



COPYRIGHT BY RUPERT HUGHES

W.N.U. SERVICE

CHAPTER I

Through the clouds from their cigars mingled in the thickening air of the smoking compartment, the two Americans might have been cast-aways on desert islands in different oceans, for all the congress they held.

Their moods seemed as unlike as their persons; the one smiled broadly, cheekily even on the flat landscape—the only thing in Germany that is not fat; the other saw nothing, but seemed keenly intent on an inner panorama of remorse, revenge, unrequited hate or love, or some such acid emotion.

His very behavior toward his cigar showed that. A musician would have said that the plump fellow smoked in luxurious legato, the other in a staccato agitato. He puffed furiously for a while; yet a little later, his hand must be seeking another match, and trembling as he ransacked his pockets. He scratched the match with impatience and its shaken illumination threw a little calcium on a face of drawn intensity, on such a gaunt and hunted intensity that the fat man felt not entirely easy of his company in the leather-padded cell.

Strange, how unlike Americans are at home, and how like abroad. These two differed in every detail of feature, costume, and behavior, yet the first glance either gave other told both that they were fellow-countrymen. And their presence on the Nord-Express bound for Ostend implied that their common destination was Home.

They seemed to be taking back experiences as different as their souls and bodies.

One was plump, in the most generous stretch of the epithet, and complacent with the pleasant thoughts of a traveler full of agreeable remembrances; yet glad to be returning to still more delightful memories. The other was slim to the verge of lankness, and some tragedy was apparently at ferment within him.

In America, at least in the less effete regions, they would probably have drifted into comment on the weather or some such unimportant topic. But being in Europe, where a general suspicion is the most contagious of all habits of mind, they mewed themselves up in themselves, and kept caste feudally, with moats full and portulicuses down.

The rotund citizen, who had been the first to establish himself in the smoking compartment of the corridor car, observed the latter corner with surreptitious, while seeming to let his unfocused gaze follow his own smoke. Noting the taut features, and the eyebrows locked with two deep bars, he suspected the stranger of contemplating some crime or feigning its consequence.

On impulse he picked up again the copy of the Hamburgische Tageblatt he had been laboring over till he had grown tired. His few works of conversation-book German had given him an admiration of some desperate murder committed in Braunschweig. He had gleaned that the guilty wretch had escaped. This might be he.

As he went back over the column, even his scant vocabulary showed him that whoever else the stranger might be, this man was not that man. For the fugitive was everything that this man was not; the fugitive was described, among several details which were Sanskrit to the American, as fat, burly, and Austrian with a duel scar that had clipped the lobe off a left ear and made a furrow across the cheek to the nostril.

With a sigh almost of disappointment, the felled Hawkshaw put the paper aside and resumed the study of his vis-a-vis. He took his invoice through opportune clouds of smoke. In the first place his man had the forehead of intelligence ripened with study. His jaw was neatly planned and squared, yet his chin was weak. His lips were compressed till they were thin and pale, and his mouth was one in which weaknesses and strengths were at war, as indeed they were throughout the man's catalogue of traits.

The stranger's costume was almost over-emphatic in the matter of modesty, in thorough contrast with his analyst's costume. The fat man wore a richly tinted ultra-cut coat, trousers baggy yet sharply creased, and revealing a glimpse of shameless purple between trouser-cuffs and yellow shoe-tops; a white-rimmed waistcoat of many colors was draped like a Union Jack about a roundly emphasized by a patterned shirt and a flaming silk scarf with a twisted gold sisker in it.

The stranger was dressed as negligently as an almost finicky neatness would permit. Hat, coat, neck-

scarf, trousers, waistcoat, stockings, shoes, all were black, yet with no hint of mourning. He had the look of a professional person.

The most striking, the only really striking, trait of the man was the hand that held—or rather clutched—the cigar. It was a notable hand, a hand of skill, of cunning, the hand of a craftsman perhaps—too muscular for a painter's; it might be a sculptor's, or a pianist's. Yet the fingernails were trimmed to the quick, not gnawed, but carefully trimmed.

And so after much puffing, much secret scrutiny, and much unworthy curiosity, the fat man had decided only that the lean man was an American, of education, and of middling prosperity.

And that was as far as he could go. The train had gone much farther, before a nervous shift of position disclosed on the waistcoat of his subject a little gleaming jewel. The next glance revealed it a fraternity pin. Was it—could it be?—it was! The stranger wore the emblem of his own fraternity, the dread brotherhood whose little stone meeting house at New Haven was known as the Catacombs.

The fatter man made a long battle with hesitance, the double hesitance of infringing on the lean man's trouble and of incurring perhaps a heavy responsibility by confessing kinship with a casual stranger laboring under some excitement, perhaps some scandal that might defile with pitch whosever touched him. But at last he yielded to the fraternal impulse. When Greek meets Greek then comes the tug of heart.

He cleared his throat with resolution, leaned forward and said:

"I beg your pardon. I see that you are a Catacomb."

"Ye-es," came the answer with a resentful tang, for at Yale it is as across an insult to mention a man's fraternity as to breathe upon the mirror of a woman's reputation. The fat man felt easier. He leaned forward, and said reassuringly:

"Don't shoot. So am I!"

"No!"

"Yes."

"What year?"

"'92."

"My year?"

"Well, I'll be—"

"So will I."

"I ought to know you, then. Wait! don't tell me—you're—no!—yes!—"

"You must be Jebb—old Dave Jebb. My name is—"

"Hold on! Give me a chance. Let me see."

Jebb looked the plump one up and down, also around, stared at the flamboyant and commodious costume. A broad grin cheered his lonely face. He chuckled. "Those spirituelle outlines, them shy little wasp-waist, those modest waistcoat—can belong only and always to Big Bill Gaines—Goliath, we used to call you."

"That's right. David and Goliath, here we are again!"

"Well, I'll be—" even more so.

"Where you bound, Bill, home?"

"Yep. I cross Ostend—Dover, and down to Southampton to catch the American liner."

"Me, too."

"Well, well. This is great. Got to have a drink on this."

"No, thanks," with a curious desiccation of tone.

"Ah, come along, Dave. Got a flask of it in my suitcase. None of your foreign smoke-choke,—real old Bourbon."

"Please don't, Bill!"

There was an emphasis here that miffed Gaines. He sputtered like a glowing stove under a spill of cold water:

"As I remember, Jebbys, you used to indulge a bit in the old days—hit it up pretty lively now and then."

"That's the trouble, Bill."

"Not turned Prohibish? You haven't gone and got religion and turned into a Demosthenes or Polyphemus—or whoever it was that used to drink water?" Gaines' voice was full of tears and pleading. "You haven't done that, have you, Dave?"

"Nope. Not at all, not a single damtall."

"That's better. Just taking a little jaunt on the water-wagon, eh?"

"Strapped to the seat."

"Too bad. It's powerful dry to meet up like this after—Lord, how many years ago was it?"

"Seems like 1492 when I entered college. We'll soon be doing the oldest living alumnus stunt."

Gaines was rolypoly with good feeling. Again he pleaded:

"Couldn't you drop off the sprinkler for just a little nip? You can keep one foot on the step."

There was an unimaginable sadness in Jebb's eyes and voice, an unbelievable longing in his tone:

"I'd like to, Billy, but if I did, God only knows what would happen. You see I'm a—oh, but I'm glad to meet you, Billy, specially just at this moment. I'm in trouble, Billy, good and plenty."

"I thought you looked a little pale around the gills when you first blew in here. I sized you up for a murderer doing a get-away."

Jebb smiled an unamused smile. "I've never killed anybody—except legitimately in the line of my profession; but I'm up against it harder than hard."

Gaines' fat hand was instant to his fat wallet:

"I'm on my way home, Dave, after Europing about; but here's what they left me. Save me enough to tip the stewards—and go as far as you like."

"It's not money, Billy. I'm full of it." He looked about cautiously, and, bending close, murmured: "I've got ten thou. in my belt."

"Ten thou., and worried? Lord, if I ever saw that much at once, I



What's the matter, old boy?

wouldn't care whether school kept or not. What you afraid of? Burglars? Pickpockets?"

"Not a bit. I'm afraid of me—little old David J. Me."

"Afraid you'll give it away or throw it at a cat?"

"I'm as likely to as not, when I'm—Lord, but I'm glad to see you, Billy. For the sake of old sake's sake, I'm going to put my little hand in yours and let you lead me home."

"What's the matter, old boy?"

"Excuse me a minute, till I go see if the child is all right."

"The child?"

But he was gone. He returned in a moment along the corridor, and began to talk as he took his place again:

"You see, it's like this. It Gaines broke in:

"One minute, Dave. Did you say something about a chee-ld?"

"Yes, I left her for a moment to have a smoke. She's scraped acquaintance with another little girl in the same compartment, and I left her in charge of the parents. As I started to say—"

"But the child. You're married, then? Isn't your wife with you?"

"I have no wife."

"Do I condole or congratulate? Are you sod or grass?"

"Sod or grass what?"

"Widower."

"Neither. I've never married."

"Oh, excuse me!"

"And don't go to thinking that either. The child isn't mine at all. I'm just taking her to America."

"Sort of wet nurse, eh? Go on, stranger, your story interests me. You've got a strange child and a ransom of ten thou. I spotted you for a professional the minute I saw you, Dave. Are you one of those lovely kidnapers?"

"No, I'm a grave-robbler—when I'm lucky. If you'll close your trap, I'll tell you. I'll begin at the beginning. When I left Yale I took up surgery."

"You always were a great cut-up."

"In due course I took my diploma at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, went to Johns Hopkins, then to Vienna University, and came back to New York, perspiring knowledge at every pore. Didn't have much practice, of course, at first, but got a lot to do in the hospitals, and made quite a hit with some experiments of my own."

"You're a pretty good little carver, I suppose?"

"I'm great, Billy."

"You ought to know."

"I do, I am. That is, I'm great with extenuating circumstances. I'm a genius, but a damfool. I have a curse that ruins everything."

"Not cocaine?"

"No. I've somehow escaped drugs."

"Our mutual friend, Barleycorn?"

"Old John Barleycorn."

"I see, it makes your hand unsteady, eh?"

"No. I never play with the fire, except at regular intervals. Then I commit arson. I'm what is popularly known as a periodical—with a capital P. It's a terrible thing to confess, even to old Goliath Gaines, but it's all in the Catacombs, and I'm not the only person on earth with a flaw in his make-up. Nobody knows how badly assembled human machines are, Billy, except doctors. If it weren't for our Hippocratic ideals, what closet doors we could open in the best simulated families!"

"I've got a skeleton too—some-where, I suppose," said Gaines, "but I can't find it. My skeleton is a tendency to turn into a balloon—more or less dirigible. I've tried everything. I've banted in seven languages. Diet? I haven't eaten a thing for ten years, but I—you don't know any sure cure for fat, do you?"

"Nobody does, Billy," said Jebb with the cynical frankness doctors employ to their friends; then with a look at his own lank legs. "I've got the anti-fat serum in my system, I suppose, but I don't know what it is."

Gaines shook his fat head and all his chins in elephantine despair. "Thanks for your little ray of discouragement. Go on with your story. I'll tell you mine later. So you've developed one of those clock-work thirsts, eh? Too bad, old boy. I had a pal who was like you—he's dead now—but he found a cure. Have you tried—"

"Your friend found the one sure cure. Don't start anything beginning 'Have you tried?' I've tried all the Have-you-trieds and then some. I've tested all there are in the books and a thousand of my own invention. I had a landlady who used to buy those 'put-some-in-your-husband's-coffee-and-he-won't-notice-it-till-he's-cured' things. Her coffee was so bad anyway I never noticed it. But no more did she notice any cure. You see, Billy, most of the habit-cures depend on the will eventually; but when the will itself is diseased, what can you do? It's like making rabbit-pen when you can't catch the rabbit. The one important fact is that everybody has his personal devil, and that's mine."

"Otherwise I'm all to the good. I've got two arms, a pair of legs, a couple of eyes, both ears, both lungs, one whole stomach, no floating kidneys, a liver you couldn't derange with an ax, and ability to work forty hours at a stretch, and a gut for operative surgery that is a marvel, if I do say it. But I've got an intermittent thirst that amounts to mania, and it does its little best to nullify all my other gifts. If it weren't for that I'd be famous and rich."

"Don't you call ten thousand real iron dollars rich?"

"Oh, I'm rich enough for the moment. I feel like old King Midas, but the trouble is I've got his long ears, too. When I'm in my—cups, is the polite expression. But it's a case of bathtub with me. When I'm that way, I think I'm Mr. Croesus, and I spend what I have as if I owned the Standard Oil and had struck a gusher of gold."

"I don't tittle between speers. I hate the sniff of liquor in my dry seasons. But when my time rolls round, I've the thirst of a man lost in the Mojave desert. I see mirages, but not of waterfalls, Billy—fire-waterfalls!"

"My life runs on schedule. So many months of humanity, then three weeks of humidity. I'm like the tropics—all rain or all sun. And I can pretty nearly tell you to the hour and the minute, just when my freshet begins. I'm a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hydrophobia. When the rabies bites me, the sight of water makes me froth at the mouth. For two or three weeks I go about like an idiot trying to put out a raging fire by pouring on kerosene."

"Poor old boy," said Gaines, "it must be hell. What do you do? Lock yourself in a room and order drinks through the keyhole?"

"If I only did! If I only did! I'm no ordinary dipsomaniac. I'm the only original Wandering Jew—no connection with a cheap imitator of similar name. I hardly show what I'm carrying—they tell me. I look a bit feverish, and I'm slightly thick of tongue, but I have a subintelligence that keeps me from being run over by the cars. My trouble is like certain forms of aphasia with double personality. I lose my sense of orientation, but I am determined to hike. And hike I hike, till I drop or come round sober. Then I'm like the man Bill Nye tells about who was found after the train-wreck, plucking violets in the dell and gently murmuring 'Where am I?'"

Gaines looked at him more in amazement than in sorrow:

"You must have had some rare old experiences." Gaines loved to travel.

"No doubt, Billy, no doubt. But I don't know what my experiences are. Once in a while I meet some man who hails me by some strange name and says I borrowed money from him in Pueblo, or lent him money in Skaneateles. I never ask any questions. I take his word for it and say, 'Oh, yes, of course.'"

"I tell you it's an uncanny sort of thing to wake up in a mysterious room in some unheard-of place and wonder how under the sun you got there and where under the sun you are."

Gaines was reminded:

"I used to walk in my sleep as a boy. Once I found myself in my nightie in the middle of a ballroom floor. I had just meandered in. The floor committee meandered me out in double time. The other night, I got turned round in bed in a hotel in Leipzig, and when I woke up with my head to the footboard I was so bewildered I came near hollering for the night clerk. I thought somebody had put a voodoo on me."

"That's the feeling exactly," said Jebb, "only when I wake up I'm as weak as a sick cat, and my head—oh, my head! And my tongue—oh, oh, my tongue! I haven't the faintest idea of what I have done, or where I have been, or where I am. I reach for my trousers and

the pockets are empty—my watch is gone, stolen, given away to a polite street-car conductor or thrown at a cat. Then I have to recuperate, send a telegram, collect, or draw on my bank—that's no fun among strangers—and get home the best way I can."

"I'm a periodical prodigal, Billy; only I have no father to fall on my neck and offer me a meal. I sneak back to my own shack and try to regain my disgusted and mystified patients by scattering lies by the bushel."

It was Gaines' amiable nature to try to wring a drop of honey from every gall-bag.

"You must be a great little surgeon, Davey, to keep any practice at all."

"I am, but I had to give up New York and go West to a smallish city where they have to have me, handicap and all. When I feel the madness coming on, I arrange my affairs, transfer my patients to other hands, say that I've been called East about my property—and then I hit the trail on the long hike. If I weren't one of the cleverest surgeons that ever ligated an artery, I'd be in the poorhouse today. If I weren't cursed with the bitterest blight that ever ruined a soul, I'd be at the top of my profession."

"Poor old Jebb," sighed Gaines, "but don't you care, we've all got our troubles. Now to look at me, you wouldn't think—but that can wait. You were going to tell me what I could do for you."

"Well, now that you know all, I'll tell you the rest. The last time I fell, I woke up in New Orleans. When I got home I found a letter saying that a distant relative had died leaving me a leasehold in London. That's one of the things that happens in storybooks. But truth sometimes tries to imitate fiction. I vowed I'd jump across the Atlantic, clean up what cash I could, and invest it where I couldn't touch the principal."

"Well, just when I was getting my affairs straightened up so that I could start a beautiful operation came my way. No money in it, but some reputation and a rare opportunity I couldn't let slide—an exquisite fibroid tumor intricately and vitally involved. The woman, Mrs. Milburn, was a widow, and her only child was a married daughter who had gone to Berlin with her husband, John Thatcher."

"When Mrs. Milburn heard that she must undergo a capital operation, she called her daughter to come and hold her hand while she went under the ether. John Thatcher couldn't afford to come and his wife took the first steamer, leaving her little four-year-old girl with her father. I brought Mrs. Milburn through—and good work, too—there'll be an article about it in the Medical Record. Her daughter, Mrs. Thatcher, cried all over me and said she would pay my bill when her husband made his fortune by a great invention he was working on. We doctors get a lot of that money! But I always say that:

"Just as Mrs. Thatcher was about to sail back to Europe, she got a cablegram saying that her husband had committed suicide—scandalously, with a woman of bad name. The Dutchman who sent it had to pay a mark a word, and he didn't waste any breaking it gently."

"Thatcher left only funds enough to bury him. Strangers took the child in charge. The death and the circumstances and the shock prostrated Mrs. Thatcher completely. She was in no condition to go over and bring back the little girl. The money was a big consideration, too, and I—well, since I was going over anyway, I offered to get the child and bring her back with me—fool that I was."

"Fool nothing," Gaines blurted; "it was mighty white of you, old boy."

Jebb shook his head. "I meant well, but you know where we well-intentioned people lay the asphalt."

"I don't follow you, Davey."

"I hoped you would, Billy. It's so nauseating to explain. But here goes: I was so delayed in starting from America and met so much postponement in settling my affairs in poky old London, and had so many details to close up for poor Thatcher before I left Berlin with the child, that I have exhausted my vacation from Hades."

"You don't mean—"

"That's just exactly what I mean. I've been so busy in new scenes that I lost count of the days. This morning as I boarded the train at Berlin, a drunken man—needless to say, he was an American—lurched into me. He paused to lean on me and beg my pardon profusely. I couldn't dodge his breath. I shook him off, but I had felt that first clutch of the thirst. It comes with a rush, Billy, when it comes. And I might as well fight it as try to wrestle with a London fog. It's got me. And I'm afraid, Billy, horribly afraid. I feel like a man who has sold his soul to the devil when the clock strikes and he smells brimstone. It doesn't matter about my rotten soul or the body it torments. And I have no children—I've never dared to marry and drag any woman along my path. My parents, heaven be praised, died when I was in college. I got my curse by entail from poor old dad. His father acquired it in the grand old days when the high society was found under the table after dinner."

"I'm alone now. There'd be nobody to mourn for me. But here I am with a poor widow's only child in my care, and I'm racing with fate."

"And there's another thing, Billy. In Berlin I found proofs that this poor Thatcher didn't commit suicide. He tried to save the woman's life—she was drowning; she dragged him to his death—they both died. He didn't even know who she was. Besides, he did leave something for his family. In my handbag, I have his finished drawings for a great invention that looks to me good for a fortune if it can be got to America and patented and placed."



He paused to lean on me and beg my pardon profusely.

"So you see, Billy, what a load I've got on my chest. The little child, her father's honor, her mother's salvation from poverty—all these, with an ocean and a half a continent between me and safety. It's no question of will-power. I have none. Your offer of a nip of you know, went through me like a knife. If you want to spare me agony don't use even the name of any of those things in my hearing. If I get a sniff of liquor—ugh! I'll fight for it. And after the first drop is on my tongue, it's all over but the hike."

Goliath looked at David with eyes of complete compassion. He said:

"Don't you care, Dave. I'll stick to you to the finish. If you should be—er, incapacitated, I'll get the child to her mother, and the documents, too. So just qualify for the Don't Worry Club, and leave the rest to me. And I rather think you'd better hand over those plans. They'd be a little less likely to be lost in any excitement. And all that money of yours, Dave—it doesn't sound exactly Samaritan to say to a man you haven't seen for years, 'Give me your ten thou, and I'll carry it for you,' but if you want to gamble on my honesty I'll play banker for you."

He was about to break down, but he gathered himself together with a brusque effort. He slapped his hand hard on the leather and rose to his feet:

"I'll get those documents for you, Billy, this instant, and I'll hand you my money-belt as soon as I can un buckle it."

He looked at Gaines' girth, and Gaines looked at his. The same thought struck both of them, and a whiff of laughter shook away the gloom.

"Your money bag will have to be pieced out about a yard to get round my equator," said Gaines. "It will be great sport for me, though. I'll know how it feels to be entirely surrounded by money."

Seeing that Jebb's dour face had softened a trifle—the fat ear eminent consolers—Gaines made an effort to keep him diverted, and he began to laugh reminiscently:

"Say, Dave, do you remember, when we were cubs together at Yale, and one evening we were at—"

He was about to say "Moriarity's" but that had liquid connotations. He stopped short and gulped. "No, that wasn't the time." His memory switched to another incident—but that was Heublein's or Traeger's.

It seemed to him, as he tumbled out the pigeonholes of memory in his roll-top forehead, that he could find nothing recorded but carousals. He knew that they had played only a minute part in the total of college life, but because he wanted to avoid them, he found them everywhere.

He tried to think of some athletic excitement, some classroom joke, some incident in the Catacombs, but the memory is not a voluntary muscle.

Upon the leaden silence came the futility ripple of a childish voice:

"Hello!"

And an exquisite face peering through a cascade of curls was thrust into the fog of smoke:

"Nunkie Dave, are you dere?"

Jebb leaped to his feet and caught the child to him in alarm.

"How did you get here, sweet-heart?"

"I just come long de hall, Nunkie Dave."

"She calls me Nunkie Dave," he explained. "It's shorter than Mr. Jebb. Cynthia, this is an old friend of your Nunkie Dave's—Miss Cynthia Thatcher, may I present to you Mr. William Gaines? There's a good deal of him, but it's all wool and a yard wide."

"And it washes," said Gaines. He knew better than to patronize the young. He said, without condescend-

MIDDLETOWN NEWS

A shower was given Friday night at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jim Farrow in honor of Mr. and Mrs. Hoyt W. Whidbee.

Redginal Burrus of Manteo spent the week end home with his mother, Mrs. Kate Burrus. Mrs. H. C. McKinney and her daughter, Colleen toured