PARROT & CO

HAROLD MACGRATH

Author of The Carpet From Bagdad, The Place of Honeymoons, etc.

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CHAPTER XVIII—Continued.

—15—

He saw her walk bravely the length of the dining-room, out into the office. What a misfortune! Argument was out of the question. Elsa was not a child, to be reasoned with. She was a woman, and she had come to a woman's understanding of her heart. To place before her the true angles of the case, the heartless banishment from the world she knew, the regret which would be hers later, no matter how much she loved the man. . . . He pushed back his chair, leaving his coffee untasted.

He possessed the deep understanding of the kindly heart, and his one thought was Elsa's future happiness. Could he save her from the day when she would learn Romance had come from within? No. All he could do was to help find the man.

He sent five cablegrams to Saigon, to the consulate, to the principal hotels—the most difficult composition he had ever attacked. But because he had forgotten to send the sixth to meet the packet boat, against the possibility of Warrington changing his mind and not landing, his labor was thrown to the winds.

Meantime Elsa stopped at the office desk. "I left a note for Mr. Warrington who has gone to Saigon. I see it in his key box. Will you please return it to me?"

The clerk did not hesitate an instant. He gravely returned the note to her, marveling at her paleness. Elsa crushed the note in her hand and moved toward the stairs, wondering if she could reach her room before she broke down utterly. He had gone. He had gone without knowing that all he wanted in life was his for the taking. In her room she opened the note and through blurred vision read what she had so happily inscribed the night before. "Paul—I love you. Come to me. Elsa." She had written it, unashamed.

She flung herself upon the bed, and there Martha found her.

"Elsa, child, what is it?" Martha cried, kneeling beside the bed. "Child, what has happened?"

Elsa sat up, seized Martha by the shoulders and stared into the faithful eyes. "Well, I love this man Warrington and he loves me. But he has gone. Can't you see? Don't you understand? Have you been as blind as I? He is Paul Ellison, Arthur's brother, his twin brother. And they obliterated him. It is Arthur who is the ghost, Martha, the phantom. Ah, I have caused you a good deal of worry, and I am going to cause you yet more. I am going to Saigon; up and down the world, east and west, until I find him. Shall I go alone, or will you go with me?"

Then Martha did what ever after endeared her to the heart of the stricken girl—she mothered her. "Elsa, my baby! Of course I shall go with you, always. For you could not love any man if he was not worthy."

Then followed the strangest quest doubtless ever made by a woman. From Singapore to Saigon, up to Bangkok, down to Singapore again; to Batavia, over to Hongkong, Shanghai, Pekin, Manila, Hongkong again, then Yokohama. Patient and hopeful, Elsa followed the bewildering trail. She left behind her many puzzled hotel managers and booking agents; for it was not usual for a beautiful young woman to go about the world, inquiring for a blond man with a parrot. Sometimes she was only a day late. Many cablegrams she sent, but upon her arrival in each port she found that these had not been called for. Over these heart-breaking disappointments she uttered no complaint. The world was big and wide; be it never so big and wide, Elsa knew that some day she would find him.

In the daytime there was the quest; but, ah! the nights, the interminable hours of inaction, the spaces of time in which she could only lie back and think. Up and down the coasts, across islands, over seas, the journey took her, until one day in July she found herself upon the pillared veranda of the house in which her mother had been born.

CHAPTER XIX.

The Two Brothers.

From port to port, sometimes not stepping off the boat at all, moody, restless and irritable, Warrington wended his way home. There was nothing surprising in the fact that he never inquired for mail. Who was there to write? Besides, he sought only the obscure hotels, where he was not likely to meet any of his erstwhile fellow passengers. The mockery and uselessness of his home-going became more and more apparent as the days slipped by. Often he longed to fly back to the jungles, to James, and leave matters as they were. Here and there, along the way, he had tried a bit of luxury; but the years of economy and frugality had robbed him of the ability to enjoy it. He was going home . . . to what? Surely there would be no welcome for him at his journey's end. He would return after the manner of prodigals in general, not scriptural, to find that he was not wanted. Of his own free will he had gone out of their lives.

He fought grimly against the thought of Elsa; but he was not strong enough to vanquish the longings from his heart and mind. Always when alone she was in fancy with him, now smiling amusedly into his face, now peering down at the phosphorescence seething alongside, now standing with her chin uplifted, her eyes half shut, letting the strong winds strike her full in the face. Many a "good-night" he sent over the seas. An incident; that would be all.

His first day in New York left him with nothing more than a feeling of foreboding and oppression. The expected exhilaration of returning to the city of his birth did not materialize. So used to open spaces was he, to distances and the circle of horizons, that he knew he no longer belonged to the city with its Himalayan gorges and canyons, whose torrents were human beings and whose glaciers were the hearts of these. A great loneliness bore down on him. For months he had been drawing familiar pictures, and to find none of these was like coming home to an empty house. The old life was indeed gone; there were no threads to resume. A hotel stood where his club had been; the house in which he had spent his youth was no more. He wanted to leave the city; and the desire was with difficulty overcome.

Early the second morning he started downtown to the offices of the Andes Construction company. He was extraordinarily nervous. Cold sweat continually moistened his palms. Change, change, everywhere change; Trinity was like an old friend. When the taxicab driver threw off the power and indicated with a jerk of his head a granite shaft that soared up into the blue, Warrington asked: "What place is this?"

"The Andes building, sir. The construction company occupies the top floor."

"Very good," replied Warrington, paying and discharging the man.

From a reliquary of the Dutch, an affair of red brick, four stories high, this monolith had sprung. With a sigh Warrington entered the cavernous doorway and stepped into an "express elevator." When the car arrived at the twenty-second story, Warrington was alone. He paused before the door of the vice-president. He recalled the "old man," thin-lipped, blue-eyed, erup-

"A Man Like You Wasn't Made for Idleness."

tive. It was all very strange, this request to make the restitution in person. Well he would soon learn why.

He drew the certified check from his wallet and scrutinized it carefully. Twelve thousand, eight hundred dollars. He replaced it, opened the door, and walked in. A boy met him at the railing and briskly inquired his business.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Elmore. Tell him that Mr. Ellison is here."

The boy returned promptly and signified that Mr. Elmore was at liberty. But it was not the "old man" who looked up from a busy man's desk. It was the son; so far, the one familiar face Warrington had seen since his arrival. There was no hand shaking; there was nothing in evidence on either side to invite it.

"Ah! Sit down, Paul. Let no one disturb me for an hour," the young vice-president advised the boy. "And close the door as you go out."

Warrington sat down; the bridge builder whirled his chair around and stared at his visitor, not insolently, but with kindly curiosity.

"You've filled out," was all he said. After fully satisfying his eyes, he added: "I dare say you expected to find father. He's been gone six years," indicating one of the two portraits over his desk.

It was not at the "old man" Warrington looked longest. "Who is the other?" he asked.

"What? You worked four years with this company and don't recollect that portrait?"

"Frankly, I never noticed it before." Warrington placed the certified check on the desk. "With interest," he said.

The vice-president crackled it, ran his fingers over his smooth chin, folded the check and extended it toward the astonished wanderer.

"We don't want that, Paul. What we wanted was to get you back. There was no other way. Your brother made up the loss the day after you . . . went away. There was no scandal. Only a few of us in the office knew. Never got to the newspapers."

It was impossible for Warrington to digest this astounding information at once. His mind could only repeat the phrases: No scandal, only a few of us in the office knew, never got to the newspapers. For ten years he had hidden himself in wildernesses, avoided hotels, read no American newspapers, never called for mail. Oh, monumental fool!

"And I could have come home almost at once!" he said aloud, addressing the crumpled check in his hand rather than the man in the swivel chair.

"Yes. I have often wondered where you were, what you were doing. You and your brother were upper-classmen. I never knew Arthur very well; but you and I were chummy, after a fashion. Arthur was a little too bookish for my style. Didn't we use to call you Old Galahad? You were always walloping the bullies and taking the weaker chaps under your wing. To me, you were the last man in the world for this business. Moreover, I never could understand, nor could father, how you got it, for you were not an office man. Women and cards, I suppose. Father said that you had the making of a great engineer. Fierce place, this old town," waving his hand toward the myriad sparkling roofs and towers and spires. "Have to be strong and hard-headed to survive it. Built anything since you've been away?"

"In Cashmir." To have thrown away a decade!

"Glad you kept your hand in. I dare say you've seen a lot of life." To the young man it was an extremely awkward interview.

"Yes; I've seen life," dully.

"Orient, mostly, I suppose. Your letter about the strike in oil was mighty interesting. Heap of money over there, if they'd only let us smart chaps in to dig it up. Now, old man, I want you to wipe the slate clear of these ten years. We'll call it a bad dream. What are your plans for the future?"

"Plans?" Warrington looked up blankly. He realized that he had made no plans for the future.

"Yes. What do you intend to do? A man like you wasn't made for idleness. Look here, Paul; I'm not going to beat about the bush. We've got a whopping big contract from the Chinese government, and we need a man to take charge, a man who knows and understands something of the yellow people. How about a salary of ten thousand a year for two years, to begin in October?"

Warrington twisted the check. Work, rehabilitation.

"Could you trust me?" he asked quietly.

"With anything I have in the world. Understand, Paul, there's no philanthropic string to this offer. You've pulled through a devil of a hole. You're a man. I should not be holding down this chair if I couldn't tell a man at a glance. We were together two months in Peru. I'm familiar with your work. Do you want to know whose portrait that is up there? Well, it's General Chetwood's, the founder of this concern, the silent partner. The man who knew kings and potentates and told 'em that they needed bridges in their back yards. This building belongs to his daughter. She converted her stock into granite. About a month ago I received a letter from her. It directly concerned you. It seems she learned through the consul general at Singapore that you had worked with us. She's like her father, a mighty keen judge of human nature. Frankly, this offer comes through her advices. To satisfy yourself, you can give us a surety bond for fifty thousand. It's not obligatory, however."

Elsa Chetwood. She had her father's eyes, and it was this which had drawn his gaze to the portrait. Chetwood; and Arthur had not known any more than he had. What irony! Ten years wasted . . . for nothing! Warrington laughed aloud. A weakness seized him, like that of a man long gone hungry.

"Buck up, Paul," warned the good Samaritan. "All this kind of knocks the wind out of you. I know. But what I've offered you is in good faith. Will you take it?"

"Yes," simply.

"That's the way to talk. Supposing you go out to lunch with me? We'll talk it over like old times."

"No. I haven't seen . . ."

"To be sure! I forgot. Do you know where they live, your mother and brother?"

"No. I expected to ask you."

The vice-president scribbled down the address. "I believe you'll find them both there, though Arthur, I understand, is almost as great a traveler as you are. Of course you want to see them, you poor beggar! The Southwestern will pull you almost up to the door. After the reunion, you hike back here, and we'll get down to the meat of the business."

"John," said Warrington, huskily, "you're a man."

"Oh, piffle! It's not all John. The old man left word that if you ever turned up again to hang on to you. You were valuable. And there's Miss Chetwood. If you want to thank anybody, thank her." Warrington missed the searching glance, which was not without its touch of envy. "You'd better be off. Hustle back as soon as you can." Elmore offered his hand now. "Gad! but you haven't lost any of your old grip."

"I'm a bit dazed. The last six months have loosened up my nerves."

"Nobody's made of iron."

"I'd sound hollow if I tried to say what I feel. I'll be back a week from today."

"I'll look for you."

As the door closed behind Warrington, the young millionaire sat down, scowling at a cubby hole in his desk. He presently took out a letter postmarked Yohohama. He turned it about in his hands, musingly. Without reading it (for he knew its contents well), he thrust it back into the cubby hole. Women were out of his sphere. He could build a bridge within a dollar of the bid; but he knew nothing about women beyond the fact that they were always desirable.

A few monosyllables, a sentence or two, and then, good day. The average man would have recounted every incident of note during those ten years. He did not admire Warrington any the less for his reticence. It took a strong man to hold himself together under all these blows from the big end of fortune's horn.

Paul was a born engineer; Arthur had entered the office as a makeshift. Paul had taken eight thousand one day, and decamped. Arthur had refunded the sum, and disappeared. Elmore could not understand, nor could his father. Perhaps some of the truth would now come to light. Somehow, Paul, with his blond beard and blonder head, his bright eyes, his tan, his big shoulders, somehow Paul was out of date. He did not belong to the times.

And Elsa had met him over there; practically ordered (though she had no authority) that he should be given a start anew; that, moreover, she would go his bond to any amount. Funny old world! Well, he was glad. Paul was a man, a big man, and that was the sort needed in the foreign bridge building. He rolled down the top of his desk and left the building. He was in no mood for work.

The evening of the third day found Warrington in the baggage car, feeding a dilapidated feather-molting bird, who was in a most scandalous temper. Rajah scattered the seeds about, spurned the banana-tip, tilted the water cup and swashbuckled generally. By and by, above the clack-clack of wheels and rails, came a crooning song. The baggageman looked up from his waybook and lowered his pipe. He saw the little green bird pause and begin to keep time with its head. It was the Urdu lullaby James used to sing. It never failed to quiet the little parrot. Warrington went back to his Pullman, where the porter greeted him with the information that the next stop would be his. Ten minutes later he stepped from the train, a small kitbag in one hand and the parrot cage in the other.

He had come prepared for mistake on the part of the natives. The single smart cabman lifted his hat, jumped down from the box, and opened the door. Warrington entered without speaking. The door closed, and the coupe rolled away briskly. He was perfectly sure of his destination. The cabman had mistaken him for Arthur. It would be better so. There would be no after complications when he departed on the morrow. As the coupe took a turn, he looked out of the window. They were entering a driveway, lined on each side of which were chestnuts. Indeed the house was set in the center of a grove of these splendid trees.

Warrington went up the broad veranda steps and pulled the old-fashioned bell cord. He was rather amazed at his utter lack of agitation. He was as calm as if he were making a call upon a casual acquaintance. His mother and brother, whom he had not seen in ten years! The great oak door drew in, and he entered unceremoniously.

"Why, Marse A'thuh, I di'n't see yo' go out!" exclaimed the old negro servant.

"I am not Arthur, I am his brother Paul. Which door?"

Pop-eyed, the old negro pointed to a door down the hall. Then he leaned against the baniste and caught desperately at the spindles. For the voice was not Arthur's.

Warrington opened the door, closed it gently and stood with his back to it. At a desk in the middle of the room sat a man, busy with books. He raised his head.

"Arthur, don't you know me?"

"Paul?"

The chair overturned; some books thudded dully upon the rug. Arthur leaned with his hands tense upon the desk. Paul sustained the look, his eyes sad and his face pale and grave.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Fixing the Crime.

It was only a nice friendly kind of a "sing-song" at the hydro, but just because it was free expectations ran high, and the critics were in full force. The young man who rose to sing "The Maiden Fair With Golden Hair" had the best intentions in the world, but somehow he was not up to what is called "concert pitch." Indeed, he was very much below it, and after making two or three attempts he had to capitulate and resume his seat at the back. Then the benevolent looking chairman rose.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there is not a word to be said against the young gentleman. He did his best, and what can man do more? He deserves our thanks for his willingness to come forward. But I do think that the person who asked him to sing should be shot."

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Revenge!

Mollie—What are you letting your hair grow so long for? Going to be a musician?

Chollie—No; I've got a grudge against the barber.

Expression Misunderstood.

There is a certain young man who used to be notoriously egotistic. Some of his acquaintances were one day speaking of him before an old lady who was not "up" in the slang expressions of the day.

The next time she met him she put out a congratulatory hand.

"Oh, Mr. Smith," she cried. "I am so glad you are better! I heard last week that you had a swelled head."

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Ratliff, Miss.—Ida Creel, of this place, writes: "I am enjoying fine health, better than I have in years. My weight is 116; when I began taking your treatment it was 98. I sure can praise your treatment; can eat anything I want and it don't seem to hurt me."

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And No Wonder.

"What made that stout woman so furious?"

"Just as she was getting on the subway train the gateman said 'Both gates, lady.'"

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Poor Father!

"When I was a boy," said the head of the family, "I had to wear my father's old clothes made over."

"That's all right, dad," answeerd his son. "I've got a couple of old suits you can have."

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J. G. Cochrane, S. Biltmore St., Biltmore, N. C., says: "I was all run down from kidney complaint and my back was so lame and sore, I couldn't work. The kidney secretions were irregular in passage, too. Doan's Kidney Pills drove the trouble out of my system and for two years, I have had no sign of it."

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