner nearest to me. On the margin of the topmost paper were the prints of four fingers and a thumb, made with the butter with which the plates had been greased before the candy was poured into them. They were long, tapering, shapely fingers, unquestionably those of an artist.

"The training of years asserted itself. I tore away the corner of the paper with the finger prints upon it and slipped it into my pocket. I could no more help doing this than water can help flowing down hill, for the prints seemed a duplicate of those I so well remembered upon the wrapper of the unused plate we had captured in the cigar stamp case. I was disgusted with myself, but instinct is stronger than will sometimes, and this was such a case.

"I left the boat as soon as I could conveniently get away. The desire was strong upon me to destroy the paper which nestled guiltily and accusingly in my side pocket, but I could not.

"On my return to Washington I secured the wrapper with the finger-prints and compared them with the grease marks on the bit of newspaper

have done under the circumstances?"

(Next week Capt. Dickson will relate the story of "The Clew of the Liquor Bottle.")

According to gossip in Republican circles Whitealair Reid, ambassador to Great Britain, entertains a desire to become secretary of state in President Taft's cabinet. His friends say that he aspires to this place as the rounding up of his career. On the other hand, Mr. Root, it is said, wants to remain at the head of the state department for another year or two as he desires to carry through certain policies with regard to Latin America that he has been working out.

The fellow who borrows money should be compelled to take a course in memory training.

Neill—"Maude is the most changeable girl I know." Belle—"Yes; she never even wears the same complexion twice."

"Only a fool will make the same mistake twice. Cynicus—"Well, judging from the number of world must be full of fools."

ON THE PAPER WERE THE PRINTS OF FOUR FINGERS AND A THUMB.

and went abroad, where she remained until her return for our marriage. I believe my jealousy of the time she gave to it had something to do with her decision, although she has never admitted that to me.

The Bloody Ace of Hearts!

Savannah News.

Twenty or more years ago, when the tide of political battle had turned favorably for the democracy and there was swept into the White House the first friend of the late Confederate States that had been there for well-nigh three decades, not a few Southerners, for partisan activity, were rewarded with government positions in Washington. Among the number were two young men—one from Carolina, the other from Texas—between whom a fast friendship sprang up as the result of a chance acquaintance formed en route to the National capital. Neither had ever visited Washington, hence their knowledge of the city was necessarily limited. Nothing was more natural, therefore, than that they should agree to seek lodgings at the same place, temporarily, at least.

A modest but respectable hotel had been recommended to the Texan, at which they were for some days comfortably established. Fire came along one night, however; the hotel was gutted and the young men had to find quarters elsewhere. At a loss to know whither to go, they sought the aid of the congressman, stating that the home district of the Carolinian. His assistance was readily given. Of course he knew where they could be accommodated; indeed, the family with whom he was staying in the Northwest would be pleased he doubted not to take the young men in.

The place was some distance out, but not inconvenient to the government offices. The house was large, roomy, well furnished and withal a desirable home, in most respects. It had been built by a retired Southern planter of the Calhoun-Webster-Clay era, who, having disposed of his immense holdings of slaves and plantations, had come to Washington to spend his declining days in feast and luxury and to bear the scene of the momentous political discussions, which were then well-nigh the all-absorbing topic of public interest.

During the war the place had passed into the hands of a Scotchman, a somewhat mysterious man, about whose past and present life little was known. For years he had been the sole occupant of the house, but after considerable importunity had reluctantly agreed to lease the three floors above ground to the present defendants, retaining the basement for himself. The house had recently been repaired within and was now attractive enough inside; but for some reason, singular and unexplained, the Scotchman had refused absolutely to allow any improvements to be made to the exterior of the buildings or the grounds, declining even to discuss the matter.

Furthermore, there was one room in the building which, he announced, must be little altered. This room, on the rear of the third floor, might be used, but he insisted that no changes be made therein further than necessary to make it habitable. The room, the congressman added, was innamated to the rear of the one himself occupied, and he thought it the only unoccupied room in the house. If the young men hesitated to use the room because of the Scotchman's singular solicitude concerning it, they need not, of course, do so, even if it were offered them.

The young men had little trouble in locating the place, but both were surprised to find the house and grounds even more desolate and forbidding than they had supposed. The iron gate groaned wearily on its rusty hinges, the lawn (if such it could be called) was unkept and covered with dead leaves and dying grass, a marble statue had fallen from its base and lay half hidden in the tangled mass of rotting herbage, here and there an old-fashioned flower, growing wild, struggled for existence among the weeds and briars and the shrubbery had long since failed to bear evidence of kindly care; the house, a massive brick pile, was old, weatherbeaten, uninviting. In the extreme and looked as if no human foot had crossed its threshold for ages—"over all there hung the shadow of a fear."

Once within, however, the transformation from the gloomy outward appearance of the place was in such marked contrast to the cheery, hospitable surroundings that all thought of the former was forgot. Only one room, they were told, was at the disposal of the landlady, a rear room on the third floor; and she would be pleased to allow the young men to use it, since they were recommended by her distinguished guest. Did they care to see the room? Yes. There was nothing objectionable about it as both agreed, though furniture was of an antiquated, out-of-date pattern. In one corner there stood a small table covered with green cloth, that appeared to have been roughly used. Across the top of the table bore a number of stains, the peculiar brownish color of which suggested human blood; and on opposite sides of the wall there hung the portraits of two young men, each of striking appearance, but of a distinctly different type, who seemed to be looking fixedly at each other. In other respects the room was not unlike many others of the young men had seen, and instead of being displeased because of its somewhat quaint and indeed out-of-date appearance, each said that he would move in the following day.

All efforts of the Texan to calm the Carolinian were unavailing and the latter arose and turned on the light, but not before receiving the positive assurance that the Texan had not been out of bed since retiring. The light revealed the fact to both that in some mysterious, unaccountable way the small, green covered table had been shifted from its accustomed place in

the corner to the center of the room, and that underneath it on the floor lay a blood-soaked ace of hearts.

No beseeching would induce the Carolinian to reveal the nature of his dream but he promised his friend to relate the whole of it the following morning. The promise was fulfilled when they were joined at the breakfast table by the congressman, to whom was shown the blood-besmeared ace of hearts as evidence of the Carolinian's unhappy experience. That afternoon both young men moved out of the Carolinian, at least in the conviction that the place was haunted. To this day he has in his possession that weird ace of hearts.

Coincident with the departure of the young men, a message was received by the congressman, stating that the Scotchman was ill and wished to see him. The request was readily complied with, the visit to the old man's bedroom disclosing the fact that he was indeed very ill. Here is the story he related as the reason for requesting to see the congressman:

"As you know, I am an old man. For the last ten days I have been sick, and I am now so weak and emaciated that I do not hope ever again to arise from this bed. I have little strength left, and, realizing that it perhaps is but a matter of hours for me on this earth, I can no longer bear the thought of passing out into the great beyond without telling some one of the awful life I have lived for the last twenty-five years. But let me begin the recital Scotchman by birth and lived on my father's estate near Glasgow until my young manhood. I am a twenty-fifth year, in spite of the careful home training which I received in my youthful days. I grew up to be a wild, dissipated young man, and was fast bringing disgrace upon my honored parents when, one day, my father proposed to me that I go to America and there make my home, thinking the change would make me the man he had so hoped for. The proposition was agreeable to me, especially after I learned that it was also the purpose of a boyhood friend to emigrate to America.

"We sailed together, each of us having considerable money, and finally drifted to Washington. Shortly after the outbreak of the great civil war I bought this home intending to return later to my native land and bring back with me the girl who could never discover in me the faults so many others found. But I could not shake off my inordinate passion for gambling—the thing took complete possession of me. As the climax to this irresistible desire for the game I invited the friend of my boyhood days to spend the night with me, with the purpose of investing him into a card game. He cared little for cards, but agreed to play to please me. I lost steadily for hours, the stakes meanwhile mounting higher and higher. Finally I risked my all one lone hand, every dollar I had in the world was thrown in the balance, and I—lost. The thought of the utter ruin which stared me in the face completely overcame and crazed me, and drawing from my pocket a dagger I drove it to the hilt into the heart of my friend. The blood spurted over the table, and cards, and he sank to the floor and died without a groan.

"Realizing the awful crime I had committed and the necessity to dispose of the body to save myself, I dragged it downstairs from the rear room of the third floor, where we had played, and hid it under the floor. Not one night in all the long years since I committed the horrible crime have I failed to sleep in this room, within a few feet of the body of my murdered friend. Last night, realizing that my strength was fast leaving me, and unable to withstand the irresistible desire once more to visit the scene of my crime, I stole silently upstairs to that fated room. Upon discovering that the room was occupied, I left it as quickly as my feeble strength would permit, but dropped to the floor an ace of hearts, besmeared with the life blood of my friend.

"No one can imagine the horror haunted life I have lived since that night more than twenty years ago. Now, I beg of you not to repeat the story of my crime until—"

The stricken man had sunk back on his pillow unable to say more. Within twenty-four hours' dissolution had come and his soul had passed out into the great beyond, there to be tried for the crime before a greater Judge than he had evaded on earth.

She Meant Well. New York Press. At the table: Mrs. Hoplight—"That awful pretty stuff in your gown." Miss Granger—I liked it when I bought it. "Does it wear well?" "Very well."

"No one so much flimsy stuff nowadays," down-right swindling. I think, Anna, my dear, that last gown you sent me wore like sheet iron, but them white aprons wasn't worth the thread it took to make them; went a-holes the first washing."

"That was too bad, for I made them myself."

"You did? Never mind, dear. I know you meant well, and I'll just take the will for its valter, if the plaguy things did give out."

"You're such a wretched writer it's a wonder you wouldn't get a type-writing machine."

"I would only that would show what a miserable speller I am!" Catholic Standard and Times.