

JIMMIE DRURY
CAUGHT BY THE CAMERA

by
DAVID O'HARA



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**THERE CAME A SHARP CRY: “LOOK OUT! IT’S
TIPPING.” ([Page 124](#))**

A JIMMIE DRURY MYSTERY

CAUGHT BY THE CAMERA

BY
DAVID O'HARA

Illustrated by
F. E. WARREN

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JIMMIE DRURY; CAUGHT BY THE CAMERA

CHAPTER I THE CLICK OF A LATCH

“Say! That was mighty strange!” A short, broad-shouldered, redheaded young man grinned at Jimmie. “The click of a latch!”

“What latch? Where?” Jimmie Drury asked in some bewilderment. He had never seen the man before. They had left the little tenth floor shop at the same moment, but he had not been conscious of the young man, only of a girl and a hundred cameras. For Jimmie, a camera shop was a place of great enchantment.

“So you didn’t hear it?” the young man chuckled. He had a disarming smile, did this young man. Jimmie had played football against just such a fellow once. He had put him down for an easy mark at first. In the end the fellow had

jarred him nearly out of his shoes, and smiled all the time.

“Hear what?” Jimmie asked. He was still thinking of that rare assortment of cameras.

“The click of that latch!” There was a suggestion of impatience in the young stranger’s voice. “I suppose you didn’t see the man, either.”

“What man?”

“You only saw the girl.” The stranger laughed.

“Not the girl,” Jimmie corrected. “The cameras. I’m nuts on cameras and that was a grand collection. I could hardly tear myself away.”

“Was it? Well, every man for his line. It was the man who interested me and the click of that latch.”

“The latch?” Jimmie was interested and puzzled.

“They say,—” the stranger spoke slowly, “that a really mean dog can tell when you are frightened by the way you smell. Dogs have a remarkable sense of smell. People give off a fear odor.”

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“It—” he hesitated. “It’s much the same when you follow certain occupations, if you’ve searched a hundred persons who have something to conceal, you come to know by some strange intuition that certain other people have something they wish to conceal too. The moment I entered that shop,” he nodded over his shoulder to the shop door, “I knew that big

man had something to hide.”

“What was it?” Jimmie asked.

“That’s what I don’t know.”

“Don’t know?” Jimmie stared.

“Only that it’s in the center cabinet. There are five doors. It’s the middle door. I noticed the instant I entered that the door of that cabinet was ajar, just a little, not so you could see much, perhaps nothing. But it disturbed the man.”

“Why?”

“Perhaps he’d seen me somewhere before and knew or suspected,—” The young man did not finish, but stood staring at that shop door.

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“He’s a queer one,” Jimmie thought.

“The moment I heard that latch click I knew he had sidled over there and closed the door,” the stranger went on, “and I knew that he was at his ease again—and I had my back to him all the time. But I knew. You get that way.

“Say!” The young man’s voice dropped to a whisper. “My name’s Peter Grim.” He put out a hand. Jimmie took it without knowing why. “Will you do something for me?” Peter Grim asked.

“That—ah—depends.”

“Nothing really dangerous,” Peter Grim laughed low. “You’ll get barked at, that’s all. It’s a queer world. Dogs bark at just anybody. Men bark at boys. You won’t mind?”

“Not a bit.” Jimmie grinned.

“O.K. We’ll go back into that shop.” Peter moved a step nearer the door. “I’ll ask for a film, buy one for you, in fact. What shall it be?”

“A—a Margot Trispeed.” Jimmie was thinking, “Here’s luck.”

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“O.K. A Trispeed. While I’m getting it from the girl, you wander over to that middle cabinet door and pull it open wide. You’ll get barked at, that’s all. Any boy’d be likely to open that door. The man won’t suspect it’s a trick.”

“Al—all right.” Jimmie’s heart leaped. “It—it’s a go.”

“Sure it is. Just a minute though,” Peter paused. “This thing must not be done too quickly or he’ll suspect something. They keep those high speed films in a darkroom, don’t they?”

“Sure.”

“The girl will have to go for it. That gives us a little time. I’ll ask her a few questions, too. You just wander about the room looking at the cameras, then when I say ‘That’s fine’ to the girl, you open that cabinet door. Get me?”

“Oh sure!”

“Then, in you go.” And in they went.

The room they entered was small. Its walls were lined with cameras. There were tall moving picture cameras, and some so small you could slip them into your pocket. Candid cameras, a whole battery of them,—German, Swiss, French and American makes, occupied the north wall. Speedy cameras and slow cameras, portrait cameras,—they were all there. With permission to examine them, Jimmie would gladly have spent hours here. 6

Truth is, he had already spent many happy moments here. That was before he had become acquainted with this mysterious Peter Grim. Now, to hold his mind steady, he thought back over that joyous interlude.

For the first quarter hour of his previous visit he had been free to look about him quite undisturbed. There were but two persons in the room, a girl in her late teens and a gray-haired man who wore spats and carried a gold-headed cane.

The girl had caught Jimmie’s eye at once. She had the largest, blackest eyes he had ever seen, and the blackest hair. She might, he thought, be Italian, yet he doubted it. She had moved almost languidly, and she spoke with a drawl. Still, young as she surely was, she knew cameras. In this small room Jimmie could not but hear her talking to the old man. 7

“This,” she was saying, “is a Swiss make. It is fast and very accurate. Surely your son would prize it.”

“Grandson,” the gray-haired man corrected. “Yes, I am sure

he would like it. But our American cameras,—what of these?”

“Oh, yes. There are several,” she replied. “Some are very fine. Here is one.” She spoke low as if revealing a secret. “A very unusual camera. Only a few were made. There is some trouble about the patents. Perhaps others will be made later. We have this one. Only one.” She spoke softly. “It is two hundred and ten dollars. But it is truly worth it. See,——”

She opened up the camera, demonstrated the speed of the shutter, and spoke of the accuracy of the lens, and the dependability of all parts.

“Built like a watch, a very fine watch,” she murmured. “It will last as long as the boy lives.”

“Very well,” said the man. “Wrap it up. I’ll take it.” He pulled out a roll of bills.

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Jimmie envied this man’s grandson, whoever he might be. He had heard of this suppressed model, had longed to possess one, but until now had never seen one.

“And what can I show you?” The girl had said to him, after the man was gone.

“On—only a film.” Jimmie had drawn his small camera from under his jacket. “A color film for this.”

“Oh, yes. I will get it.” She had disappeared into a cabinet affair, like a magician doing a trick. She had reappeared a moment later with the film all wrapped up.

Jimmie had paid for the film. “You have some keen cameras here.” He felt no desire to leave.

“Yes. This is a remarkable shop. Of course,” she added with a rare smile, “it’s not mine, so I can say that. Do you like cameras?”

“I’m keen for them.” Before Jimmie knew what he was doing he was telling of his exploits with his camera as an amateur detective, how he had helped catch the Bubble Man, and solve the Golf Club robberies.

He was beginning to feel that he had told too much and was planning a retreat when Peter Grim had entered the place. After that all had been changed. The girl was all business again. A big man, apparently connected with the shop, had entered and begun rearranging the motion picture cameras.

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All this Jimmie recalled as his heart beat a tattoo against his ribs and he waited for his cue from Peter Grim that would tell him to open that cabinet door.

After looking at a candid camera here and a large movie projector there, he glided toward the cabinet. Finding the big man’s eyes fixed upon him he took another turn about the room.

Then, just as the big man looked away, he caught Peter Grim’s words:

“That’s fine.” His heart leaped. His hand went up. He pressed the latch to that door. He would have sworn

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there was not a sound as the door opened. But, with a roar and a bark, for all the world like an English mastiff's, the big man began a familiar foreign ejaculation, broke off half way, then roared:

“What do you do? Make that door shut!”

As the latch clicked once more, seeming to realize that he had, perhaps, made a mistake, the big man said to Peter Grim with an expressive groan:

“These terrible boys! What is one to do?”

“Bark at 'em,” said Peter Grim with a rare grin.

At this Jimmie bolted through the door, caught an elevator, and descended to the ground floor. There, breathing more easily, he waited for his strange new acquaintance, Peter Grim. And all the time he was thinking “Who is this Peter Grim? He said, ‘When you follow a certain occupation.’ What is his business? And why should he care what's in that cabinet? For that matter, why should the big man care if he knows?”

CHAPTER II

FOR TALKING DOWN A BEAM OF LIGHT

“Well, you got barked at, all right.” Peter Grim laughed as he bounced from the elevator. “Come on over to the corner and have a cup of coffee.”

“Make mine ice cream,” said Jimmie, as a moment later they dropped into seats at the small eating place.

“Peter Grim!” Jimmie’s voice dropped. “What sort of apparatus was that?”

“Behind those closed cabinet doors? You’d be surprised.” Peter Grim’s face broke into a strange smile. “There’re only a few like it in the country. It’s for talking down a beam of light.”

“Talking down a beam of light!” Jimmie stared. “I never heard of such a thing!”

“I suppose not,” said Peter. “It’s practically unheard of. Yet it can be done, thirty or forty miles at least.”

“But why?”

“Secrecy, that magic word secrecy,” Peter whispered. “You

talk on the phone and they tap in on your conversations. Use the radio, and they get your wave length. But this, they must get into direct line with your beam of light. They must own equipment that costs a small fortune to hear it then. If you change direction ever so little, they must go groping about to find that beam of light. You can't see it, that beam, not twenty or thirty miles away. Why, man! It's almost impossible to listen in! It—it's practically perfect!

“Question is,” his voice changed, “why is it there in that tenth floor camera shop?”

“Yes,” Jimmie agreed, “that's the question.”

“And yet,” Peter chuckled, “why should it be a question? There's no law against talking down a beam of light any more than there is talking over a short-wave radio.

“In a case like this,” he settled back in his chair, “we always begin at the wrong end, the big end. We think these people must be crooks directing the activities of other crooks by talking over a beam of light. Or—” he hesitated. “Or, perhaps we think they're spies directing other spies. Chances are they are neither one. We should start with the simplest possible solution and build up from there.

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“Here's a similar case.” His eyes shone. “I have a way of taking a gamble now and then by buying a trunkful of things that have belonged to someone else at an unclaimed express auction. Mostly the stuff is junk,—rags. Now and then I get something real. Once I got a fine trunk. It had been owned by a trained nurse. There were bridge sets, cup and saucer sets, a

fine camera, rare books, surgical instruments,—just wonderful things. And,” he laughed to himself,—“two hundred letters from Bill!”

“Who was Bill?”

“The man in the case. The girl was Margie. A romance had developed. Bill, it seems, was something of a bounder. But he wanted Margie to marry him. She consented at last, planned to send her trunk ahead, travel by bus from New York, stop a day or two somewhere along the line, and then come on. And there,” he paused. “There the story ended.”

“Ended?” Jimmy exclaimed.

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“I bought the trunk a year later,” Peter went on after a pause. “It had been sent to Bill’s office and never was claimed. What would you say to that?”

“Margie was killed in an accident on the way,” Jimmie suggested.

“But in that case, Bill would have claimed the trunk.”

“That’s right. Then—well—Bill, you say, was more or less of a bad one? He murdered her. Then he was afraid to claim the trunk.”

“Good enough logic,” Peter smiled. “But, don’t you see, you’ve proved my point, you started at the top. You thought of the most tragic solution.

“What really happened was the dullest thing possible.

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They were married. Bill's business was bad. Money was scarce. There was nothing in the trunk that Margie really had to have. They postponed claiming it and paying the express. This went on from month to month. Each month storage charges were added. In the end, their time for claiming it expired, and the trunk was sold to me for charges. When I found Bill and Margie," he concluded, "they had a baby and were living quite happily on next to nothing, without the trunk and its contents. So I left it all on their doorstep and went away."

"That was keen!" said Jimmie. "But say! Where's that auction place?"

"Somewhere on Monroe, just west of the river," Peter grinned broadly. "Today they hold their weekly auction. You are going there. I can read that in your eyes. But you've missed the point of my story."

"No—no I haven't!" Jimmie insisted. "The point is that those people in the camera shop probably are neither crooks nor spies."

"And," Peter added, "that the equipment is merely stored there, or that the big man who barks at boys who open cabinet doors, is something of an amateur electrician and inventor who likes to try unusual experiments."

"All the same," Jimmie insisted, "he *did* bark at me. It was a dangerous sounding bark. If he is an innocent amateur, what does he care if I have a look at his playthings?"

"That's the question," Peter agreed. "Why?"

“Glad to have met you,” he said a moment later. “Thanks for your help. I must toddle along. Hope you find gold and diamonds in that trunk you’re going to buy.”

“Why! I’m not——”

“Oh! Yes! You’re going to that auction!” Peter laughed heartily, and was gone.

Of course Jimmie went to the auction! He walked across the Loop and out on Monroe Street toward the river.

At the same time he was thinking “Who is this man Peter Grim? I’ve never met a more interesting fellow. Why didn’t I ask him what his business was and where he was bound for or where he could be found?”

He knew the answer to that last question. Somehow he had never been able to crowd his way into another fellow’s personal affairs. If Peter Grim had wished to tell more, he would have told it. If it was written in the stars that he, Jimmie, was to meet Peter Grim again, why then he would meet him! This was a large city, but strangely enough, people who should know one another went round and round, meeting each other constantly. Musicians met musicians, artists met artists. He, Jimmie, was a youthful detective of a sort, and had done a thing or two with his candid camera. If, along with John Nightingale, the reporter, and Tom Howe, the detective, Peter Grim belonged to this little circle, why then they would meet again!

“But this talking down a beam of light,” he thought. “I wonder if there truly is something of the sort. And, if there is,

I wonder what that big man's purpose is in having the apparatus there?" In spite of Peter Grim's theory regarding the manner in which one should approach a puzzling problem, he had a feeling that the strange device in that cabinet, whether Peter Grim had told him the precise truth about it or not, was of considerable importance.

But here, to his left, was the auctioneer's red flag. This must be the place. Would he buy a trunk filled with all manner of unusual things? A mildly thrilling adventure, that would be. His step quickened as he reached the door for already he had caught the drone of the auctioneer's voice.

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CHAPTER III

WITH CONTENTS—IF ANY

Three hours later, just at dusk, Jimmie might have been found in a telephone booth. The booth was located in a small room at the left of the large auction hall. His fingers trembled slightly as he attempted to drop in the slug. He gave the slug a little impatient push, but it did not drop. “Upside down.” He turned it over, then glanced quickly through the glass side of the booth before trying it again. There was no one near.

“No one,” he murmured as he slid the slug into position. There came a click, the receiver hummed. He dialed rapidly—STA 6263. The automatic switch did its bit, then a voice said:

“Hel-lo.”

“This Joe’s place?” Jimmie asked.

“Yep.”

“Tom Howe there?”

“Let me look,—yep—he’s here.”

“Put him on.”

“Sure—a—ting.”

“Hello!” A new voice sounded in the phone.

“That you, Tom?” Jimmie’s voice dropped to a near whisper.

“You off duty, Tom?”

“Sure am.”

“Say, Tom. This is Jimmie Drury. I’m over at that auction place on Monroe Street. Can you come over here in about a quarter of an hour? The number’s 663.”

“I might. What’s up?”

“I think I’m going to be held up and robbed, Tom.”

“Say—ee!” Tom exploded. “We get calls like that every day. When we catch the guys we put ’em in a padded cell. Snap out of it.”

“But, Tom, I’m no jitterbug. You know that. I—mean it.” Jimmie was growing excited.

“O.K., Jimmie. I’ll finish my coffee. There’s a squad car heading that way in about three minutes. I’ll be there.”

“Say, that’s swell of you, Tom. You’re going to get a surprise, catch a queer bird and like as not clear up a mystery. That’s all I can say now. You wait at the outside door. I’ll be coming out in fifteen minutes with a long box that looks like it might contain artificial flowers, which it does, and—” Jimmie’s voice dropped, “and something else.

You just shadow me and,——”

“Leave the rest to me,” Tom Howe, the clever and fearless young detective snapped. “Coffee’s getting cold. Step right out, son. I’ll be behind you.”

“Now what did I do that for?” Jimmie asked himself as he slipped from the booth. “Probably about the most foolish thing I’ve ever done. Imagine announcing in advance that you’re about to be held up! But then,” his face sobered, “why did I do any of it? Besides, that fellow has a fierce look. He’d knife you in the dark, that guy would. No use taking chances.” The whole affair had, to say the least, been very strange. The worst part of it was he had invested a brand new ten dollar bill in a large collection of artificial flowers and something else. What that ‘something else’ was, he had only the faintest notion.

“That’s what a fellow gets for playing hunches,” he told himself with an inward groan. “Fellow should stay away from auctions.”

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“Auctions,” he groaned. “They’ll be the death of me yet.”

Auctions had always fascinated Jimmie. This auction, as it had been described by Peter Grim, had promised to hold unusual interest. And that it had.

As if to whet his appetite a little, a run-down-at-the-heel fellow loitering in the inner doorway had told of one man who had found a ring, set with a large diamond, in a dilapidated suitcase, and another who had salvaged a five thousand dollar government bond from an ancient trunk.

“A trunk,” Jimmie had said. “That’s what I want.”

“I’ll lay you three to one you lose,” said the stranger. No matter. Jimmie wanted a trunk.

To his disgust he found that in this particular sale there were no trunks. Just to fill in the time, he began bidding on anything, a broken radio, an iron-bound keg, an alabaster lamp. Always he stopped bidding just in time, and let the other bidder have it.

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And then it happened. A long cardboard box was put up:

“There you are, folks,” the auctioneer droned. “How much am I bid for this here box?”

“Three dollars,” said a man’s voice.

“Four,” chirped Jimmie.

“Five.” The other bidder gave Jimmie a dirty look. Jimmie didn’t like dirty looks. Besides, he didn’t like the appearance of that other bidder. So he said:

“Six dollars!”

Like the thunder clouds of a hot summer day the looks directed at Jimmie by that other bidder had grown blacker and blacker as the bidding went on.

No one could bluff Jimmie. If the box was worth eight dollars to the stranger it was worth eight and a half to him. And so the bidding went on.

“Nine!” One more black look.

“And a half!” A smile from Jimmie.

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“Ten!” The stranger half rose in his place. His fists were clenched.

“And a half,”—Jimmie ceased smiling.

“Eleven.” The stranger, a man of some thirty years, dropped to his chair, reached for something under his jacket, then, appearing to think better of it, gave Jimmie one more black look while the boy repeated:

“And a half.”

There was a look on the man’s face that Jimmie did not care to think about, as he shrugged his shoulders, made a motion as of drawing a knife across his own throat, then ceased bidding.

“I get the package,” Jimmie thought. “Now what shall I do with it?”

Strangely enough, even after he had paid his money at the window and in a secluded corner opened the package, he did not care to give it up. That the package contained paper flowers he had discovered at once. A hand thrust into the half-open end told him that. But there was something else. He had purchased a package within a package. The inner package had an address all its own, quite a different one from that on the box. Here lay the mystery. How had it come inside this practically worthless box of flowers?

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Jimmie's suspicions were aroused at once. When that other bidder, a dark, foreign appearing fellow, with deep, sullen eyes, offered him more than he had paid, he refused, and got one more black look and a muttered curse for his troubles.

The inner package, he discovered, was a long, slender cylinder, very compact, and very well wrapped. It showed blue on its ends. This suggested blueprints. Blueprints mean plans. But plans of what, a house? A railroad? A battleship? An airplane? At least here was an intriguing mystery. He meant to see the thing through. There was, however, in that fellow's looks and actions, more than a suggestion of danger. That was why he had called Tom Howe, and why he would wait in the shadows with his prize package under his arm until he was sure Tom Howe had arrived.

While waiting, he moved to a brighter corner, drew the long cylinder from its place and read the address to which it had been shipped. After that he copied it in a notebook: S. O. C. 606 Corbin Place, Room 767. "Queer sort of address," he thought, as he slid the mysterious cylinder back to its place of concealment.

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CHAPTER IV

SPEEDING FAR BENEATH A CITY'S STREETS

All that happened after that remains in Jimmie's memory like a very fast movie seen dimly from a dark corner. With the box under his arm, he opened the street door and looked out.

"Dark," he murmured.

There was a shadowy figure in the corner. That, he thought, would be Tom. This, he knew at once, was true, for a low whistle, three notes ascending, came as a signal to his listening ear.

Starting out boldly into the night, he walked rapidly past a loading platform, all black and deserted. A dingy eating place, with lights out and door padlocked, came next. He shuddered at sight of that lock. "Bad spot, this," he thought. A small auto repair shop and a filling station of a sort stood on the corner. He was about to pass this when, from a dark hole in the wall, a figure sprang at him.

Not a word was spoken. A grimy fist reached for the package. Jimmie was too quick for the fellow. He shot the long package forward. Taking his assailant under the chin, it bowled him over like a ten-pin.

“That should fix him,” the boy thought, as after leaping to one side he sprang forward. The man was quicker than he had counted on. A hand caught his foot. He went down in a heap. A corner of the box caught him in the pit of the stomach. For a count of twenty he was down and out, fighting for breath.

“Where’s Tom?” he thought, as he struggled to a sitting position. He could still hear the sound of running feet.

Next instant there came a cry:

“Police! Po——”

The call was not finished. It was Tom. Jimmie knew that. Something had gone wrong. He had counted on one man only. There must have been others. The whole affair was much more important than he had thought. Those men were up to something serious, and perhaps terrible.

He heard a police whistle. The flatfoots were coming. Tom would be taken care of.

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The man with the package was still in sight.

“I’ll get him!” He set his will hard. “Get him if it takes a year!” Jimmie was fast. A football player of no mean ability, he had more than once done eighty yards to a touchdown.

The man was speeding straight down the street. What more could he ask? He was after him like a flash.

Two blocks and he had gained half a block. The man was but half a block away. “I—I’ll get him!”

But the man had vanished, gone down an alley—yes—yes—there he was. Now a little burst of speed. A hundred yards—hundred and fifty——

“Gone again!” The boy sped straight on. Coming at last to a door, he opened it to run down a flight of stairs, then down another. What place was this?

There came the rumble of cars. A bright light flashed past him. He had reached a narrow platform.

30

Some distance before him, still hugging the mysterious package, was the man. Beside him were low steel cars. They were in a freight tunnel. These small steel cars were drawn by an electric engine.

Just as the train started, the man vaulted into one of the cars. Not to be left behind, Jimmie followed his example. Next instant they were rattling along through a tunnel that was, Jimmie thought, like a grave, so narrow and cramped. Above him a trolley running on a live wire he might have touched, sizzled and snapped.

“Queer sort of place,” he murmured. “What next?”

The train rattled on and on. He had heard of the city’s freight tunnels. There were forty-two miles of them. They carried coal and merchandise to the great skyscrapers and hauled away ashes, cinders, and other trash.

“Trash,” he thought. “That’s what I’m sitting on.”

It was true, the car was half-filled with rubbish. Putting

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out a hand, he felt twisted wires, broken cardboard boxes and bundles of waste paper. As he shifted his position he felt something else, his candid camera. A thought flashed through his mind.

Why not a candid camera shot of that man? His chances of getting him were slim. A picture would help to spot him next time. But how was it to be done?

That, indeed, was the question. In his pocket was a flash bulb. Above him was electricity, too much of it. It hissed and sputtered at him.

“Rubbish,” he thought, feeling about him. His hand came into contact with a length of insulated wire. If he had this connected with his flash bulb, then hooked over that high-tension cable above him, both ends at once, there would be a flash, no doubt of that. And such a flash!

“Dangerous,” he murmured. “But perhaps not too much so.”

He felt about once more. Ah, yes, here was a square of old oilcloth. It should make insulation of a sort.

At last he had rigged the whole affair to suit his taste.

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“But I’m too far away. Light won’t carry.”

The train slowed up but did not stop. The cars were close together. If he were to climb from one car to another, he could come closer to that man, get a clearer picture, have a better chance to catch the man, too.

At once he began dragging himself from car to car. This was risky business. The cable was all too close, but somehow he had a feeling that the whole affair was immensely important.

At last he dared go no farther. Two cars ahead, not fifteen feet away, was that man. He would be sure of a picture from here, if only,——

His heart skipped a beat. The train began slowing down. He had little doubt the man would leap from his car and run for it, the instant they stopped. That was his only chance of escape. Aided by the motorman and perhaps a platform attendant, Jimmie felt sure he could make trouble for him, and plenty of it.

The instant the man put up his head he meant to hook his wire over the cable. His eyes ached at thought of the flash that would follow. But it was worth the try.

33

The train moved slowly and yet more slowly. It moved its own length, another, and yet another. They twisted round a curve. There was a lighted platform. Now,——

But no——

The train was picking up speed again. He settled back in his place.

Scarcely had his tingling nerves composed themselves when again the train began to slow down.

“Now,” Jimmie breathed, gripping the bundle of oilcloth wrapped about his wire. “Now!”

The train was all but at a standstill. They were within a few feet of the platform.

Holding his camera high, he waited. Of a sudden, a dark bulk loomed ahead.

“He’s up,” he breathed. “Now!”

There came a sudden glare of light, then all went black. This lasted for a space of ten seconds. When normal vision returned, he saw the man with that bulky package racing down the platform.

34

Before he could catch him, he was up a flight of stairs and into a place that was a maze of packing boxes, pillars, and hand trucks. After falling over a truck and sprawling on the floor, then dashing into a post, he gave up the chase.

“What a mess!” he grumbled. “Money and package both gone!”

At once he began to wonder where he was. Some warehouse, probably. It would be well to get out of there as speedily as possible. If some watchman picked him up, it might mean a night in a police station.

Feeling his way about, he found a stairway. At the top of the stairs he came to a door with a spring lock on the inside. Turning the bolt, he let himself out—to find himself standing beneath a sky full of stars.

“Where am I?” he murmured once again.

From a distance he caught the rattle of a streetcar. He would soon know.

CHAPTER V

A SPY PLOT

A little more than an hour after his exit from the freight subway, Jimmie walked into Joe's place. Joe's was a place for eating sandwiches and doughnuts and drinking coffee. It was within a stone's throw of the largest police station in the city. Policemen, plain-clothes men, and reporters gathered there. Many a hard-boiled crook owes his present place behind the bars, where he rightfully belongs, to the consultations held over coffee and sinkers in Joe's place.

Jimmie hoped that Tom Howe had not been too badly handled and that he might find him here. He was not disappointed. With a bandage showing beneath his cap, Tom sat in a corner talking to the young reporter, John Nightingale, and a short, square-shouldered stranger sat beside Tom in the shadows.

"Jimmie Drury!" Tom Howe exclaimed as he entered the door. "Just the fellow we wanted most to see. But say!" His face took on mock gravity. "You're a fine pal! Lead a fellow into a trap and get him hit over the head with a blackjack! My pal!"

36

"Honest, Tom, I wouldn't have done it for the world. I——"

"Forget it!" Tom laughed. "It's all in the game. You were

trying to do your bit. So are we all. What are you having?"

"Hot chocolate, good and bitter, and strawberry pie."

"Coming up," said Tony, the waiter.

"Well, Jimmie," drawled Tom. "It looks as if we might be preparing to work on one more case. And then again, it may not be much of a case. Suppose you tell us about it."

"Important enough to get us bunged up at the very start," said Jimmie, sipping his hot chocolate. "Who knows how important it is? Anyway, I think I got his picture."

"You did? How?" Tom stared.

"Good stuff!" exclaimed John Nightingale, the reporter. "Get it developed right away. We'll run it with a story."

"That," said Jimmie, "depends on Tom. It may not be time for a story just yet. But I'll tell you about it."

37

Passing over his experience with Peter Grim in the camera shop, he told what happened in the auction house and the adventures that followed. When he drew a note-book from his pocket and read the address taken from the package within a package: "S. O. C. 606 Corbin Place. Room 767." Jimmie caught a low exclamation from the stranger in a dark corner near their table. He tried to distinguish the man's face in the darkness, but failed.

"It all sounds a little goofy," he said, after he had finished his story. "What does it all mean? What can it mean? A package

within a package, a set of plans or something. A fellow willing to risk his neck for it, and others prepared to bump you, Tom, over the head, to get it. What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you," said a voice that to Jimmie seemed familiar. "That package contained plans,—you are right. They're mighty important plans." The bulky figure moved out of the shadow. Jimmie saw the man's face. 38

"Peter Grim!" he exclaimed.

"None other," said Peter. "It seems we were destined to meet again. And, speaking for myself, I do not think it a bad piece of luck."

"Nor I," said Jimmie, though for the life of him he could not have told exactly why.

"It would seem," drawled John Nightingale, "that you two have met but not been introduced, Jimmie," his voice dropped to a whisper. "Peter Grim here is a Federal man."

"Oh-o—," Jimmie breathed. "So that's it!"

"Well,—I won't bite you," Peter Grim laughed. "But truly, Jimmie Drury!" His voice took on a sober note. "Some people seem to have all the luck, both good and bad. You had a very valuable set of plans in your hands. You bought them, took a bill of sale for them, and then they got away from you. Those, —" his voice dropped, "were plans for the McNair anti-aircraft gun.

"Of course," he added, "that doesn't mean a thing to

you. But to any man in the army or the Secret Service it means more than words can tell.

“To think!” His whisper was as solemn as a psalm. “To think you actually had them in your hands, and now they are gone!”

“I—I’m sorry,” was all Jimmie could say. And then, “Were they truly as important as all that?”

“Important!” Peter Grim sprang to his feet. “It’s a spy plot! That’s what it is! That anti-aircraft gun! Why, it doubles the protection of any big city. It will shoot twice as high as any gun we now have in the field, or so its inventor claims. And I’m beginning to believe it. We haven’t tested it out yet. It takes a special kind of steel. That’s part of the secret. They’re preparing to make the steel out at Gary right now, the steel and the gun as well. I’m going out there,——

“But if our enemies have the plans!” he exploded, taking short steps back and forth like a caged tiger, “Oh! I say! We can’t let them have those plans!”

“As I said before, I think I got that fellow’s picture,” Jimmie suggested. “Won’t that help?”

40

“Picture? Sure! Good boy!” Peter exclaimed. “We’ll go through all the rogues’ galleries.

“But then,” his voice dropped, “you don’t often find the faces of spies in such places.”

“It was a colored picture,” said Jimmie. “I have a sort of notion that you can do more with such a picture, color of

clothes, and everything.”

“People change their clothes,” suggested Tom.

“Not everything,” Jimmie insisted. “Did you ever notice, you’ll change your suit, shoes, even your overcoat, and you’ll wear the same scarf or tie. It’s these little things that have the most unusual color and give you away.”

“Might work.” Peter Grim seemed impressed. “Have that picture developed. Bring me a copy, a dozen copies. I’ll pay you well for them. I’ll give each of our men a copy. We’ll get that fellow and the plans.

“Trouble is,” he lowered his voice, “two can play with candid cameras. First thing those fellows will do will be to photograph those plans. Then, what do they care if we get them back? They’ll just enlarge their pictures, and there they are. We’ve got to act fast.”

41

“You’ll have the pictures at eight tomorrow morning,” said Jimmie, swallowing his last mouthful of hot chocolate. “But I’ve got to step on it in that case.”

“606 Corbin Place,” Peter Grim reminded him. “You have the address?”

“Yes, I’ve got it,” said Jimmie. “Now I’ll have to beat it. Good night.” He was gone.

“There are a few things I don’t understand,” said Tom Howe, after ordering a second cup of coffee. “You say these plans are tremendously important?”

“Absolutely.”

“Then why were they sent by express? Wasn’t that risky?”

“Very!” Peter Grim agreed. “But you see, we didn’t know they were important in the beginning. Every month in the year, the War Department, to which I am at present attached, receives letters from people assuring it that the writer has made a scientific discovery or invented something that will revolutionize war. And most of them are cranks.

42

“Ninety-nine out of a hundred. So we just tell them to send us the plans and we’ll look them over. That’s what we did with this man.

“He sent the plans. Some spy must have discovered their importance. They never arrived. When they failed to show up, we wrote him, and he brought us a second set of plans.”

“And when you discovered how important the plans were, somebody lost his job.”

“Not quite that bad,” Peter laughed quietly. “Anyone may make a mistake. But we did get mighty excited about it. Little good it did. Those plans had vanished. And now,—well, work it out for yourself.” He settled back in his chair.

“Seems clear enough,” Tom said, after a moment’s reflection. “They were in the process of stealing the plans when someone interrupted them. After hiding the plans in a box of paper flowers, they snatched the billing tag from the box of flowers and beat it.”

43

“Something like that,” Peter agreed.

“After that they watched the unclaimed auctions until the flower package came through,——”

“But why let Jimmie bid in the package?”

“This fellow may have been a little afraid of being caught. It would be easy to take a package from a boy, so why spend a lot of money? He had accomplices waiting for him. They spotted me and banged me over the head. Of course, they all got away. That was one I muffed. Oh, well,” Tom sighed as he rose, “you can’t catch ’em all. But we’ll get those birds yet!”

“If only we could get them before they make a copy of those plans!” Peter exclaimed. “Honest, Tom, you haven’t a notion of how very important it is!”

“We’ll get them!” Tom repeated. “You don’t know Jimmie and me!” For all that, he had his own grave misgivings.

CHAPTER VI

TRACKING

“That’s swell!” exclaimed Jimmie. It was the next morning. His pictures in color had been developed. “The one I wanted most came out swell. It’s this one.” He pointed. “Make twelve of them as soon as possible.”

He was looking at the candid camera shot taken in the freight tunnel. The picture of the man with the stolen package of paper flowers had come out better than he had dared hope. It was a profile. The man had a long nose and a short mustache. His face was thin. His features sharp.

“Spanish type,” Jimmie said to Peter Grim some three hours later. “I didn’t think——”

“Didn’t think we were at war with Spain!” laughed Peter. “We’re not,—nor with any other nation. They’re spying on us all the same, as they never did before. It’s up to us to be especially alert, every man of us. Federal men and police can’t do all the work. Others must help, men and boys.”

45

“That’s where I come in!” said Jimmie.

“Right. But if you think this fellow is spying for Spain you’re

probably wrong. Spies work for the nation that offers them the most money.

“But let’s get down to business!” Peter’s voice changed. “Let’s have a look at that candid camera shot under this reading glass.

“Ah!” he breathed. “That brings it out. This fellow goes in for red. Wearing a red plaid scarf and a dark red necktie. Say! This color-photo business is the berries!”

“A bright blue topcoat,” Jimmie added. “I’d know that combination anywhere.”

“If you got a look at it,” Peter added dryly. “Which you probably won’t.”

“You never can tell,” Jimmie insisted. “Everybody comes down to the Loop sooner or later. I’m going to cruise the Loop this livelong day. And I’ll have an eye out for that plaid scarf. It’s an unusual pattern. Looks foreign. I doubt if there’s another like it in the city.”

46

Jimmie did cruise the Loop for hours. He pounded the pavement, looking at faces and scarfs, but all to no purpose.

At last, weary of tramping, he allowed his feet to take him to a place he had for hours been longing to see again, the tenth floor camera shop.

It was with a mingled feeling of interest, curiosity and fear that he once again turned the knob of that door. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw that the dark-eyed girl was there

alone. At least he would not again be barked at. He did want to open that cabinet door and have one more look at that curious mechanism. Could one truly talk down a beam of light, or had Peter Grim been yarning? He wanted to believe Peter, and yet the thing seemed almost too fantastic to be true.

“That candid camera you sold to the rich old gent for his grandson,” he said to the girl, “do you have another like it?”

“No, I’m sorry.” Her large dark eyes were upon him. There seemed to be a question lurking in their depths.

47

“Those cameras are quite rare. That was the only one we had in stock.”

“Oh, well,” Jimmie drew in a breath, “it doesn’t matter, really. It’s too expensive for my blood anyway.”

At the time, he was studying that girl. He’d like to know her. Why? He could not tell. He didn’t go in for girls, at least, not much. There had been Jane Hunter in the Golf Club mystery, and Mary Dare in the Bubble Man affair. Mary was married now. But this girl. What was her name? What,——

Just then a large man, wearing a full beard, burst into the room. Jimmie thought he detected a startled look on the girl’s face. It was gone in an instant.

“Give me my camera,” the man exclaimed. He said it just the way an outlaw in a western movie says:

“Give me my gun!”

“Give me my camera,” he repeated as the girl did not move.

“You know!” he exploded. “The little one! I am in a great rush!”

The girl did not hurry. Turning slowly she disappeared into a cabinet. Jimmie wondered in a foolish way whether she would vanish altogether.

48

She did not vanish. Instead, she reappeared to give Jimmie another shock,—she carried in her hand an exact duplicate of the camera she had sold to the gray-haired man on the previous day.

“This place must hide all the unusual cameras in the world,” the boy thought to himself.

Seizing the camera, the big man bolted from the room.

Filled with an unexplainable desire to follow that big man, Jimmie slipped out after him. Perhaps he wished to see a picture taken by this unusual camera. Who knows? One fact remains. He did follow him down the elevator and out of the building, onto the street, and from there, due south. And all the time he was careful not to let the man know he was being followed.

As the big bearded one rolled along down the avenue, with Jimmie a hundred feet to the rear, he was suddenly halted by a very small man in a round-topped stiff hat.

49

Jimmie stared. He thought the big man would run the little fellow down. Instead, he swung to the right, roared a few unintelligible words, which Jimmie guessed were in some foreign tongue, then went rolling along.

For a space of seconds the little man, an Oriental, Jimmie guessed, stood staring after him, then with the agility of a scared rabbit, lost himself in the traffic.

Jimmie kept his eye on the main point of interest—the big man.

Arrived at a less important part of the city where the buildings were old and dirty, the big man darted through a doorway. Sprinting after him, Jimmie managed to crowd into the same elevator. He was a little disturbed. Was the big man watching him? Perhaps not. It seemed probable that even in the camera shop he had not seen him. He was intent on one thing—his camera.

At the eighth floor the big man got off. Jimmie rode to the ninth then dashed down the stairs to the eighth.

50

He arrived just in time to see the big man rap three times on a door. Before the door opened he managed to slip into a dark corner that gave him a view of the room. The door was not opened far.

“Here it iss!” said the big man. His hand went forward. The candid camera disappeared. The door closed. It had all happened in ten seconds. But in those ten seconds Jimmie had seen that which made his heart leap,—a blueprint thumbtacked to the wall of that room.

“If it is!” he whispered. “If it only is!”

51

CHAPTER VII

CANDID CAMERAS FOR TWO

The room door had closed without Jimmie getting a glimpse of the man inside. The large bearded man hurried away to the elevator and went down.

Left alone in the dingy hallway, Jimmie tiptoed to the closed door to stand there listening. Suddenly, he barely suppressed an exclamation, for through the thin shade that covered the glass inside, there came a dazzling flash of light.

“Flash bulb,” he whispered, after the first surprised shock had passed. He knew what that meant. Someone inside was taking flash-bulb pictures. Could it be that by mere chance he had stumbled upon the very man who could, unwittingly, lead him to the stolen plans for that anti-aircraft gun?

This question did not long remain unanswered. By careful search the boy discovered a narrow crack along the side of the shade that gave him a limited view of the room. He could not see the man. He could see a section of the wall upon which three blueprints had been fastened. And he could see a corner where a long box leaned against the wall.

52

“My unclaimed express package,” he whispered. “What luck! This is the place!”

The next instant he was down the hall ringing impatiently for the elevator.

“Where’s the fire?” the elevator man grumbled as Jimmie tumbled into his car.

“No—nowhere,” Jimmie stammered. “I—I’m sorry. Where’s the nearest telephone?”

“Cigar stand, first floor.”

Jimmie fairly fell out of the car to race to the cigar stand and exclaim, “Where’s the phone?”

The girl at the stand poked a thumb at the booth. Jimmie raced toward it.

“You’ll have to have a slug.”

“Oh, yes,”—Jimmie raced back.

He was in the booth with slug lifted toward the slot when to his consternation he realized that he did not have Peter Grim’s phone number.

53

No matter. He’d call Tom Howe. Tom Howe it was, but with little better luck. Tom was out on a case, should be back any moment. He left the street number and room number. “Tell him to come right up,” he said to the desk sergeant, before he banged down the receiver.

Back to the elevator, up to the eighth floor, a silent dash to that door, one more silent wait, but no sound, no light.

“The fellow may be gone,” he thought.

By studying the rest of the building he discovered that this room had a window opening onto a fire escape.

“I’ll take a chance,—have a look,” he thought.

Slipping out of a hall window, he crept along the fire escape. One corner of the faded window shade was curled up. One look inside and he knew that the man was gone.

“Gone with the camera and the flash pictures that tell him all he wants to know,” he groaned. The blueprints were still on the wall. He must at least have these. There was a chance that the man had run out of flash bulbs and had gone for more. In that case his record of the numerous blueprints would be incomplete.

54

“I’ve got to get ’em,” Jimmie thought, tugging at the window.

“But what if he comes back too soon?” He shuddered at the thought, but kept on trying.

By shaking the second window he was able at last to loosen the latch, and in he went.

Never had he worked as fast as now. Tearing the blueprints from the wall, he threw them in a heap. When they were all down, he slid them about, stood them on end, knocked them on the floor to straighten them, then made them into a compact roll.

He was turning toward the window when he heard a click

behind him. He whirled about to find himself facing the tall Spaniard.

“So!” said the man, reaching for his belt.

Jimmie shot forward to send the man crashing to the floor. A long knife clattered across the room.

55

The battle that followed was short and fierce. Now, Jimmie was on the man’s chest, crushing out his wind. The next, the man had a grip round Jimmie’s neck that might have brought an end to him had he not swung a knee into the pit of the man’s stomach.

While the fellow gasped for breath, Jimmie tore himself free, grabbed the bundle, the knife, and Glory be! one more thing, —the camera that had fallen from the man’s pocket. Then he dashed away.

Disregarding the elevator, he dashed down the stairs. One flight, two, three, five, six. He was before a door marked “Men.”

Suddenly realizing how he must look, he plunged through that door. The place was empty.

After straightening his tie, dusting off his clothes and washing his face, he hid the knife and camera beneath his coat, tucked the roll under his arm, then walked nonchalantly out of the room and down the remaining flight of stairs.

56

As he reached the street door, imagining that all sorts of

people were staring at him, he nearly ran into a man, took one good look at him, then exclaimed:

“Tom! Tom Howe! Boy! Oh! Boy! Am I glad to see you!”

CHAPTER VIII

PETER GRIM'S HIDE-OUT

“I got your message and came right over,” Tom said. “What’s up?”

“I—I got ’em back,” Jimmie stammered. He held up the roll of blueprints. “And—and the candid camera. But he—he’s up there. Do—do you think we should go after him?”

“Candid camera?” Tom stared. “Go after whom?”

Catching his breath and steadying his nerves as best he could, Jimmie told his story.

“Now,” he breathed at last, “shall we go after him?”

“You didn’t injure him seriously?”

“Only knocked the wind out of him.”

“Then he’s gone long ago. You’ve got the goods on him, blueprints, camera,—everything. He’d scam, and how! Come on. We’ll get those blueprints to Peter Grim right now. Jimmie, my boy, it looks as if you had made a fine haul and done your daily patriotic deed in the grand manner.”

“I hope so,” Jimmie replied modestly. “It began to look as if I had handled the whole affair like a dumb cluck, getting you knocked over the head, losing the blueprints, and all that.” They were now walking rapidly toward Peter Grim’s office.

“Just a bad break,” said Tom. “You have to count on about so many every so often. It helps to keep you humble. ‘Blessed are the meek,’ you know. But you got the good breaks today. And how!”

“Here we are.” Tom led the way into a modern skyscraper, and they went up.

“Well,” Jimmie sighed, as he dropped the roll of blueprints on Peter Grim’s mahogany desk. “There they are!”

“What! Those blueprints?” Peter exclaimed, springing to his feet. “Say! That’s doing things! But then,” his voice fell, “they’ve had ’em several hours. Probably took pictures of them, small ones, with a candid camera.”

“They did,” Jimmie grinned. “And here’s the camera!” He pulled the unusual little camera from his pocket. “If you don’t believe it, have the film developed.”

59

“Say!” Peter exclaimed. “What are you? A magician?”

“Nothing of the sort. This is my lucky day, that’s all,” Jimmie grinned,—a broad, happy grin.

“Sit down and tell me about it,” said Peter. “No, wait. I want Colonel Farwell to hear it.” He vanished.

While Jimmie waited he looked about the room. “Queer sort of place,” he said to Tom. “No windows, and the walls are soundproof, like a broadcasting studio.”

“That’s right,” Tom agreed. “This entire floor has been fitted up for Federal men. They work at all sorts of things. Some are draftsmen drawing plans for guns, airplanes, fortifications,—all sorts of things. Some are chemists testing chemicals, poison gases and explosives. Some are mechanics making models of machines of destruction, and quite a number, like Peter Grim, are just plain Secret Agents, watching out for spies, those international criminals who steal plans if they can, take candid camera shots of fortifications and airplanes,—anything that will give away our secrets.”

Jimmie was thrilled to the tips of his toes at being in the secret hide-out of a hundred Federal men. “But then,” he thought, “it’s a case of being a hero for a day. I happened onto something. I had a streak of luck and seem to have done my country a good turn. It’ll all be over tomorrow.” Would it? 60

Just then Peter Grim returned, bringing with him a tall, broad-shouldered man with thin gray hair but with the buoyant step of youth.

“This is Colonel Farwell, Jimmie,” said Peter. “Tom, you’ve met the Colonel before. He’s the hero of a dozen wars, including the World War.”

“Aw now!” the Colonel smiled in an embarrassed manner. “Just an old war horse, that’s all.

“But say!” he exclaimed. “I’d like to have you all over at the

Wanderers' Club for lunch. There's a little private cubby-hole over there where we can eat and talk. We—we'll have regular old army stew!" he laughed.

"All right with me," said Peter. It was more than right with all of them, so off they went.

61

The Club was only a short distance from Peter's office. They soon reached it. It bore little resemblance to Joe's place, this ancient Club. The room they entered was paneled with wood of a certain brownish color, suggesting that it might have been smoked by a thousand campfires. And well it might have been, for the men who fondly called it "Our Club" had wandered the seven seas, and lighted fires on every shore.

Jimmie told his story over the coffee cups.

"Ha! Yes!" the aged Colonel exclaimed more than once.

"That reminds me—but no! I must not get started. You young gentlemen must get back to work."

"That we must," said Peter Grim, as the Colonel repeated these remarks at the end of Jimmie's story. "Jimmie here has uncovered a nest of hornets. We must soak a rag in oil and smoke them out."

"That expresses it," the Colonel exploded. "Hornets, yellow jackets, spies—all the same pests—you have to go after them."

62

"Jimmie, my boy!" He gripped the boy's hand until it hurt. "You've done a brave bit of service for your country. This very city, our city, Chicago, will have cause to bless you."

“Chicago?” Jimmie exclaimed. “Chicago won’t be attacked!”

“Won’t it!” The Colonel seemed about to leap into the air. “If there is a war Chicago will be the first major city to suffer! Look at your map. Where will the enemy come from? Across the Atlantic, ten thousand bombing planes? Impossible. Too far. From Canada? Canada is our friend,—always will be. We think alike, believe the same things, speak the same language.

“But Mexico!” The Colonel swung his arms wide.

63

“There’s the spot. The enemy can take over that country before we know it. Then where will they come? Right up the level Mississippi valley. Ten thousand airplanes, ten thousand trucks loaded with men, tanks, cannon! I can hear them now!” Pausing, the old man leaned an arm on the table and rested there in an attitude of attention. Jimmie had not the slightest doubt but that he was hearing now, as he had heard it a thousand times before, the rumble of heavy artillery over hard roads, and the shouts of men as they lumbered on through the night.

How he wished he might linger here the whole afternoon through and listen to the old man’s mellow voice as he told strange, fantastic tales of the past.

“Some time I will,” he assured himself. “But not today.”

64

CHAPTER IX

JIMMIE IS IN IT NOW—HE CAN'T TURN BACK

“Seems to me,” said Jimmie—there was a note of regret in his voice—“that I’ve happened on something interesting and perhaps a little dangerous, and that now it’s all over.”

“All over?” Peter Grim fixed his bright eyes upon him. “All over! It’s only just begun. Here you’ve uncovered a nest of spies. We’ve suspected they were here. But you’ve brought them out into the open. You’re the only one who has seen any of them. And you’ve had a good look at,——”

“Anyway, three,” Jimmie said, after a second’s thought. “There’s the olive-faced fellow from somewhere in southern Europe, the one who bid against me at the auction.”

“And set his gang on you,” said Tom.

“Yes, and there’s that slim Spaniard,” said Jimmie. “I’ve sure seen plenty of him!” He stroked a sore spot on his chin. “And there’s the big fellow who got the camera from that shop. I wonder,”—he stared at the wall. “What about that camera shop?”

“Did the big man seem to belong there?” Peter demanded sharply.

“No,—no, he really didn’t. Just asked for his camera, and went out.”

“Probably left it there for repairs or reloading. You might take another look or two at the place.”

“That won’t be too bad!” Jimmie grinned. “That girl up there is—well—er—sort of interesting.”

“When does your vacation start?” Peter demanded suddenly.

“It’s done started,” Jimmie drawled. “Today. It lasts two weeks.”

“Two weeks! Swell!” Peter enthused. “We’ll have you made into a regular Federal Agent by then.

“You see,” he leaned forward,—“this anti-aircraft gun promises to be the real thing. It’s the kind of steel that’s to be used in its barrel. I suppose you think these heavy barrels are cast. They’re not. You’ll be amazed. I’ll take you out to Gary. They’ll be pouring steel for that gun soon—pouring and rolling it. There’s a place for you! You’ll be thrilled. I want you out there. We’ve got to keep those spies out of it. They must not learn a thing. It’s for your country, Jimmie.”

66

“Oh, you don’t need to give me any pep talk,” Jimmie grinned good-naturedly. “I’m with you to the last ditch! Ask Tom if I won’t stick if we get into something real.”

“Sure will,” Tom agreed.

“Get into it!” Peter exploded. “You *are* in it right now. You’ve seen three dangerous men. You’ve got evidence against one or two of them that will send them to prison. Tomorrow I want you to do the Loop as you did it today. Perhaps luck will be with you again. But watch your step. Spies are the most dangerous people in the world. I’ve known two of them to pitch a guard who caught them shooting pictures, over a rocky cliff to his death, and that in peace time. The world is beginning to treat them rough, too, just as they deserve. Only last week in France, a spy was sent to the firing squad. Mighty right, too. But son! Watch your step. Let’s see the knife you took from that fellow today.”

“Here it is.” Jimmie drew a shining blade from his belt.

“Man, Oh Man!” Peter felt its keen double edge. “That’s something! Come to my office first thing tomorrow. I’ll give you a neat little automatic no bigger than a pocketknife but with power enough to blow the heads off a dozen spies. Don’t hesitate to use it. You have to get spies before they get you.”

“I—I’ll do my best.” Jimmie wet his dry lips. Little wonder that he thought all at once of his cozy room at home, his seat beside the fireplace, his classroom at school, and all the rest.

“But then,” he thought, “if these spies had their way there’d be no home and no school. I’ve gotten into something. I’m on the spot. I’ve got to stick. And I shall.

“I’ll be in your office first thing tomorrow,” he said quietly.

“We’ll get over here quite often,” Peter said as he led the way

out of the room. "It's quite a place."

"Yes! Yes! Indeed you must!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Any time,—just any time at all."

"Have a look in here, son," he said to Jimmie.

They stepped into the large lounging room of the Wanderers' Club. At this time of day there were few people about. One old man slept in a large chair. In the corner two men talked business while three others sat looking out of the window at the lake off in the distance.

It was not the people in the place but the walls that caught the boy's eyes. They were completely covered with all manner of trophies loaned or donated by the members. Here were tattered flags from three wars, there a collection of ancient firearms, here a mounted walrus head, there elephant's tusks, and there a large assortment of pirates' cutlasses.

"What a spot!" Jimmie exclaimed. "I'd like to spend days here listening to the stories your members must be able to tell."

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"You may," the Colonel exclaimed. "Indeed you shall."

"By the time you are through spy hunting," Tom chuckled, "you'll be ready to contribute a collection yourself. Just think! A Spanish blade and a camera the first day!"

"Oh!" Jimmie exclaimed. "What shall I do with the camera?"

"Give it to me for the present," said Peter Grim. "I'll have one

of our men remove the film and develop it. That will be first class evidence. Just you catch the man and we'll do the rest."

"But, Peter!" Jimmie protested. "That's really a keen camera, a very unusual one, too. There're not more than a dozen of them anywhere. It's something about the patents."

"That's swell." Peter grinned. "We'll impound it as Exhibit 'A' in our case against this hatchet-faced Spaniard. Then when the case is over, I shall conduct an auction, and knock it down to you for a dollar. What do you say?"

"I say O.K. if you can do it on the square."

70

"At least," said Peter, "we can give it to you as a reward to a loyal citizen who saw his duty and did it."

"That—Oh, that," said Jimmie, "will be swell!"

After accompanying Peter to his office and seeing the important film removed, Jimmie remained to examine the camera. It was, he decided after a long study, just about the most perfect thing he had ever seen. It was fast to one-thousandth of a second. Must be very accurate, too. A mechanism turned the film. Once you had found your focus, you could shoot it like a gun,—click—click—click—twenty pictures in two seconds.

"Boy! Oh Boy!" he whispered. "I'll earn that camera or know the reason why."

"Remember," Peter Grim said to him as they parted, "you've done a wonderful piece of work thus far, but your task is only

begun. I'll take you out to Gary the first of next week. You'll see the pouring of steel for the new gun. That will be a rare occasion. There'll be no spectators except you and me. I'll have to pull some wires to get you in, but we'll make it."

"Thanks a lot," said Jimmie. "I'll be right there, Johnny on the spot."

71

To himself, as he took the elevator, he said, "Jimmie, old boy, watch your step! You're having a lot too much luck. You'll slip before long, and down you'll go. Life is always that way." Was he wrong? Look back on your own life and see how many things have worked out. One day you are up,—away up high—a ball game won, a speech made just right, a triumph in some contest, and then, a huge blunder on your part, and down you go. Oh, well, life is a ridgy affair. You go up one ridge and down another. The only thing that matters is that after each period of triumph and disaster you find yourself on a ridge a little higher than the last. Life's path runs uphill all the way, at least, if it's to be a successful life, it does.

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CHAPTER X

SQUIRRELHEAD'S MOTOR-STOPPER

It was dark when Jimmie reached his home that night. He was just turning up the walk to his door when an old truck rattled up and stopped.

A tall, angular youth climbed out. "Howdy," he drawled. "Can you all tell me where there's a hotel in this here town?"

"There isn't any," said Jimmie. "You see, we're too close to the big city for people to stop here. They drive right on in."

"Chicago," said the other boy who could not have been many years Jimmie's senior. "Hit's a heap sight bigger'n I reckoned hit were. People're powerful unfriendly, too. Don't never say 'howdy' when you meet 'em on the street."

"Too busy," said Jimmie. "Too many of them."

"I reckon so," said the stranger.

"What you got in the truck," Jimmie asked.

73

"Name hit and you can have hit," the stranger chuckled. "I calls hit a motor-stopper."

“Motor-stopper? What do you want to stop a motor for?”

“That’s hit,” the stranger laughed. “Just no reason at all, I reckon. The thing don’t make sense. That’s what I come up here for to find out about.

“You see,” he paused,—“What name do you call yourself by?”

“Jimmie Drury.”

“Wall, my name’s Caps,—Joe Garfield Caps. Down on Poundin’ Mill Creek whar I come from they call me ‘Squirrelhead.’”

“Squirrelhead!” Jimmie laughed in spite of himself. “That’s a queer name.”

“I reckon.”

“Tell me about this motor-stopper,” said Jimmie.

“Well, sir, hit’ll stop any motor, even if’n hits a quarter mile away, mebby more.”

“You don’t expect me to believe that, do you?” said Jimmie.

“Reckon not.”

For a while after that there was silence. It was a chilly night. Even in his overcoat, Jimmie was cold. The mountain boy was thinly clad. Jimmie thought of this. Then he remembered how Peter Grim had come so near missing out by doubting

that a dreamy stranger had anything in the way of a real invention.

“A motor-stopper,” he thought. He was about to speak when Joe Caps drawled:

“Hit were this a’away. Thar’s a right smart static on our radios at Poundin’ Mill Creek, ’count of motors goin’ in the coal diggins. So I starts experimentin’ with a lot’a old motors an’ such to see if’n mebbly I could stop it.”

“Did you?” Jimmie asked.

“I reckon.”

“What happened?”

“Reckon you’ll think I’m yarnin’, but sure’s Poundin’ Mill Creek runs downhill when that ’ar static stopped, every motor in Poundin’ Mill mines stopped. Refrigerator in the Company store stopped, every horn-swaggled one of ’em motors stopped.”

“Did they know what did it?”

75

“You better know they didn’t! They’d a driv me outa town. I jest poked that there contraption into that thar truck an’ driv plum up here.

“But then,” Squirrelhead’s voice dropped, “hit might not do hit agin. You can’t most ever tell.”

“Probably never did it in the first place,” Jimmie thought.

“But he’s right, you never can tell.”

“We’ll try it some time,” he said.

“What? Oh! Sure! That’s jest the thing we’ll do. I reckon I’m the most motor-stoppin’ est feller you most ever seed.”

Squirrelhead, Joe Caps, laughed a hoarse laugh, in which Jimmie joined heartily.

The result of this whole affair was that Jimmie invited the stranger to drive his truck in the garage and stay all night. In the morning, having found the boy entertaining and interesting beyond all expectations, he took him to the city with him for a look around. And so for the time being, the mysterious motor-stopper was forgotten. But not for long.

Just as Jimmie and Joe were preparing to leave for the city, a trim roadster drove up and out jumped Jane Hunter.

76

Jane and her father were society people. You will remember them from our last Jimmie Drury book. They were the frankest, friendliest people in the world. Jimmie had done them a favor or two for which they were deeply grateful.

“Oh, Jimmie!” Jane exclaimed. “I’m glad I caught you.” Here she held up a black case of unusual shape. “This is some sort of camera that was part of my uncle’s estate. Father had done nothing with it, and I am curious to know what it’s like. It’s some foreign make. Would you mind taking it to some camera shop? You know them so well—have them tell you whether it’s any good or not.”

“Sure I’ll do that,” exclaimed Jimmie, glad enough to have an excuse for one more visit to that unusual shop he had seen the day before. “I’ll let you know what they say.”

A moment later he and Joe Caps were marching down the street. Joe’s clothes were thin and baggy, his hair a tumbled mass, and yet there was a certain dignity about him that commanded respect. People turned to look at him after he had passed. 77

“Sort of like young Abe Lincoln,” Jimmie told himself.

Arrived at the city, they went directly to the tenth floor camera shop. Jimmie had little faith in a girl’s opinion regarding an unusual camera. He hoped he might find some man in the shop. In this he was not disappointed. True, the girl was there, but with her, putting cameras in place, was that same large man who had barked at him for opening the door. He wondered in an amused sort of way whether the man would recall his face and bark at him again. Oh, well, he should worry! He had broken no laws, only opened a door. He still wanted to know for sure whether the apparatus behind that door was for talking down a beam of light, and if it were, why it was here at all.

But now the man was speaking to him.

“Well!” he said in a slow, slightly foreign voice, “What iss it?”

“Here is a camera,” said Jimmie. “A movie camera. I’ve never seen one like it before. Can you tell me about it?” 78

“So,” the man breathed heavily. “We shall see.”

As he lifted off the case, Jimmie saw his eyes widen. A second later they were narrower than before.

“This is a foreign make. You would scarcely have use for it. It is a very highly specialized camera.” The man made a gesture. “Perhaps you would like to sell it. I will give you a hundred dollars.”

“No, I——”

“Two hundred, then.”

The girl stood behind the man. Her big black eyes were looking squarely into Jimmie’s own. Was she trying to tell him something with those eyes? He could not be sure.

“No, I——” he began again.

“Three hundred, or perhaps as much as four hundred,” the big man persisted.

“It doesn’t belong to me,” Jimmie managed to break in. “I doubt if it is even for sale.”

“Well then,” the man’s face fell, “all I can tell you is it is a very special camera. You would not understand more. But if you——”

79

Just then something happened that gave Jimmie a start. Forgotten, Joe Caps had wandered about the shop looking at things. Since in the modest stores of his native mountains one

is free to look at everything, he had opened the door to that broad cabinet as Jimmie had done, when as before, the big man suddenly let out a roar:

“No! No! It iss Verboten!”

The shock was so sudden that Joe swung half about and in an instant his right hand shot toward his left armpit. Then, like some mechanical man with the power shut off, he stood there motionless.

All this lasted but a split second.

After that Joe’s arm dropped. The girl quietly closed the cabinet door, and all was as it had been—but not quite.

“Well—ah,” Jimmie stammered, “I—I am much obliged. I—guess we’ll be going.”

“Stop!” said the big man. “Five hundred! Tell your friend five hundred for that old camera. It is too much. But it is a very fine specimen, as you may say.”

“I’ll tell her,” Jimmie said, starting for the door. The girl’s eyes were still upon him. She seemed to be saying something with those eyes, but he could not read their meaning.

80

“Know what was in that cupboard?” Joe asked, once they were outside.

“No, what?”

“A riggin’ for talking down a beam of light.”

“A beam of light!” Jimmie started. So Joe knew about this too. This time he had caught a glimpse of something bright and shiny, like a very large reflector. “Talk down a beam of light,” he thought. Then, “I’ll see—I’ll see how much he can tell me about it.” To Joe he said,—“What do you mean, ‘talking down a beam of light’?”

“Sure, talkin’ down a beam of light,” Joe insisted. “Queerest thing I most ever seed. Put your hat in front of the light and you couldn’t hear nary a word. Take away the hat, and there they be, talkin’ big as life an’ twice as natural. And them all of thirty miles away. Sort of spooky, hit sure was.”

Jimmie was more interested in Jane Hunter’s unusual camera than he was in beams of light just then. Ten minutes more and they were in Peter Grim’s office.

81

“What did he offer you?” Peter exploded once he had a good look at that movie camera.

“Five hundred,” Jimmie grinned.

“He’s a robber. A bloody robber,” Peter burst out.

“Remember that long range gun that threw shells into Paris from behind the German lines, thirty or forty miles?”

“I’ve heard of it.”

“This is the camera that tested out the speed of the shells that came from that gun, or one just like it.

“Know what?” Unconsciously Peter took a dramatic pose. “This camera will take from twelve hundred to fifteen hundred pictures a second!”

“A second?”

“Exactly! When a shell is fired from a gun, sometimes part of the smoke comes out before the shell does. This camera is fast enough to show that—count the pictures taken before the shell got out of range of the camera and you know how fast the projectile is traveling. That’s how good it is.”

“And this camera,” he finished with a gesture, “is worth not five hundred dollars, but five thousand dollars. You couldn’t buy its equal today for twice that amount. You shouldn’t be carrying it about. It’s not safe.”

82

“Safe enough,” Joe Caps grinned, throwing back his coat and revealing a long-barreled blue revolver hanging in a holster under his left arm. “Let ’em come!” he grinned. “I’m the all-firedest pistol shootinest feller you most ever seed.”

“You’ll get yourself arrested, carrying that thing around,” Peter said soberly.

To Jimmie he said,—“How about letting me keep this camera for a while? We’ve a vault here like one in a bank. It will be safe, and—” he added slowly, “we may find a use for it. Who can tell?”

“O.K. by me,” said Jimmie. “I’ll speak to Jane Hunter about it. I’m sure she won’t mind. She—she’s a little bit of all right.”

CHAPTER XI

PETER GRIM'S SHOOTING GALLERY

“Look,” said Peter Grim, rising from his desk. “You boys come with me. I want to show you something.” He led them down a hallway, a turn to the right, a second turn to the left, then applied a key to a door.

The room they entered was strange. It was long and narrow. Its walls were completely dark. In silence they entered this long narrow room. The door closed without a sound.

“How quiet,” Jimmie whispered. His whisper could easily be heard above the stillness. The noise and rattle of the city were completely shut out.

Before them was a narrow counter, back of them three chairs. There was no other furniture. Peter touched a button and the wall at the far end began moving upward, displaying three black and white targets.

“Aha!” Joe Caps breathed.

Peter touched a second button and the wall behind them began to roll up, disclosing a shallow cabinet in which all manner of firearms were neatly arranged, row on row.

“Oh! Ah!” Joe’s eyes shone.

“We must keep in practice,” said Peter Grim, in a voice that gave point to his last name. “Being a Federal man is no soft snap. There’s no chance to dodge duty, even if one were inclined to do so. Our enemies are experts in their field. Unless I miss my guess, there are just such rooms as this in other parts of our city, equipped by our enemies, for their own use.

“Let’s see if you can really shoot.” He nodded to the gangling Kentucky youth.

Joe made no reply. Instead, he calmly drew the long blue pistol from its holster, pulled his long face into one straight line, squinted down the barrel, and fired,—not once, but five times,—Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

When Jimmie got his eyes in proper focus he stared. At the very center of the middle target was a black smear the size of a quarter, that was all.

“Old Kentucky!” exclaimed Peter, gripping the boy’s hand. “My father was a captain in the American Expeditionary Force in France. He had three Kentucky mountain boys like you in his company. Two of them came back. One of them must have been your father.”

85

“Could have been at that,” the mountain boy drawled.

“Jimmie,” said Peter, “tomorrow’s Christmas.”

“That’s right, it is!” Jimmie exclaimed. “I nearly forgot. I’ve

got to get a present for my mother.”

“Good boy!” said Peter. “Never forget that mother of yours. A fellow’s mother deserves more than he will ever know.”

“But, Jimmie,” his voice changed,—“here’s a present for you, from the S.O.S., meaning Secret Ordnance Service.” He took down a small, flat little instrument of death, an automatic pistol. It was with the greatest difficulty that the boy kept from cringing. He had never been really afraid of anything, but he did not love firearms.

“Man! That’s something!” Joe exclaimed. There was a look akin to envy on his thin face.

86

“Try it,” Peter invited. “It works like this.” He gave Jimmie a few simple instructions.

“Oh, I don’t know.” Jimmie hesitated. “Ole, the Swede, had a twenty-two once. He was a caddy out at the golf club. We used to practice by shooting gophers. Gophers are a nuisance. They dig things up, but,——”

“Go ahead,” Peter encouraged. “Remember this is no exhibition. There are never any contests in this room. It is a place of business. We are in deadly earnest. We have to be. So will you. Come often and practice. Ammunition is free. Go ahead.”

Jimmie took careful aim, and fired.

“Well,” he sighed, “I hit the target.”

“Sure you did,” Peter encouraged. “Try it again.”

Jimmie’s five shots were all on the target, but he had made the target look like a polka dot dress.

“You’ll do,” said Peter. “And you’ll improve with practice. This gun is only for your protection. You must realize that this is a very special occasion and for a limited time only. Here is your permit.” He handed Jimmie a slip of paper. “I want you to know,” he went on, soberly, “that we have done this only after consulting your friend, Tom Howe, a detective, whose word is above suspicion. He assured me that you are not reckless, that you will not show your gun to other boys, and will only use it as a last resort.”

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“You are right. I won’t,” said Jimmie in a voice that carried conviction. “And as soon as this business is over, I’ll trade it back to you for a good pocketknife.”

“It’s a bargain,” said Peter. “But I *do* want you to practice and take the whole thing seriously for the time being. The experiences you are about to go through may prove of great service to you in the future. We are living in dangerous times. Who can say how soon the drone of war planes will be heard over Chicago? At such times our nation will need trained men and you, we shall hope, will be one of these.

“Listen, son!” Peter fixed his eyes on Jimmie. “I can tell by the look on your face that you’re thinking ‘Soon’s I get out of here I’ll give this gun to someone to keep.’ Don’t do it. If I didn’t think you’d need it I wouldn’t give it to you.

88

“You’re a soldier, son, dropped into our peacetime army. A

soldier carries a weapon. He must. If this peacetime army does its work well, there will be no war. We are a peace-loving nation. We will never lead in any war. We'll fight when we're attacked. And we'll never be attacked until an army of alien spies has undermined the loyalty of our people. And that, by the Grace of God, shall never be!"

As Jimmie walked out of the building a few moments later to enter the merry throngs of late Christmas shoppers he felt as if he had come from another world, a world of cold, grim realities and probable death.

A moment more and he had shaken himself free from these dark forebodings. He had become just one more shopper, looking for his mother's Christmas present.

He and Joe dropped into a place on the corner for a hot chocolate malted. Having called someone on the phone, Joe returned all smiles, to announce that he had located good Old Bud Turner from down on Poundin' Mill Creek, who lived up here now, and that he had been invited out there to spend Christmas.

89

"There's my truck," he apologized. "I'm right down ashamed to have it in you all's garage."

"Oh! That's O.K.," Jimmie hastened to assure him. "We don't need the space. And," he added with a laugh, "I won't let the motor-stopper stop anything."

"I reckon you all don't believe it could," said Joe. "Well now, you just wait a spell. I'll prove hit to you all. It's mighty nigh supernatural the way that thar thing behaves."

“All right,” Jimmie agreed. “I’ll be seeing you. So long.”

“Goodbye and good luck.” The strange boy was gone.

“Good luck,” Jimmie murmured thoughtfully. Had he but known it, he was going to need luck, and plenty of it.

Still thinking of his mother’s present he wandered into the book section of a large department store.

90

“Hello there, Jimmie Drury!” a girl’s voice greeted him.

“Why, hello, Peggy Storm!” he exclaimed. “I’d forgotten you worked here.” Peggy lived two doors from Jimmie’s home. She had graduated from high school in June.

“Sure I do, Jimmie. Been here six months. What are you doing?”

“Sh!” Jimmie lowered his voice. “Hunting spies.”

“Spies on Christmas Eve?” she whispered in surprise.

“There are always spies. If Christmas meant anything to them they wouldn’t be spies. But how have things been, Peggy?”

“Oh! Grand!” The girl’s face beamed. “The Christmas rush has been glorious. Everyone is so jolly—and happy—and kind, too. If you make a mistake they don’t snap your head off. Look at everybody now. See the smiles on their faces? It’s Christmas Eve. What a gorgeous thing it is! Listen!”

Jimmie did listen. A tall, pleasant-faced man was

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shaking hands with a smiling young lady and saying:

“Goodbye, Miss Cody. And a very merry Christmas to you. You’ve done a fine job. I hope we can have you with us next year.”

“Thanks, and a merry Christmas to you,” was the happy response.

“She’s got two children,” Peggy whispered. “Been here just for the rush, one month. First work she’s had for a long time. But she,” Peggy faltered,—“she’s happy. It’s Christmas, Jimmie, Christmas!”

“Peggy,” said Jimmie, feeling that things were getting a bit too sentimental, “I’ve got to get a present for my mother.”

“A book? Why not!”

“Guess that would be O.K.,” said Jimmie. “Which one?”

“Here’s one.” Peggy held up a book. “‘Midsummer’s Dream.’ I just know your mother would love it. Of course,” she laughed, “there are no spies in it!”

“I hope not.” Jimmie shuddered, he knew not why.

“It’s about a small family, a man and a woman, a boy and a girl. It’s their life,” Peggy explained. “Just simple, kindly people who wanted to be happy, and were happy.”

“Sounds a little dull,” said Jimmie.

“Oh! It’s not,” she hastened to exclaim. “You see it’s all about the terrible things that might have happened to them, but never did. It’s terribly clever and, you know, sort of human.”

“All right.” Jimmie took a bill from his pocket.

“‘Midsummer’s Dream’ it is.”

When the boy left the store with his mother’s present under his arm, the evening sun had gone under a cloud. Still the faces of those who thronged the street were happy and smiling. And still, from a loud-speaking unit on a tall tower, Christmas chimes were ringing.

“People,” Jimmie murmured, “thousands and thousands of happy people. That’s why Tom Howe hunts criminals and Peter Grim traps spies, to keep them safe and happy.” He might have added, but did not, “And that’s why I mean to do my bit.”

CHAPTER XII

JIMMIE IS TRAPPED

It happened between seconds. One second Jimmie listened to the joyous peal of Christmas chimes and watched the bright, smiling faces of that Christmas Eve throng. The next, he was staring at the broad front of a bearded man and at a small Oriental trotting at his side.

They were past him in ten seconds, but in the next ten he turned to follow them. In the bearded man he had recognized the one whose candid camera now rested in Peter Grim's vault. The Oriental, he had decided, must be the one who was all but run over by the big man on that other day.

Where were they going now? What were they planning to do? "Probably nothing important," Jimmie thought to himself. "At least I may be able to discover their hang-out." He thought of calling on a crossing policeman to arrest the pair. But what could he, a boy, say?

94

"Arrest these men. I think they are spies!" What would the policeman say? No. It wouldn't do. He'd have to have more than he now knew. Besides, full well he knew that a spy's secret hide-out, where all his papers are kept is often more important than the man himself. So he followed on.

The men walked two blocks south on State Street, turned east, walked a block, turned south once more, and walked an indefinite distance. To Jimmie it seemed at least half a mile.

Of a sudden they paused to drop into the shadows beside an old brick building that was all dark except for the first floor front.

“Perhaps they suspect me,” Jimmie thought with a shudder. This far south there were few people about. A streetcar rattling by brightened things up a bit, but left it more dismal than ever after it had passed. One thing cheered him. In his right hand, within his large overcoat pocket, was something cold and hard,—the gun given him by Peter Grim. He was glad to have it now.

95

To avoid unnecessary suspicion, he walked straight past the ill-assorted pair. Then, as they did not move, fearing he might lose sight of them, he opened the door to the building and walked inside, which, as things turned out, was just the thing he should not have done. But who can know what is the next move on this strange checkerboard of life?

The place, he found, was deserted. There were no dark corners in which he might lurk. His next move seemed uncertain. He must keep up his pretenses. To do this, he opened a door. It led into a modest sized, dimly lit room.

“Just the place,” he whispered, “as long as no one happens along. I can watch them without their seeing me until they move on.”

Surprised, and a little frightened, a moment later he saw

them turn and enter the same building. Just inside the outer door they paused to talk in low tones. The Oriental waved his arms as he spoke, and twice pointed to the door through which Jimmie had stepped. Realizing that they might, at any moment, enter the room, he looked for a possible way of escape. There were no other doors to the room except a pair of huge double ones that would, he thought, admit a ten-ton truck.

When he realized that they did mean to enter the room, he glided to the farthest darkest corner. There he stood, scarcely daring to breathe, but still gripping that friendly bit of steel.

The big man lumbered into the room, and, planting his huge legs far apart, seemed to await some movement. But what? Jimmie thought there would be one more conversation, and hoped he might hear something important.

At last the big man spoke: "All right. Ve vill go down."

"Down?" Jimmie thought. "What can he mean?" He was not long in finding out. The little brown man stepped to the wall, opened a small door, pressed a button here, another there, and—down they all went, slowly, steadily, disastrously downward.

Too late Jimmie understood his mistake. He had walked onto the broad floor of an elevator for lowering trucks into a basement. Perhaps the little brown man worked here. Perhaps the place was a spy headquarters. It might be that he was being lowered into a very nest of spies. Whatever was to come, he could not now avoid it. They were five feet below

the street level and were still going down, down, down. He could only grip his little steel comforter, and wait.

The floor, which had turned out to be an elevator, came to a jarless halt at a distance of some fifteen feet.

“So!” grunted the big man. “It is cold here. We remain not long. Did you get the papers?”

“Salazar,” he grunted, “he is a fool! That was bad! That boy! Bah! Not even the pictures! He got the camera as well!”

Jimmie felt the hair prickle at the back of his neck. That Salazar was the spy whose purpose he had defeated by retaking the plans and carrying off that unusual candid camera, he did not doubt. That the big man was speaking of him he seemed equally certain. Would he recognize him, this big man? And if he did?

98

“The papers?” The little man spoke smoothly. “I have them. Let me see. It is too dark.”

Jimmie wanted to scream—“No more light.”

He did not scream. The light came, a flood of it. For the time, however, the men had their backs to him.

Frantically he searched the walls for an exit. There was one, a steel door, corner-wise across the room from him. Could he make it? He began gliding toward it. Fate was against him, as he disturbed the balance of the elevator, it slipped sideways, causing a slight jar. Instantly the big man’s eyes swept the place.

“So-o!” he murmured, as his eyes fell on the boy. “So, ve have gompany tonight.”

Gripping his revolver, and looking the big man squarely in the eyes, Jimmie waited. Had he been recognized? How was this little drama to end?

99

“Gompany on Christmas Eve,” the big man rumbled. “That is nice. Very nice.” But it was not nice. Jimmie knew that.

The big man moved a step closer. Jimmie’s eyes never wavered. Only his grip tightened a little. He could shoot his camera accurately from the hip, why not his automatic? All he had to do was to close his hand hard and the big man would fall on his face. He did not deserve to live. He was a spy, bent on destroying the happiness of those smiling people on the street.

“But you don’t do things that way,” he told himself. “You wait until they reach for a weapon.” From a corner of his eye he watched the little brown man. He was standing motionless.

Perhaps Jimmie’s mind was held so closely to that bit of steel in his pocket that he passed the thought on to the big man’s brain. Certain it was that the big man’s eyes became fixed on Jimmie’s pocket and for a full half minute he stood staring.

He said at last,—“This is Grismas Eve. We must do good tonight. Ve vill leave this young man to enjoy himself. Come. Let us go.”

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He ushered the little brown man through the steel door, then turning, said:

“We wish you a very merry Grismas.” At that the steel door clanged shut. Not until then did the boy realize that he was being locked in an abandoned building, to remain there perhaps until the day after Christmas.

“Merry Christmas,” he groaned low. A very merry Christmas. And he fancied that he could still hear the Christmas carols ring.

CHAPTER XIII

THE HAND

That he was trapped, Jimmie could not doubt. When he tried the steel door he found it securely locked. Rattling at the pair of massive steel doors matching the two above, he decided that they must be heavily barred on the other side. This place had not been prepared for him. It had all come along by accident. Probably the little brown man worked here. Spies often take jobs to hide their true purpose. But, had the place been prepared, it could not have been made more perfect. The walls were smooth,—no chance to climb, absolutely no chance of escape.

“Well,” he sighed, slumping down in a corner, “lots of time to think.”

But would there be? Perhaps that evil pair had gone for that Spanish fellow to identify him. If they came back, what then? He shuddered at the thought.

“There’ll be a fight,” he told himself. “A whale of a fight.” He fingered his automatic. “That big man guessed I had a gun. He’ll be on his guard, and so shall I.”

An hour passed. It was growing cold in the place. At home they were having dinner and wondering where he was. There

would be a cheery glow in the fireplace, always was on Christmas Eve. They'd be expecting him to hang up his stocking just as he had done when a very small boy. Life surely was strange.

Another hour passed. Yes, the place was growing colder. He walked slowly back and forth. It would be terrible staying here all night, and perhaps all day tomorrow, and—

What was that? Had he heard a footstep above?

Springing into a corner that gave him the first look if anyone appeared at the door above, he waited breathlessly.

Yes, there was a footstep, a very light one. "Tiptoeing," he thought. The gun was out of his pocket now. It gleamed wickedly in the light.

There came a creak. The door opened a crack. "Now!" he breathed. "Now!"

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He was watching for a face, the big man, the Spaniard, the little brown man. What he saw was a hand.

"A hand!" he whispered. "A woman's hand!"

His gun dropped into his pocket. He was not shooting any woman on Christmas Eve. Instead he snatched at his camera, made a quick focus, took two hurried shots, then dropped the camera back into place. At the same instant the elevator began to rise. That hand had touched the starting button.

It was with mixed feelings that he felt himself being slowly

lifted up—up—up. Had the trap been sprung by the woman? Would they be waiting to carry him off?

“They won’t!” he told himself, gripping his gun.

But perhaps the woman,—or was it a girl?—was alone. Would she be waiting? Who was she? What did she look like?

The elevator came to a standstill. He had arrived. His heart leaped as he gave the door a push.

He breathed an instant sigh of relief. The place was empty.

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Springing across the lobby, he bounded into the street.

“Free!” he breathed, taking a long deep breath. He was free! All his life, until two hours before, he had been free. Never before had he known so well what freedom meant.

A streetcar rattled by. There were happy smiles on the faces of the passengers. From far away came the joyous peal of chimes. He felt something under his arm. It was his mother’s present. This was Christmas Eve. And he was free.

Bounding down the street, he raced up an iron stairway, paid his dime, caught an elevated train, and was bound for home.

Life had never seemed so good to him as now. As he walked to his home from the station, the moon had never seemed to shine more gloriously, nor the snow gleam more brightly. He caught the sound of fresh young voices chanting Christmas carols. It seemed the voice of angels. He

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kept whispering,—“I am free! Free!” Had he not always been free? Yes, except for that terrific two hours. What a difference those two hours had made.

“And yet,” he told himself stoutly, “I am still with Peter Grim. Still after those spies.”

Here he was, home again. “Jimmie!” his mother exclaimed. “Where have you been? I was worried!”

“Yes,—I—I suppose so,” he murmured softly. Should he tell her? No! Not on Christmas Eve.

“Well, you know,” he said with a smile, “I was on State Street. There were chimes and carols. The people seemed so happy I just wanted to stay.” And that, as far as it went, was the truth.

Morning found his stocking filled with all manner of small gifts, just the things he had wanted, the sort of things that made him conscious of others’ care and kind thoughtfulness, and caused him for a moment to feel all choked up inside. Surely this was a grand and glorious world.

After a splendid dinner of chicken, cranberry sauce, rich plum pudding and coffee, he and his father sat down for a talk by the open fire. During the passing years this after dinner chat by the fire had come to be an institution. Jimmie would not have missed it. Happy the boy who feels so about his father.

“That Joe Caps is a queer fellow,” Jimmie said.

“In what way?” His father put a fresh log on the fire.

“Says he’s got a motor-stopper in that old truck of his.”

“A motor-stopper?”

“Sure. Says it will stop any motor within a half mile. Pipe dream, I’d say. Pure bunk.

“Another thing,” Jimmie laughed. “He says they have a thing-a-majig in that camera shop that you can use for talking down a beam of light. Peter Grim said that too.”

“That,” said his father, “is true.”

“What?”

“Yes. That was perfected some time back.” His father spoke quietly. “They use electric eyes—photoelectric cells. You talk into a microphone. The cells catch the sound impulses and turn them into light impulses. A bright reflector at the other end catches the light impulses and a second set of tubes change them back into sound impulses. If a bird should light on a twig fifteen miles from nowhere and he were in the way of that beam of light, your voice would not go through. But unless he had that expensive apparatus in just the right place, no one but the one for whom the message was intended could hear it. For complete secrecy it’s got everything else beat a mile.”

“That,” said Jimmie, “why that’s marvelous! And I shouldn’t wonder.” He paused to think. “I’ll bet that cabinet is built to hide a window and that this talk-down-a-beam-of-light thing

looks out over the city and whispers to it in the night.”

“Don’t go too far with your dreaming,” his father warned.

“All the same, I’m going to find out,” the boy declared stoutly.

“Well,” he exclaimed a moment later, “if Joe Caps was right about that beam of light thing, he may really have a motor-stopper after all.”

“You never can tell,” his father chuckled. “In these days of marvelous discoveries you surely never can. And it’s just those crude fellows who often make the finds. Look at the Wright brothers,—just little fellows, but they flew the first plane. Take Henry Ford, a bicycle tinkerer fellow, not at all sure he’d succeed, and now look at him!”

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“Yes, I know,” Jimmie murmured.

“Dad,” he said suddenly leaning forward, “I want to tell you something, a whole lot of somethings.”

“O.K. Shoot!” said his father.

“Hm,” his father sighed, when Jimmie had finished telling all his experiences with the spies and Peter Grim. “Looks like you’d let yourself in for something, gotten in so deep you can’t get out, at least not yet. If you’re the only one who’s seen those men, you’ve got to see the thing through.

“Son!” his tone was deeply serious, “I don’t want you walking into danger in a reckless manner. Life is a great

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gift not lightly to be thrown away. But this spy business must be taken with the greatest seriousness by all of us. We must become spy conscious, every man jack of us. That's the only way to safety. It is a well-known fact that one European nation is already speaking of 'Our America' meaning their America. They think they're going to take us over.

"Well," he sighed, "they thought that once before. We called their bet. They didn't feel so important after we had finished with them. For all that, we must be on our guard.

"I know your man Peter Grim," he went on after a time. "He's the right sort. You can't go wrong with him."

"He's taking me out to the steel mills tomorrow," said Jimmie. "I'm to witness the first pouring off of a marvelous new type of steel. And," he added with a pardonable touch of pride, "I'm to keep my eyes open for spies.

"We're to take overnight bags," he added. "Stay a night or two with some of the steel workers."

"Good idea," his father agreed. "In these days the fellow who can be of the most use to his friends and his country is the one who knows a little about all kinds of folks, how they live, think, and dream. At the steel mill you will learn things you will not soon forget."

There was more truth in those words than he dreamed. Jimmie would never forget this little talk with his father beside the fire on Christmas Day, nor the many exciting hours that were to follow.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MOTOR-STOPPER STOPS THEM

Jimmie had not long to wait for the answer to his questions regarding Joe's motor-stopper. He was just preparing to sit down to his breakfast in a sunny corner of the kitchen next morning when Joe Caps appeared at the door.

"I just wanted to show you all about that motor-stopper of mine," he half-apologized.

"Sure! I knew you would!" Jimmie grinned good-naturedly. "Come on in and have a stack of hots. Pure maple syrup and everything."

"Don't care if I do," said Joe, shuffling into the room. "Reckon there ain't nothin' more deliciouser nor pancakes."

When Joe had stowed an astonishing pile of hot cakes under his belt, the two boys went to the garage, started the ancient truck, then drove out into the country.

"Now," Joe breathed. "We'll jest back into this farm driveway and see if this here thing-a-majig'll work."

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Going to the back of the truck he tilted a broad circular affair made of sheet iron so it faced down the road. After that he

threw a switch, moved a lever, touched a button, and the thing began to hum.

“Now,” he sighed, “reckon she’ll work. Watch that there big car comin’ this way. If hit stops short of a hundred feet, she’s doin’ fine.”

Jimmie did watch. To his amazement, he saw the car a quarter of a mile away come to a dead stop.

“See?” Joe exclaimed triumphantly. “Stopped him dead!”

The driver of the distant car climbed out of his place, walked to the front, lifted the hood, looked at the motor, seemed to test a spark plug, and tighten something. Then he climbed back into his place, threw the car into gear, and rode happily away.

But not for long. Once more Joe threw the motor-stopper into high, and again the car came to a dead stop.

“Well I’ll be,—” Jimmie exclaimed.

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“Sure! That’s what I think,” Joe agreed. “That’s what I come plum all the way up here fer to find out about.”

Once again the car was started and as before, well within the hundred feet, came to a standstill.

“Stop it,” Jimmie exclaimed. “He’ll suspect us and have us arrested.” Then he laughed. The notion that any man would suspect two boys of stopping his motor by setting some mechanism in motion a quarter of a mile away was truly

amusing. Nevertheless, they allowed the car's motor to run and the car to come along. The man gave them an inquiring look, but that was all.

“See that feller plowin’ with a tractor?” Joe said. “Must be mighty nigh half a mile off.”

“All of that.”

“Might not work. We’ll give her a try.” The large metal disc was shifted to face the tractor, then again the motors purred.

“See!” Joe exclaimed. “She’s workin’. Workin’ mighty nigh perfect.”

Like the car driver, the farmer dismounted, tested his motor, climbed back, started, stopped, started, and stopped again.

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“That’s enough,” said Jimmie. “I’m convinced. But now you’ve got it, what you going to do with it?”

“That,” Joe replied solemnly, “is exactly what I aim to figger out.”

After that they drove the truck back into the garage and Jimmie, carrying his overnight bag, with a candid camera in one pocket and a not too candid pistol in the other, started for the city,—and some further adventures.

“Sam, will you develop this for me?” he said to a young photographer in his father’s newspaper office an hour later.

“Sure will, Jimmie. What is it? A girl?”

“Only her hand,” Jimmie laughed.

“Oh, well,” Sam laughed. “Some girls’ hands are interesting—very!”

Together they entered the darkroom and watched the narrow color film come out.

“Where’s your hand?” Sam asked.

“It will be pretty small,” said Jimmie. “Needs enlarging a lot. But that big spy, he’ll show up plain enough.”

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While his very life was being threatened in that elevator well, Jimmie had snapped two pictures of the big spy and his little Oriental companion. “I’ll know that big man the next time I see him,” he assured himself. Would he? The little Oriental, he thought, would be more difficult. Somehow those little brown men all looked alike to him.

“There’s your hand,” said Sam, holding a powerful glass before the developed film. “Not a bad hand, as ladies’ hands go. A little to the plump side. Nice rings she’s wearing, one set with a green stone, the other with red. Red setting must be made of several stones arranged like a star.”

“I’ll know that lady by her rings,” said Jimmie, “if I ever see her.”

“Haven’t you seen her?” Sam asked in surprise.

“Not that I know of,” Jimmie admitted. Then, because Sam

was a dependable fellow, he told of his strange adventure on Christmas Eve.

“Man! Oh Man!” Sam exclaimed. “That was close! But this girl now,—why did she let you out?”

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“That’s what I don’t know,” said Jimmie.

“I’d find out,” said Sam, “and have a look at her. You know, Jimmie,” he added, “people show their character in their hands just as much as they do in their faces. I’ve sort of made a study of hands. Unless I miss my guess, this girl has real character. And that’s what you want in a girl, Jimmie. Character. That’s it. A pretty face! Bah! A pretty face never kept a man from freezing nor starving, either.”

“Oh yes!” Jimmie chuckled. “If the face gets into the movies, it does.

“Well,” he sighed, “I’ve got to get going. Make me an enlargement of each picture, will you, Sam?”

“Sure will.”

“Thanks a lot.” Jimmie was out of the darkroom and away.

The next place he visited was the camera shop presided over by the dark-eyed girl. He wanted another film for his camera. Also he wished to have a look at that cabinet hiding the down-a-beam-of-light talking apparatus.

The girl was there and so was the big man. The big man glowered at him. Why should one glower at a

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customer? Jimmie wondered. Probably had indigestion. The girl favored him with a strange but friendly smile. “Ah, well, one smile, minus one glower, makes nothing.” He was no worse off than before.

The man left the room. Jimmie asked for a color film. The girl disappeared into a cabinet. Like a flash Jimmie was at that other cabinet opening the door softly, taking a look, closing it again, even more softly. Yes, it was as he had thought, that strange mechanism faced a window. “And the window,” he told himself with a start, “faces the steel mills, right where I am going today, in Gary!” It was strange. He was back in his place not an instant too soon. Like a huge cat after a mouse, the big man popped back into the shop.

“By—by the way,” Jimmie stammered, “do you happen to have one of those unusual candid cameras made by Western Camera Company, and withdrawn because of patent difficulties?” To his surprise he saw the big man’s face turn purple. He seemed about to choke. When at last he was able to speak, he exploded:

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“Thunder and damnation! No! Ve have none! One it vas stolen. The thief, he is known. He shall be apprehended. Yes, he shall!” The big man went stomping out again.

“Sometimes he becomes very angry at nothing,” the girl said, as she handed Jimmie his film. “Just nothing at all.”

Jimmie wondered if it was for nothing this time. “Just how much does he know about this whole business?” he asked himself. To this question he could form no certain answer.

Two things he had learned from his visit to that shop. The girl's name was Betty—the big man had called her that—and she wore a ring set with five rubies, one large and four small ones, set like a star. “Only one ring,” he whispered, “not two. But she does have plump hands. Strange business, this studying ladies' hands!”

CHAPTER XV

THE LADLE TILTS

“This,” said Peter Grim, “is one of our big moments. In every life there come a few truly great moments. This is one of mine.”

He was talking to Jimmie. It was early afternoon. They were in the great steel and glass structure that housed the steel mill. Above them, swinging on a crane, was something that resembled a huge steel bucket.

“What is it?” Jimmie pointed at the giant bucket. The place so fascinated him that he found it difficult to listen properly to what Peter was saying.

“That’s the ladle.” Peter’s tone was impressive. “In that big bucket lined with tile—is our molten steel. It is now ready for pouring, the first of its kind ever poured.”

“How—how much of it?” The words stuck in Jimmie’s throat. “And how—how hot is it?”

“There are twenty tons,” Peter replied. “And it’s hotter than anything you’ve ever known. It’s lava, steel lava. No volcano ever poured out anything hotter.”

“Lava, steel lava,” Jimmie shuddered. The thought that above them, held there by massive steel clamps, hung twenty tons, a whole flood of white-hot, molten steel, filled him with awe and a certain amount of cold terror. Suppose something happened and the ladle slipped? Suppose that steel came pouring down,—where would he be?

They were not, however, alone. About them, three here, four there, two over yonder, were a score of steel workers. “They are here all the time,” he assured himself. “They do not seem afraid. Why should I be?” This only half stifled his fear.

“Yes,” Peter went on. “This sure is a big day in all our lives, all lives of all Americans, we hope. Just think, Jimmie! Think what it will mean to have anti-aircraft guns that are twice as powerful as any we have ever known! Know how these guns are made?” he asked.

“No.”

“I’ll tell you some time,—not now. You’ll be surprised.

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“But, Jimmie,” he went on, “remember what Colonel Farwell said about Chicago being the first city to be attacked if there is a war. He wasn’t dreaming. It’s a terrible reality. It’s an established fact that a certain European nation is setting up airplane bases in South American and Central American countries, and that an Asiatic power is not far behind. Transportation bases, to be sure, but they can be changed to war bases overnight.

“Think of Chicago, Jimmie, with anti-aircraft guns mounted on the steps of the Field Museum, Art Institute, the Aquarium,

in Jackson Park, Grant Park, Lincoln Park, every public place, and all these with tremendous new power. And there, Jimmie,” he waved his arms aloft, “there is the first steel to be made into these marvelous new weapons of defense. We _____”

“Beg pardon,” said a worker. “Would you gentlemen mind stepping a little to one side? The flatcars for the steel are being backed in.” They stepped hastily aside and four flatcars, pushed by a donkey engine, bumped into place beneath the mass of molten steel.

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“Jimmie!” Peter exclaimed. “You seem nervous, as if you expected something to happen.”

“I do,” Jimmie said.

“Nothing will happen,” Peter insisted. “Nothing can happen. Everything about a steel plant is figured out to the last ounce of stress and strain. It must be. That’s where your mathematics come in. A steel mill is a marvelous place to work. It——”

“Peter!” Jimmie exclaimed. “I saw a man dodging in and out among the beams up there!”

“Where?”

Jimmie pointed to the loft of the great structure. “Just some workman,” was Peter’s quiet reply. “Nerves, Jimmie, just plain nerves. Come on over here. I want you to see something.” He led the way to what appeared to be a great, square pile of brick, but was instead an open hearth steel

furnace.

“Look.” He pointed to what might have been a great tank of boiling water but was instead a mass of molten steel.

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“That’s what our steel is like,” said Peter. “Only this is ordinary steel. Ours is very unusual indeed. That’s why not an ounce of it may be carried from the mill. We’re here to see that it is not carried out. Of course,” he chuckled, “as long as it’s up there in the ladle, it’s safe enough.”

“Peter,” said Jimmie, “what is steel?”

“Just iron, with the proper impurities mixed with it. Pure iron is a soft, uninteresting metal and not of much use. When you mix it with the right amounts of nickel, cobalt, carbon, and so on, it comes to be the sort of thing we use for knife blades, railroad rails, and cannon.

“Do you know, Jimmie, an impression seems to be growing among the boys of our land that blue overalls and a jacket are a badge of disgrace. Instead, they are a suit of honor, a sign of well-being. See that man?” He pointed to a workman standing before the open hearth. “His job is to reach into that molten mass with a twenty-foot long spoon and take out a sample of the steel. When this sample has cooled just so much, he cracks it, examines the broken edges and from the way they shine, determines whether his batch of steel is ready to take up. And for that he gets twenty dollars a day.”

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“Whew! Some pay!”

“Sure it is, Jimmie. Many a fine fellow wearing a white collar, sells neckties and socks for that much a week—you see, Jimmie, ours is an industrial nation. Men who make things serve their country well. But here I am preaching. Looks as if things were about to move. Come on.”

“It’s moving! The ladle is moving!” Jimmie exclaimed.

“Yes!” Peter hurried forward. “It will move up to a position above the first car. Then it will be lowered to a place above that first steel shell resting on the car. Then the bottom will be opened and steel will be poured into the first shell. Each shell will be filled in turn, and then——”

Of a sudden there came a sharp cry:

“Look out! Look out!”

“It’s tipping. Look out!”

Just in time Peter dragged Jimmie back. The ladle was tilting perilously. Would it overturn? Would the molten mass flow over the men and burn them to a cinder? It was a tense moment.

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A white stream poured over the edge of the ladle. It reached the floor in large drops to go spattering in all directions. Jimmie saw a man grab at his face. He felt a stinging burn on the back of his hand.

In an instant it was all over. The ladle righted itself. For ten tense seconds there was an ominous calm. Then Peter Grim shouted:

“Get those bits of hot steel. Don’t let a single sample be carried away!”

“Men!” commanded the foreman. “Get them, every one.”

At once a dozen men were busy gathering up the spatters of the new and precious steel that were fast cooling.

“That wasn’t just an accident.” The foreman’s lips were set in a grim line. “We do things right in this mill. Someone has been tampering with our controls.”

“Spies,” said Peter.

“I’m afraid so, sir.”

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“They are in every important plant in America.” Peter’s words had a somber sound. “We must have more counter spies.”

“They won’t get away with a single trace of that steel,” the foreman promised. “The men can only leave by the front entrance. I’ll have a powerful electromagnet on either side as they pass.”

“And if they have a bit of steel in their pocket,” Peter laughed, “those magnets will get them.”

“Will they?” Jimmie asked.

“Will they?” The foreman laughed hoarsely. “Just you wait and see! Those magnets will lift a ton of steel rails.”

“I have a moving picture camera with me,” Peter said

thoughtfully. “It belongs to a friend of Jimmie’s. I reckoned we might use it in picturing some of the tests of our new steel. We might set it going by the gate and get a moving picture of all your men going out. Then your foremen can study their faces on the film to make sure there are no intruders among them.”

“Good idea,” said the foreman.

“Think you can manage that camera?” Peter turned to Jimmie.

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“I—why, yes, I’m sure I can,” said Jimmie.

“Good. But look!” Peter exclaimed. “They’re pouring our steel. It’s going into the shells. The big moment has arrived.” For a full quarter hour after that, in awed silence, Jimmie watched the pouring of the white-hot steel. When the last bit had dropped from the ladle Peter Grim said:

“Jimmie, that’s a sight we’ll not soon forget.”

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CHAPTER XVI

THE ELECTRIC SPY TRAP

“There’s a darkroom connected with our laboratory,” said the foreman. “If you care to use it, you’re welcome.”

“We’d better,” said Jimmie. “Sooner we get at it the better. We may discover that we need help making adjustments.” He was speaking of Jane Hunter’s camera. It was yet to be loaded. The film, he knew, was costly. He must not blunder.

“Right. Let’s go,” said Peter.

Ten minutes later they were in a small place adjoining the darkroom, examining the camera.

“Whew!” Jimmie exclaimed. “I never saw anything like this movie camera. It’s a marvel. I’m almost afraid to touch it.”

“Should be a marvel!” Peter chuckled. “Cost as much as a house.”

Jimmie did touch it. He did more than that. He went over it bit by bit. In truth, only the night before he had spent three hours studying a booklet written about that very camera. When he had satisfied himself on every point, he loaded it with an old film, and put it through its paces.

Satisfied with this test, he told Peter to dance a jig in the sun, while he made a test shot.

In the darkroom he and Peter watched the bit of film come out. “Marvelous!” Peter exclaimed. “Look! You can even catch the blink of my eye!”

“And the bend of your shoe soles!” Jimmie laughed.

After loading the camera they hid it away in a corner of the darkroom, then walked out into the sunlight.

“Let’s have a look at our precious new steel,” said Peter.

“Can we see it now?”

“Oh, sure!”

Ten minutes later they were looking at some pinkish red monuments standing on box-cars.

“Still rather warm, those billets,” said Peter. “In fact, they’re liquid fire inside. Shoot a high-power bullet into one of them and it would squirt liquid steel.”

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“Is that *your* steel?” Jimmie asked.

“Sure is.”

Jimmie stood staring at it for some time. There came a flurry of snow that completed the picture. “Pyramids of red-hot iron kissed by flakes of snow. What a world!” he thought.

“Come on,” said Peter. “We’ll see what comes next.”

As they entered a building they were greeted by such a bang and clatter as had never reached Jimmie’s ears before.

Watching, they saw great steel hands seize a red-hot billet of steel, swing it from a flatcar, then drop it on a steel platform.

A man in a cage above pulled a lever. The billet rolled over. Another lever set heavy rollers crashing over the red-hot steel. Amid the clatter and bang of steel on steel, they saw that billet rolled and rolled, tumbled, tossed and rolled until it had become a forty-foot long steel bar.

“That’s not our steel,” said Peter. “It’s not cool enough yet. But that’s what will happen to it. What’s more, the process will be continued until it is no thicker than a knife blade, and not half as wide.”

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“To make an anti-aircraft gun?” Jimmie stared.

“Sure! But let’s get out of here. It’s nearing closing time. We’ve got to get set up.”

Jimmie’s part of this work was simple. With his camera already loaded, all he had to do was to set it up at the proper distance, in a shadowy spot, make his electrical connection, and there he was. He was greatly interested in the other half of the trap, the two electromagnets. He had seen these. They looked like large iron cushions suspended from cables, lifting scrap iron from the ground and loading it into cars. He had even seen an entire automobile lifted off the ground. But how, he wondered, could they trap a spy? He was to know soon

enough.

Just before the whistle gave forth its hoarse blast to say that the day was done, the head company detective took his place beside them.

“We’ll catch some innocent men,” he murmured. “But they won’t mind. Best-natured bunch of men in the world, these steel workers. And why not?” He laughed low. “They really get paid. Average better than seventeen hundred dollars a year. Do you think the white-collar boys get that? I guess not. I——”

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“There’s the whistle.” His voice rose. “Here they come.”

And here indeed they came, hundreds and hundreds of men. Some faces were grimy, some hands were black, but all eyes were smiling. The day was done.

“Hey!” a big brawny fellow exclaimed. “Who’s got my coattail?”

“What you got in your coat pocket, Barney?” The detective laughed.

“That? Oh, that’s my pocketknife. But what’s that electromagnet doin’ there?” he demanded. The pocketknife in his pocket had leaped for the magnet and pinned him fast.

“Don’t matter what it’s for,” the detective said in a low voice. “There. The current’s off. You’re a free man.”

As the moments passed and the men filed through the

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gate the spy-trap caught a pair of steel spectacles, a folded metal lunch box, and three more pocketknives, but no bit of the priceless secret steel.

In the meantime Jimmie's camera was clicking off yards and yards of film. If any stranger walked past he would be spotted in this new form of "show-up."

Just when it seemed the electric trap was useless, Peter Grim exclaimed:

"Look what we have here!"

They had been watching men, not the magnets. Having stepped a little to one side, Peter had had a look at the right-hand magnet and there, abandoned by its owner, stuck to the magnet, was a paper lunch box.

"Iron spoon inside," suggested Jimmie.

"I doubt that," said Peter. "You'd have heard a holler if the fellow was innocent. You'll find a lump of our secret steel inside that lunch box."

And so they did, two pieces. As soon as the current was off and the box opened, out tumbled the bits of steel.

"Worth many times their weight in gold," was Peter's comment, as he thrust them deep in his pocket. "Let them analyze these bits and that part of our secret is lost."

"Well," said the company detective as he watched the last man pass out the gate, "you got the stolen goods but

failed to catch the thief.”

“That may come later. We have their pictures,” said Peter. “Someone in the plant may be able to point out the guilty one on the film.”

“These spies,” said Jimmie, as he thought of those two bits of steel. “They sure are a heartless bunch. They tipped that ladleful of steel, just to get those two little chunks. If they’d tipped it just a little farther, men would have been burned.”

“To a cinder,” Peter agreed. “Those honest workmen had wives and children waiting for them at home,” he went on soberly. “The children are climbing on their knees right now. Spies are beasts, dirty dogs. They have a country of their own where they might be happy. We, too, have a happy land. But they come over to wreck it, Jimmie!” He pressed the boy’s arm hard. “We’ll get this bunch of spies, if it’s the last thing we ever do.”

“We will, and it won’t be long!” Jimmie declared.

“Who knows?” was Peter’s solemn reply. “Of course,”
said Peter, after a moment’s silence, “we can’t hope to
keep the composition of this new steel a secret for long. But
that’s not all there is to it. The process by which it is made,
that too is a secret, and the manner in which the gun is to be
made. Then, too, we have a new form of smokeless powder to
be used in the gun. Take it all in all, it’s one of the most
precious secrets in the world. The knowledge just a few men
hold under their hats at this moment, could be sold for a
million dollars to those who hate us. And there’s not a man of

them all that would sell at any price. That's the glory of America, Jimmie, it breeds real men."

A moment later Peter hurried off to keep an appointment with some big men of the steel company, leaving Jimmie with the great steel mill and his own whirling thoughts.

As he sat on a pile of rusty steel ingots, he watched the white-hot billets gleaming through the snow, saw great flames rise from a blast furnace and for the moment felt himself a part of something big and wonderful.

Then, as his mind went back over the days, he wondered how this all was to end. Again he saw the talk-down-a-beam-of-light apparatus and the dark-eyed girl in the camera shop. Once more he bid in the box of paper flowers, battled with the Spanish spy, took his picture, reclaimed the stolen plans, was locked away in that vacant building, rescued by a girl's hand, and all the rest.

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"That girl?" he thought. "Who could she have been?" Without his bidding, the dark-eyed girl of the camera shop appeared on the picture gallery of his mind.

"She's no spy," he said to himself. "She just can't be."

But the big man who had barked at him? He thought of that strange apparatus hidden away in that cabinet. It faced the very spot where he now sat. It was many miles away. In spite of this, he thought he heard whispers. "Whispers down a beam of light," he murmured. And then, "What nonsense! It's only the wind."

CHAPTER XVII

SHADOWS IN THE NIGHT

“Come on.” It was Peter who wakened him from his daydreams.

“I’ve arranged to have those films developed. We’ll be able to see them in the morning. We’re going over to Peskanoski’s for the night.”

“To what?” Jimmie favored him with a stare.

“Ivan Peskanoski’s. He’s one of the men who works here, and a mighty fine fellow to have for a friend.”

“A Pole?”

“Sure. There are many Poles in America, millions, I guess. Mighty fine people, hard working, honest, peaceful folks—you’ll be proud to own Ivan for a friend.”

The house they came to after a fifteen minute walk was large and old-fashioned. They were met at the door by a fine big girl in her late teens. There was, Jimmie noted with approval, a touch of real color in her cheeks.

“Kathy,” said Peter, speaking to the girl, “this is Jimmie. Will

you take us in for the night?”

“Oh sure.” The big girl smiled. “We shall be happy and proud to have you. Father said you were coming.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “Here he is now.” A second later a powerfully built man, standing six-feet-three in his stockingfeet, filled the doorway.

“Glad to see you. Glad to meet you,” he said, all in one breath. The grip he gave Jimmie’s hand left his fingers paralyzed for a full minute.

“Come in,” he invited. “Get your things off. Dinner’s nearly on. We are having pasties.”

“Oh! Pasties!” Peter voiced his approval.

“What are pasties?” Jimmie asked.

“Wait and see,” was Peter’s reply.

Jimmie did wait, and the pasties were well worth waiting for. Delicious crispy crust, filled with all manner of meats that were cooked in just the right manner, these were Madame Peskanoski’s pasties. Jimmie ate until he was ashamed of himself. The two boys in their early teens, Kathy, her father, they all ate prodigiously, and still there were more.

“Eat all you can,” the good lady urged. “They are never so good next day.”

A heaping bowl of doughnuts and great cups of hot chocolate in which marshmallows bobbed and floated, completed the meal.

“We are going to dance tonight,” said Kathy. “Old Rubens is coming. And can he play the fiddle!”

“But the dancing would not be so good if Kathy didn’t play the piano,” said the mother proudly.

“I’m sure of that,” said Peter. “I’ve heard her. She’ll be putting her fellow countryman Paderewski in the shade some of these days.”

“Oh! No!” Kathy exclaimed, blushing.

“Well, Jimmie,” said Peter. “These people will be wanting to get ready for the dance. We’ve got to exercise after such a feast. Let’s take a turn round the block.”

“O.K. by me,” said Jimmie.

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“I like to walk,” said Peter, as they came out into the crisp winter air. “I can always think more clearly on my feet.”

“So can I,” said Jimmie. “Tell me, Peter, how are modern cannon made? Aren’t they just cast?”

“I should say not,” Peter laughed. “That’s the way they used to be made. All too often they blew up and killed the wrong men. If they didn’t do that, they’d expand from the power of the explosions. That let out a lot of the gas which pushed out the ball or shell so you couldn’t count on much damage.”

“Now,——”

“Now?” said Peter. “Did you ever take a golf ball to pieces?”

“Sure have. They are made of the finest kind of rubber, like rubber bands, wound round and round a small solid center.”

“Why?”

“To let them contract and expand easily. That gives them speed.”

“Good boy! Go to the head of your class!” Peter exclaimed. “You,——”

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“Jimmie!” his voice dropped. “Did you see something disappear behind that store?”

“No,” said Jimmie. “Probably only a dog.”

“Or a man.” Peter’s voice was low. “You know, Jimmie, even the walls have ears when you’re a Federal man. Believe me, you’ve got to have an eye in your head.

“But cannon,” he went on, “many of them are made just like a golf ball, only instead of rubber, the material used is the finest kind of steel,—steel wire wound round and round, miles of it. That’s the British way.”

“That’s queer.” Jimmie was puzzled. “How come?”

“Your cannon must contract and expand, just as the golf ball does. It must do that to stand the terrific shock of

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high power explosives. And when the shot is fired the cannon barrel must come back so the second charge will fit just as tightly as the first. A cast gun won't do that. But if you cast a comparatively thin inner tube, then wind it round and round with steel wire, that does the trick. You——

“Jimmie!” he exploded in a tense whisper, “there was someone. He’s been dogging our tracks. He dodged behind that garage when I looked around.”

“Let him come,” said Jimmie. “I’ve got my gun.”

“It’s not that,” said Peter. “He’s after secrets. Well,” he laughed, “he’ll find all I have told you thus far in any good encyclopedia. And this much more as well,—we Americans make our guns by casting a tube, then fitting thin steel jackets, one at a time, over it, like putting a stove-pipe over a length of gas-pipe. The tube is cold when the jacket is put on, and the jacket hot. When the jacket cools and shrinks, it fits like the bark on a tree, only much closer. And the whole thing contracts and expands, just as the British gun does.

“But this gun we are making,” his voice dropped to a whisper, “is going to be the wire-wrapped sort. What’s more, the new steel will stand much more contraction than any steel yet used.

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“That means we can use a much more powerful smokeless powder and a longer barrel. As I told you before, we’ve got the powder too.” His voice dropped still lower. “It’s being developed in a little secret laboratory, way out nowhere. I’ll take you there sometime.

“You see, Jimmie,—” his whisper became shrill, insistent, “the task we have to do is to produce one of these guns, have it thoroughly tested, produce an explosive and proper shells for it to fire, then try it all out. We’ve got to do this with spies lurking everywhere.”

“And catch the spies at the same time,” Jimmie added.

“Yes, that’s it,” Peter agreed. “And Jimmie,” this he said in a faint whisper, “perhaps we can speed things up a bit by catching one right now. Do you see that double garage just this side of Ivan’s house?”

“Yes, I see it.”

“All right. We’ll walk half way to it, then get up on our toes and sprint. Not a sound, mind you. We just might —” He did not finish, but started forward without a sound.

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Half the distance was covered, then, like the wind, they were away. Fifteen seconds later Peter pounced upon an old man in the shadow of the garage.

“Who are you?” he demanded. “Why are you here?”

“I,” said the old man, drawing himself up to his full height, a good six feet, “I am Rubens. I am to play for the dance tonight.” He held up a ragged violin case. “I take this way because it is shorter.” He indicated a path. “And because, always a humble man, I enter at the back door.”

“Oh—I beg your pardon,” said Peter, stepping back. “So you are Ivan’s friend?”

“For a long time, yes. You perhaps thought me a robber. No. Rubens is very poor, a mendicant I have been called, and am not too much ashamed of it. But never have I robbed any man.”

“I am sure of that,” said Peter. “Again I ask your pardon. We shall enjoy your music tonight.”

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“I am honored to hear you say so,” said the old man. “And now I must hasten. It may be that I am late.”

“It’s strange,” Peter murmured as the old musician vanished into the dark.

Jimmie wondered what was strange but did not ask.

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CHAPTER XVIII

RUBENS' VIOLIN

The experiences of that evening will long remain in Jimmie's mind as a delightful memory. Nothing in his life had been quite like it.

By the time he and Peter returned to the house, the dance was in full swing. The sturdy Polish girls, their faces glowing as bright and gay as their costumes, whirled round and round. Their partners, steel workers in overalls by day, were neatly dressed, and polite. Some were quite marvelous dancers.

As for Kathy and the venerable Rubens, they seemed quite made over for the occasion. It is true that Rubens' clothes were still soiled and dusty, and that his long, thin hair was tumbled and unkempt. But his eyes! How they shone! And his fingers! How they caressed his violin!

And Kathy! What a marvel she was at the ivory keys.

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With the violin, or without it, she played on and on.

Now it was a dreamy waltz, now some wild Spanish dance, and now some strange Polish air, slow and stately. Always Rubens and Kathy were ready to respond when the name of a tune was called by some joyous dancer.

"That violin," Peter said to Jimmie. "He carries it in a ragged

case. But unless I am quite tone deaf, it is worth a fortune. My cousin is quite a famous violinist. She inherited a Strad from her father. It's tone is not any sweeter than old Rubens', nor is her touch softer. It is strange. Very, very strange."

Sometimes Jimmie danced with a friend of Kathy's, more often he sat in a corner watching Kathy and old Rubens. It was indeed strange that such a talented musician should be a wanderer.

"And yet," he thought, "it is not so strange after all. These are hard times. Many a fine musician is walking the street. And many a man as old and tattered as Rubens is, has drowned his chance for fame in hard drink."

Once he walked out of the room and into the winter night. Not the gleam of stars but the glow of the steel furnace fires, cast back by the low clouds, met his gaze.

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"Here," he thought, "young people are having a glorious frolic, and there, men are toiling through the night."

There was about the gathering a joyous, carefree spirit that he had never experienced in his own home town. The people of the Glen were office workers, bank cashiers, radio men, newspaper reporters, store managers. They took their cares with them when they went home at night.

"These people," he said aloud to Peter, "they seem to have no cares at all. It must be great to work in a steel mill."

"Yes," Peter replied absent-mindedly. "It must be." He was studying the face of old Rubens.

“He acts as though he thought he had seen him before,”
Jimmie thought.

The party broke up before midnight,—there would be steel to be poured and rails to be rolled tomorrow.

A great pot of coffee and a huge dishpan filled with cookies were brought in, and there was a small banquet. Then with many a jolly laugh the young people prepared to leave. Rubens’ dusty derby was passed ’round. There was the clink—clink—of silver. Peter and Jimmie contributed their share.

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Then as the hat was given to the smiling old man, there arose a shout:

“Play, Rubens! Play for us just once more!”

Dropping into his place, the old man drew his bow across the strings and the sweet, sad notes of Massenet’s “Elegy” drifted out to the hushed throng. As Jimmie listened, he felt that all the loneliness and joy of an old man who had wandered the earth over to at last find friends among these simple people was being poured out in the notes. Many friends were being impressed as perhaps they would never be again.

There was no applause as the music ended. Instead the door was opened without a sound, and on tiptoes these strange young people, raised amid the clang of steel, stole out into a night made bright by the glow of furnace fires which Jimmie thought must burn forever.

Madame Peskanoski was old-fashioned enough to have

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a wood-burning stove in her kitchen. About this the men gathered after the company was gone.

“What country do you come from?” Jimmie asked Rubens.

“No country!” The old man’s voice was kindly and sad. “I am of no country and of all countries,—Germany, Poland, France, Russia, Spain, England,—I have known them all. I am a wanderer. My violin, it is my only friend,—except,” his face lit up, “sometimes for a night I have friends,” his arms were flung wide, “very many friends.”

As he settled back in his chair and his head fell forward as if he were half-asleep, he seemed a pathetic figure.

Without knowing why he did it, Jimmie slipped back, drew out his candid camera, measured the distance, then took two quick shots of the aged violinist as he rested there by the fire.

That night Jimmie slept in a large upper room. In it were five single beds, one for Peter, one for Rubens, one for Jimmie and one each for the two boys of the household. Before he retired, Rubens drew the covers over his violin as if it were a baby, then crept in beside it.

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In the middle of the night Jimmie awoke, or thought he did. He heard a voice,—or did he? The voice seemed to say,—“Get that steel. Whatever you do, get that steel.” As he listened, or as he dreamed, he thought of that down-a-beam-of-light thing in the camera shop. It surely was strange.

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CHAPTER XIX

HIGH SPEED

After a hasty breakfast next morning, Jimmie and Peter sped away to the research laboratory where the movie film taken the previous day awaited them.

There they found an interested group, twelve men in all, awaiting the running of the film. Superintendents, engineers, time-keepers,—these men were prepared to determine whether a single stranger, posing as a laborer, had passed through their gate at the close of the day.

The projector hummed. Slowly, one by one, men passed onto the screen, then moved off again. A hundred men, two hundred, three hundred, five hundred passed, and not a man exclaimed “There! Who’s that fellow?”

When at last the end of the film snapped and the show was over, each watcher heaved a sigh of relief, all but Jimmie.

“No spies,” said a burly foreman. “No spies. No spies,”
echoed after him.

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Jimmie said “Run that over again.”

Peter said, “Do you mind?”

The operator said, "Sure. I'll run it again."

"There! That tall fellow with the long, thin nose! Who is he?" Jimmie exclaimed when the film had run about two thirds through.

"That," said the foreman of the rolling mill, "is one of my men. Came over from the Charleston plant three days ago."

"Do you know him well?" Peter Grim asked.

"No-o," the foreman hesitated. "No, I don't. But the letter he brought said he had been with us at the other plant a long time."

"Might that letter not have been forged?" Peter's tone was eager.

"Yes, of course."

"Cut the film just before that spot, and run it again, very slowly," said Peter.

A moment later, as the man on the screen moved slowly past, he said: "How now, Jimmie?"

"It's the man!" Jimmie was greatly excited. "That Spanish type. If you don't believe me, look at this! He's wearing that same scarf." He held a picture in a spot of light. "This," he went on, "is in color, that, in black and white, but for all that, it's the same pattern."

"And a very unusual one," the rolling mill foreman agreed. "It

surely is strange. That fellow has a partner, too, the short, dark-complexioned one just behind him.”

“He looks like the man who bid against me at the auction,” said Jimmie. “I can’t be sure.”

Much of the strangeness of the whole affair vanished when, on comparing letters of introduction these men had brought to the mill, with similar letters signed by the same man, they were discovered to be forgeries.

“I’ll get them,” said the Company’s head detective. “I’ll bring two of my own men over from the stamping mill to watch them. In that way, sooner or later, we’ll get them with the goods right on them.”

“The only trouble with that plan,” said an under-foreman of the rolling mill, “is that those men failed to report for work this morning.”

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“We lose again!” Peter groaned. “They saw you, Jimmie, and knew they were in a hot spot. But just you wait. We’ll get them yet.”

“And how!” Jimmie exclaimed.

Did an echo repeat his words with a question mark after them, “And how?” Who can say?

“Well, Jimmie,” Peter sighed, “looks like that’s all for the present. We’ll blow back in here tonight and see what’s what. In the meantime I’m due out at our little chemical lab. Want to go along?”

“Oh, sure!” Jimmie grinned.

Peter drove a dark green roadster, with plenty of speed when speed was needed. For the present, however, speed was not needed, so they glided along at a modest pace. Turning right here and again there, and at last to the left, they came to a long, low building which, save for a modest home at its right, stood quite by itself in the open country.

“Nice little hide-out for our chemical research,” Peter said as they climbed out of the car. “I doubt if our enemies, the spies, even know about it.

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“Safer, too,” he added. “We have quantities of explosives out here at times. At this moment we have enough to make a large hole in the ground if anything went wrong. But nothing will for the place is heavily guarded.”

“What about that small house?” Jimmie nodded toward the lone dwelling. “Are they safe?”

Peter frowned. “Tell you about that later.

“Hello, Tom!” He spoke to a powerfully built man as they entered. “Anything suspicious happen lately?”

“No-o. Only,—well,—nothing much. The same car, going slow, drove past three times.”

“What sort of car?” Peter demanded.

“Low, yellow racer type, looked foreign. No top. Slim fellow driving. No hat. Curly hair, slim face,—looked as foreign as

his car.”

“Gee!” Jimmie exclaimed.

“If he passes while we’re here, give us the high sign double quick.” Peter spoke slowly, but there was a suggestion of tenseness in his voice.

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“Bad time to have those fellows spot this place,” he said to Jimmie. “We’re developing that smokeless powder, right along with the gun. About got it, I guess.”

For an hour after that they wandered in and out of rooms where a score or more of men worked over test-tubes, retorts, miniature furnaces, electric ovens, and all manner of curious contrivances. Here Peter asked a question, and there made a suggestion. The greater part of this was lost on Jimmie,—his education as a chemist had been sadly neglected.

“All right,” Peter said at last. “Let’s go get a cup of Java.”

“Coffee?” Jimmie exclaimed. “Where do you get that in this wide open world?”

“I’ll show you,” said Peter.

He led the way out of the building and down the street a half block to the house they had spoken about some time before. Instead of knocking at the door, Peter lifted the latch to the garage attached to the house and they walked in. The tempting aroma of hot coffee and doughnuts greeted them.

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“Hello, Mrs. Cassady,” said Peter. “This is Jimmie Drury. He likes hot doughnuts, eh Jimmie?”

“Sure do.” Jimmie smiled at the friendly lady in a bright gingham dress, and at the cute kid who stood looking at him with big round eyes.

“I got a doll,” the child said. “And a Teddy bear, an’ a elephant. Peter, he give me the elephant.”

Peter grinned. “I’ll bring you something next time,” he chuckled. “Mebby a cow.”

“I like cows,” said the child.

Jimmie liked cute children. His eyes were on this one most of the time he spent eating fresh doughnuts and drinking the most delicious coffee he had ever tasted.

“They were on relief before we moved the Lab out here,” Peter said in a low tone as the woman went out of the room. “Our Lab was an abandoned factory. We wanted them to sell their little place to us, but they wouldn’t. Said it was their home. Home, Jimmie,” he said softly. “It means a lot to some people. Ought to mean more to all of us, I guess.

“So,” he went on, “we set them up in the lunch business in a small way. They’ve made good too. Nearly all our men eat here, and on a bright Sunday there are lines of cars waiting to be served with fresh doughnuts.

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“We should have compelled them to move on.” His face took on a troubled look. “We really should, when we began

making explosives here. There's that cute kid, you know. And yet," he sighed, "it is their home. So-o," he paused, "we're crossing our fingers and hoping for the best of luck—. We _____"

Just then the door was pushed open, and a man's voice said:

"Mr. Grim, that foreign-looking car has just passed again. There they go!"

"We—we'll just have a look at them." Peter and Jimmie were in the car in an instant, and went speeding away.

Speeding was right. Never before had Jimmie traveled so fast. The speedometer climbed until he scarcely dared to look. The car sang as they ate up the miles. But that foreign car had speed too. The distance between them lessened very slowly.

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They shot past a truck,—a car,—another truck. A little miscalculation at a time like this, and all their troubles would be ended.

The car ahead took a curve with reckless abandon.

"Dumb!" Peter slowed up a trifle, took the curve, then gave the car the gun.

They gained, a hundred yards,—two hundred, three,—four. Unconsciously Jimmie was leaning forward in his seat.

And then a long freight train loomed up of on the right and more than a mile ahead.

At once Jimmie's mind was busy with a problem of distance and two speeds—the train's and the cars'.

“If that engine reaches the crossing ten seconds too soon,” he shouted, “there'll be two less spies.”

“They're going to risk it,” Peter hissed. “What fools!” His own car was slowing down.

“Some things are worth doing,” he grumbled. “Some are not. They——”

“They made it!” Jimmie exclaimed. The car passed before the freight engine with scarcely its own width to spare. Was he glad or sorry? For the life of him he could not tell.

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“See you another time,” Peter exclaimed, talking to the wind.

He brought his car to a stop, turned about, then said quietly:

“We'll go back to Gary.”

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CHAPTER XX

BATTLING FOR A STRANGE PRIZE

Back at the steel mill Peter Grim inspected samples of the wire made from this new type steel, and a tube for a barrel of the new gun.

“In two days at the latest,” said the foreman, “we will be able to give you a finished product.”

“Ready for a test?” Peter’s voice rose.

“Sure,” said the foreman. “For a test to see how it stands the shock of an explosion.”

“Good!” said Peter. “It is only a step from there to the point where we can load the gun on a truck, drive to some secluded spot, set up wire nets, held in place by balloons, and give the gun a real test. Boy! That will be great! And you must be there, Jimmie!” he added. “You surely must! And will it give you a thrill!” At that, he did not know the half of it.

They were back at Ivan Peskanoski’s house in time for dinner. Ivan was a splendid host. Madame’s dinner was served with lavish abundance, and Kathy was as cheerful and smiling as ever. Still, Jimmie felt a trifle let down. Perhaps he was seeing things in contrast with the bright party of

yesterday. It might be that he was a little bit homesick, that he found himself longing for his place before the open fire,—for his father silently plotting a story for his paper, and for the click of his mother’s knitting needles. A steel mill town was all right in its way, but no town could ever replace his most beloved spot,—The Glen.

Little wonder that in such a mood he should think of the mountain boy, Joe Caps. He too was far from home and must endure the pangs of loneliness at times. Had he driven his crazy old truck and his motor-stopper back to the hills?

He wondered about that strange affair. Had it truly stopped those motors? Or was the whole thing an accident, or perhaps a frame-up?

After a time Jimmie excused himself to go out for a walk by himself beneath the light of glowing furnaces.

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He had not walked a block when a particularly bright light, low on the water close to the ore-loading dock, caught his attention. The thing was so strange, the light so bright, that he hurried back to call Peter out to see it.

“That sure is strange!” Peter exclaimed. “Must be half a mile away.”

“And see how bright it is!” Jimmie declared.

“We’ll have a look.” There was a strange new note in Peter’s voice.

Hurrying into the house for his heavy coat, Peter told his

friends they were going for a walk, then came out again.

“Still shining?” he asked.

“Still shining.”

“We’ll go down this way.” Peter took the lead. “Go half way on the sidewalk, then take to the dock.”

When they reached the dock they found it covered with a coating of snow. On this their footsteps made no sound.

Twice they stopped to listen. Jimmie thought he caught the sound of voices, “Like a radio turned low,” he told himself. Yet there should be nothing strange about this, some fisherman with a radio turned on in his boat. But that light? No fisherman would burn such a light.

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As they came close to the spot Peter signaled for silence. Jimmie caught a gleam of light. The boat must be almost under the pier. This had been an open winter. There was no ice.

At last, in absolute silence, Peter dropped on one knee at the edge of the dock. Ten seconds later, a bright light that painted a path of silver across the water, shone out.

From close at hand there came a low murmur, like someone talking softly to himself or into a microphone. This lasted for thirty seconds, then all was still again. Jimmie heard the tick-tick-tick, of his watch. From far away came the hoot of a train whistle.

And then there came a louder voice. It boomed out as if to fill all the air. Someone was talking loudly, insistently, at times, angrily. But Jimmie understood never a word—the man was speaking in some foreign language.

“Jimmie!” Peter’s whisper was impressive. “They are talking down a beam of light.”

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“From that tenth floor camera shop?” Jimmie whispered back.

“Without a doubt.”

The voice ceased speaking. Silence reigned again. Jimmie’s watch ticked louder than before.

“Jimmie,” Peter whispered, “We’re going to take them! We’ll drop right down on them.”

“Al-all right.” Jimmie’s whisper fairly stuck in his throat.

As the light shone out upon the water and the low monotone began once more, Peter crept to the edge of the dock and looked over. With one hand he beckoned to Jimmie. Ten seconds later they were both looking at two men sitting on the forward deck of a fishing boat. The covered portion of the boat was hidden beneath the dock. Between the two men was a large shiny reflector. “Down a beam of light!” Jimmie thought.

“All right, you guys!” Peter’s voice rang out sharp and clear. “Put up!”

At that instant a terrible thing happened. The dock was

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slippery. Peter's foot shot out from under him, his hand holding his automatic went up, and as he dropped on the deck, the gun fell with a thud on the boat's gunwale. Like a flash the two men were upon him.

Jimmie did not hesitate. Choosing his landing place well, he leaped downward. Scarcely had his feet touched the deck when he found himself struggling with a short stout man with a dark ugly face.

They went down in a heap. Rolling over and over they bumped the gunwale. Half freeing himself, the man struggled to his feet, but Jimmie seized him and threw him to the deck with a thud.

Struggling, panting, clawing, the man fought himself free, caught the boy about the waist, and would have thrown him into the stinging icy water had he not, just in time, caught at a heavy rail that ran around the boat. This sudden check to his mighty heave threw the man off his balance. Before he could regain his poise, Jimmie gripped his leg, gave a mighty shove, and with a great splash, the man himself fell into the water.

Jimmie was on his feet and would have gone after the fellow now swimming for the shadows, had not Peter gripped his arm.

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“No, son! It's too dangerous,” he warned. “You saved the day. I got my man. That will have to do for now.”

“Yes, and now ye got me, what ye goin' to do wid me?” the handcuffed man growled. “They hired my boat and me. So what?”

“Tell it to the Judge,” said Peter.

“There’s another man in the back, there,” said the prisoner.

“What?” Peter swung his flashlight about. “Why so there is! But he—he’s tied up and gagged. Great Scott! It’s that old fiddler, Rubens!”

While Jimmie held the flashlight, Peter loosened the old man’s bonds, and removed the gag. It seemed to Jimmie that Peter took an unnecessarily long time to complete this task and that he took an unusual interest in the manner in which the knots were tied.

“There you are,” Peter breathed at last. “I suppose you just happened along, Mr. Rubens, so they tied you up for safekeeping!”

“Yes, sir!” Rubens spoke slowly. He appeared greatly shaken. “That’s the way it was, sir. A horrible experience for a man of my age.”

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“Sure would be,” Peter agreed.

“They’d have done the same by you if it hadn’t been for this boy,” said the old man.

“And worse! Much worse,” said Peter.

“All right,” Peter said a moment later. “You, fellow. Get up. I’ll help you to the dock. Then we’ll find you a nice place to sleep for the night. If you’re a fisherman who rented your boat to these men, you’ll not fare badly. We don’t mean to deal

unjustly by anyone. You'll have to prove it, that's all."

The man was marched off to the mill and left in charge of a watchman. Workmen returned with Peter to the boat and helped carry the strange apparatus to the mill's laboratory.

Then Peter said: "That about finishes the night's business. Strange business, eh Jimmie?"

"I'll say!" was Jimmie's short reply. If the truth were known, he was just as much shaken up as old Rubens had appeared to be.

170

"Jimmie," Peter said as they at last walked back toward the Peskanoski home, "Rubens could have tied those knots himself."

Jimmie was still too nervous and excited to pay attention to this remark. Later he was to recall it and wonder what it had to do with anything at all.

Arrived at the home of their genial host, they found the family, including Rubens, seated about the kitchen table, prepared for a goodnight snack.

When coffee and cakes had been served all round the second time, the droop had left old Rubens' shoulders and there was a mischievous sparkle in his eyes.

"Come!" said Ivan. "One tune more before we go to bed."

Not one tune, but a dozen, each one better than the one that went before, poured from the old man's magic violin. Now it

was a wild dance from some forgotten land, now a slow and melodious song-poem from a great master, and now a light fanciful tune that made Jimmie think of the singing birds and budding flowers of Spring.

When at last it was over, and the old man wrapped his violin tenderly, as if it were a child, in a silken cloth, his shoulders drooped once more, and he sighed heavily, as he said: 171

“Ah, my dear, good friends. I am a man without a country. The land of my birth rejected me because of my race. So I have become a wanderer. Italy, Australia, India,—all have heard my violin. And now,—” He did not finish, but tucking his violin under his arm, he slouched up the stairs.

“Poor old man,” Jimmie murmured.

There was a peculiar light in Peter’s eyes as he watched the old man climb those stairs.

When Jimmie and Peter had climbed those same stairs half an hour later, they found old Rubens’ cot unoccupied. Had he left, or been given a room by himself? To these questions they were to have no answer. When they came down to breakfast next morning, the old man was not there.

Peter spent the early part of that day questioning the man he had seized, and arranging to have the apparatus taken from the boat, crated and shipped to his office. He knew enough of the language spoken over the beam of light to convince him that these men were talking about securing Government secrets and obtaining samples of the precious 172

steel. And that was all he wanted to know.

It was with a feeling of real pleasure that near noon that day, Jimmie climbed into Peter's car and saw the car headed for the big city.

"Chicago is a grand old city," he said to Peter.

"Yes, and not so old either," said Peter. "It's a friendly place where all the people who know you at all call you by your first name. I like that. I hate this 'Mister This, and Mister That.' Bah!"

As they entered the city, Jimmie thought of the dark-eyed girl in the camera shop. He needed one more film.

"Guess I'll go up to the camera shop and look around," he said to Peter.

"I thought you might," Peter chuckled. "Not a bad idea, either. Keep your eyes open."

When Jimmie entered the shop he was relieved to find the girl alone.

"Another film?" she asked.

"Sure. Same thing," Jimmie grinned.

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"Did you make good use of the other one?" She favored him with a strange look.

"Sure! Oh! Sure," was Jimmie's quick reply. "Took a picture

of a hand with one of them. That was Christmas Eve.”

“A hand?” Was she surprised, or did she merely pretend to be? Jimmie could not tell.

“I—I’ll get you the film.” She stepped across the room to open the door to the middle cabinet. “Oh! Oh! No!” she breathed. “They are not there. We—we’ve been changing things about a bit.”

“I’ll say you have!” The words were on Jimmie’s lips, but he did not speak them. The talking-down-a-beam-of-light apparatus was gone. Had she opened the door to tell him that? If so, why?

“Here’s the film,” she said a moment later. “That will be one-fifty, plus the tax.”

Just then the big man entered the room. If looks could kill, the look he gave Jimmie would have put him out of the way. He was glad enough to make his escape.

CHAPTER XXI

A STARTLING RESEMBLANCE

He was glad enough, later in the day, to tuck his feet into slippers, and hide himself in a big old easy chair. Home surely was a grand spot.

When on an errand for his mother, he met Billy Nixon, a school friend, and Billy said:

“Hello, Jimmie! How you been spendin’ the vacation?”—his only reply was:

“Oh, just messing around with some friends in Chicago.”

“Messing around is right,” he thought, as he laughed to himself later.

On his return he looked into the garage. Joe Caps’ battered truck and the motor-stopper were still there. He was glad of that. He wanted to know more about that motor-stopper. But where was Joe? Neither his father nor mother could tell him.

Late the next afternoon, after a good long rest, he headed again for Chicago. “This time, for a good feed and a few hours of fun,” he told himself. Colonel Farwell was throwing a large party at the Wanderers’ Club and had given

him a cordial invitation to attend. He would not have missed it for the world. There was sure to be a marvelous feed, all sorts of world travelers would be there, including a very famous musician who would play the violin. Also, he hoped Colonel Farwell would relate some of his experiences in the great World War.

It was a notable gathering into which Jimmie walked. Gray-haired men, with badges of honor pinned to their coats, men who had fought their last battle, were there. Younger men, too,—tall, thin, with faces seamed and tanned, who had just returned from some tropical adventure.

“Wanderers’ Club,” Jimmie said as Colonel Farwell gripped his hand. “This will be my Club when I am older.”

“Ah, yes!” the Colonel exclaimed heartily, “we shall be proud to have you. We are happy to have you with us tonight. Peter Grim has been telling me about your recent exploits.”

“Nothing much,” Jimmie replied, modestly. “But just you wait!”

176

“Ah, yes!” The Colonel’s blue eyes gleamed in reminiscence. “The zero hour! It’s glorious to be young, Jimmie. Don’t ever forget that. But where is Peter?”

“Something came up at the last minute. He won’t be able to come.”

“Too bad. I am,—” The Colonel broke off to exclaim, “But here’s the Maestro!”

Then it was that Jimmie received a shock. The man who stepped forward with a matchless violin case of some strange foreign leather under his arm, bore a striking resemblance to the ragged beggar, old Rubens.

“But he’s very different, after all,” the boy told himself. This was true. There was the same long, curved nose. But Rubens’ nose was broad, while this man’s was thin. Rubens’ hair was thin and straggly. Half his teeth were missing. He stooped as he walked. And his violin case! Such a wreck as it was. The Maestro stood erect, his hair was glossy, his teeth were gleaming white as he smiled.

“Only my imagination,” Jimmie told himself. “And yet,
_____”

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During the long meal Jimmie sat between a retired army Major and a young man who had just returned from the jungles of Borneo. The young man related some of his hair-raising experiences, and was in turn interested and amused by Jimmie’s story of his encounters with the Bubble Man.

“Keep it up,” the young explorer encouraged. “You’ll be one of us yet. That is,” he added in a low voice, “if one of those playful friends of yours doesn’t stick a knife in your heart. Really, I am beginning to think the jungles are tame beside some of our great American cities.”

When the meal was over, there were speeches by members who had recently returned from the wilds. Many jokes were told, and a good time enjoyed by all.

And then, as a grand climax, everyone settled back in his seat

to give ear to glorious music masterfully played. A light seemed to gleam in the great maestro's eyes as he lifted his violin into position, and drew the bow across the strings in one long, tremulous musical sigh.

After that he began to play, and as on the occasions of Rubens' playing, Jimmie was lost to all but the strains of the music. And all the time he was thinking, "Is he better than old Rubens?" He could not be sure. In his breast was something like a fierce loyalty to the ragged old man that warped his judgment. And yet,—

178

This man was gayer, more daring, surer of himself, but the low, melodious, half-sad notes that came from Rubens' violin were not there.

"It is as if this man hurled defiance at the world," the boy told himself. "As if he were saying,—'I defy you to find one who is greater than I.'"

When the last encore had been played and the great master of the violin had received deserved praise from many who were great in their own way, and when in the wee small hours, the throng had departed, Jimmie found himself settled in a big chair, listening as two rumbling voices spoke of the past—Colonel Farwell and the great violinist were talking.

"Ah, yes. Speaking of spies," the Colonel said. "The world has never known braver, more daring spies than were produced during the World War."

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"Yes—yes. I have known many personally," the violinist declared. "Personally. I have played in every capital of

Europe. I,——”

“Yes,—yes,” the Colonel broke in. “I dare say. But our Americans. None were braver than they. To fly over the lines at dawn, to drop a spy behind the lines, to fly away, and hours later return for the spy. That took real courage.

“And the spy who was left behind, how often he was captured, or in attempting to make his way across the lines alone, was done to death.”

“Americans?” There was a strange light in the musician’s eyes. “Yes, I do remember some.” At that moment a haunted look came into the great one’s eyes. It was like a flash back into a dark past, gone in an instant, but it did not escape Jimmie’s sharp eyes.

“Women.” Colonel Farwell’s voice sounded low and melodious. “Those were the ones. Such spies as they were. French and Belgian women, mere girls. How passionate was their love of country. There was one, I remember her well, Louise de Bettignies.”

180

“Louise de Bettignies!” The violinist half rose from his chair. There was a strange look in his eyes. Other words were at the tip of his tongue. They were not spoken. “Ah, yes,” he sighed, and settled back in his chair. “Many women were spies.”

“But this Louise,” the Colonel insisted. “She was truly remarkable. Again and again she crossed the line with priceless information. She could not swim, but she could paddle across a stream lying on a bread board. She employed a map-maker, himself a spy, to write two thousand words with

invisible ink on invisible paper, so small she pasted it to the lens of her spectacles and carried it safely across the lines. Ah, yes, she was clever indeed.

“But alas, poor child who loved her country more than life,—she was caught.”

181

“Yes,” the violinist murmured hoarsely, “caught, but not shot.”

“What? You know that?” The Colonel stared.

“One learns many things,” the other man replied solemnly. “As for myself, I am a man without a country. (Where had Jimmie heard those words before?) I have played before kings.” The man raised his head proudly. “Kings and soldiers. Thousands and thousands of soldiers. I can see them still. And how they applauded! Ah, yes,” he settled back. “War, it brings out the best and the worst—music and death.”

“But spies,” the Colonel continued after a moment, “there were clever ones on the other side. There was the lady called ‘Mademoiselle le Docteur.’ She——”

“Yes! Yes!” The musician leaned forward. “I can see her eyes still. How they shone! They were living fire. Hypnotic!”

“What? You knew that woman?” The Colonel was on his feet.

182

“In Europe one comes to know many strange persons.” The great violinist seemed to cringe. At that instant he looked so much like Rubens that Jimmie was startled.

The man's violin lay in its open case beside the boy. Drawing a blue indelible pencil from his pocket, he made a short mark in an obscure spot on the violin. Should he see it again, he would surely know it.

"Ah, yes," the Colonel was saying. "In Europe one does meet strange people. And I am told that Mademoiselle le Docteur, the most daring, relentless, and perhaps the most heartless spy ever known, still lives."

"Still lives in great obscurity," the musician confirmed. "But now," he put his hand on his violin, "it is high time that old birds were on their roosts. I must thank you for a glorious occasion."

"And here," said the Colonel, "is a memento of the occasion." It was, as Jimmie saw, a check for one hundred dollars.

"Ah, yes. Money." The musician thrust the money into his pocket. "That is the least of our considerations. Still, we must eat."

183

"A brave gesture," Jimmie thought, and the next instant, wondered why he thought it.

As he rode home on the electric, late as it was, Jimmie found his head buzzing with strange, wild thoughts. In his imagination, the faces of old Rubens and the Maestro of this night seemed to blend into one, then to drift miles apart. Their lives had been much alike, and yet,—it was strange.

Jimmie recalled the battle on that boat's deck in the dark. The man who escaped, he believed, was the one who had bid

against him at the auction. “One thing’s sure,” he thought. “They’ll not talk down a beam of light. We’ve got possession of one end of the apparatus.”

He wondered vaguely where the other end was, and why the dark-eyed girl had opened that cabinet. He felt sure that she had done it on purpose. Buy why? Was she one of the spy band? It did not seem possible. And still,—there were so many ragged ends to all these mysteries.

184

One thought,—or was it just a feeling—bore down upon him heavily. This was, that they were moving rapidly toward something big and terrible. These spies were desperate men. If this were not so, they would not have chosen so hazardous an occupation. Time and again their purposes had been thwarted. And by whom? By Peter Grim and by him.

By the time he reached home, he had worked himself into a cold sweat. “How stupid of me!” he thought. “Things have been going too fast. I’ll get a real night’s sleep.”

He did just that. After sleeping until ten o’clock in the morning, he sat for an hour in a snug corner of the kitchen, munching buttered toast and watching starlings and sparrows fighting over bread crusts in the back yard.

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CHAPTER XXII

NO SPIES TONIGHT

In early afternoon he took the train back to the city. This whole spy affair had gotten under his skin. He could not leave it alone.

He spent an hour or two in the office of his father's newspaper, talking to John Nightingale.

"It's going to be a grand story when it really breaks," John said to him. "I know I can trust you to let me in on the ground floor."

"It will be a scoop for you."

"And perhaps a shovel for you, Jimmie," John laughed nervously.

"Why—what——"

"Just a joke, old son," said John. "Some six feet of sod for you if those spies get you. But you won't let them. Remember this, old son." John was never more in earnest.

"Right now you are dealing with the most dangerous men you have ever tackled. Be on your guard. Don't take the lead. Leave that to Peter Grim. Watch your step. And here's luck to

you.”

As Jimmie left the office to stroll for half a block along the river, the wind seemed more bleak, and the river darker, more forbidding than he had ever known them to be.

“Have to snap out of it,” he told himself, going through the motions of skipping a rope. “Can’t let things get me down.”

He visited Peter Grim’s office. Peter told him that, barring unforeseen hindrances, he and certain Army officers were to haul the new anti-aircraft gun to a secluded spot and test it out.

“That will be a large moment.” Peter’s voice imparted a thrill. “A very large moment, indeed. And I want you to be one of the party.”

“That—ah—that is grand of you!” Jimmie stammered.

“Only justice,” said Peter. “You’ve done a lot to make it possible. I only hope,—” He did not finish.

“Peter,” said Jimmie, “there’s something I want to tell you about. There’s a motor-stopper in our garage.”

187

“A motor-stopper!” Peter stared as if he thought the boy had lost his senses.

“I knew you wouldn’t believe it,” Jimmie grinned. “I don’t more than half believe it myself, and I’ve seen it tried, too.”

“Tell me about it.” Peter settled back in his chair.

Jimmie did tell him about it, told him all he knew.

“That,” said Peter, “is about the strangest thing I ever heard of.

“Tell you what!” he exploded. “If you can get hold of this—what’s his name——”

“Squirrelhead, Joe Caps.”

“Yes—it would be ‘Squirrelhead’!” Peter laughed. “What I was going to suggest was that you bring him with you when we go to try out that gun. Bring this—er—motor-stopper. If there’s something to it—but there! Of course there isn’t! Man! There just couldn’t be! But at least it might provide a little comic relief. Bring him along, will you?”

“Oh, sure,” Jimmie agreed. “I’m sure I know where to find him.”

188

“Comic relief,” the boy thought, as once again he reached the street. “That’s what we all need right now,—a big lot of comic relief.”

Had he but known it, they were to need it badly before that night’s work was done.

After that, for two hours Jimmie wandered about the Loop, looking into faces. Sooner or later he was sure to see one of those spies, and then,——

Look as he might, he saw only worried faces of business men, tired faces of toilers homeward bound from their work, or

young, joyous faces going in search of pleasure.

“No spies tonight,” he thought, as darkness began to fall.

Before him was a Sister of Mercy. She was garbed all in black. A large bonnet hid her face. For all that, he fancied he saw a pair of large black eyes.

And then a strange thing happened. A hand on which two rings showed, one set in red, one blue, stole from the black folds, pressed a square of paper into his hand. Then the black-garbed figure passed rapidly on.

189

“What the——”

He hastened to a spot of light, unfolded the paper with trembling hands, then read, with ever increasing excitement:

“A time bomb has been placed in the Federal laboratory. It is set to go off at ten o’clock. Tell Peter Grim.” The note was not signed. It did not need to be. Jimmie knew whose hand had passed it to him. He had not been wrong about the large black eyes beneath that bonnet.

“Tell Peter Grim!” he hissed as he hurried down the street.

Fifteen minutes later, Peter Grim’s roadster sped along the outer drive. Peter was at the wheel, with Jimmie at his side.

Not a word was spoken as that matchless car ate up the miles. Jimmie’s mind was working, nevertheless. Before leaving, Peter had phoned the watchman. They would be searching. But would they find the bomb? And if they did not? Jimmie

shuddered.

“There’re enough explosives in that place at this moment to blow up a city,” Peter had said. “We can’t possibly get them all out in time. We’ve just got to get hold of that time bomb. The dogs! The dirty dogs! We’ve been stopping them. They hate us. This is their answer.”

190

Jimmie thought of the little family next door to the laboratory, that fine, clean, smiling mother, and the cute kid. They would be taken away safely. But their home! All that they loved and had worked so hard for, their prize possessions, baby pictures, toys,—all that would go flying into bits. It was unthinkable. Somehow this must be stopped.

Thinking more soberly, he tried to figure out where the time bomb might be placed. In the basement! To be sure, if at all possible. But could they gain entrance? It did not seem probable,—the place was guarded day and night. The roof was low. To lean a short ladder against the building and place the bomb up there would be easy. But would the compact of that bomb set off the explosives in the basement of the building? Of course, dynamite goes down as well as up. And yet,——

The foundation of the building was cement—rather thin poured cement,—he had noted that. A bomb set against this wall would crash it in with enough force to set off other explosives.

191

Having arrived at this conclusion, he decided that whatever others did, he would search for signs outside the building.

But here they were, at the little house next to the Lab. Peter leaped out, pounded on the door, then exclaimed as a man in smoking jacket and slippers appeared: “Dave, the Laboratory has been mined. It goes up at ten, unless we can stop it. Get that wife and kid of yours out quick. Take my car and drive them to a place of safety. Then come back and wait half a mile away, in my car.”

The man said never a word. Turning, he dashed into the house. Before they were out of hearing, Jimmie heard the cry of a child wakened from her sleep.

“We haven’t found it, Mr. Grim,” a guard whose face appeared ashy white in the night, said as they arrived.

192

“We’ve got more than an hour,” said Peter. “We’ll find it. We’ve just got to do it, that’s all!” But, would they?

Peter sprang from the car and raced inside. Drawing his flashlight, Jimmie began walking slowly around the building. He studied every inch of ground as he went, but found neither a sign of disturbed soil nor a footprint in the soft earth close to the building. Two feet from the building was lawn—a strong, tough sod—where marks would not show. The snow of two nights before was melted away.

Someone came out with a short ladder and climbed to the roof. Five minutes later he went away, muttering:

“Nothing there!”

The minutes were passing. In his mind Jimmie was seeing a wall clock with a second hand that moved slowly round and

round.

“Relentless time,” he muttered.

For a space of seconds his mind went into a tailspin. What if that time bomb went off prematurely? Scarcely could he prevent his feet from carrying him speeding down the road.

193

“Got to get a grip,” he muttered. “Got to——”

He stopped suddenly. His eyes had caught something. There had been a light rain the night before. There were no eaves or troughs on the building. Rainwater pouring off the roof had cut an inch-deep gutter in the soft earth. At one place, some three feet in length, it was not as deep as in other places.

“Ground may have been disturbed, then put back.” His heart skipped a beat.

Dropping on his knees, he put his ear to the ground. Did he hear the dull tick—tick—of a clock? He couldn’t be sure. This was no time for wondering. Action. That was what was needed.

“Peter!” he shouted. “Oh Peter!”

“Coming. What is it?” came booming back.

“Bring a—a spade. Anything that will dig.” He began pawing at the earth with his hands. A half minute later, a furnace shovel replaced his hands at the digging.

“Careful!” Peter warned. “Don’t strike it with the shovel,—if it’s there,” he added.

Thirty seconds of digging, and Jimmie said, “Peter, you listen there.”

Peter listened. Then, springing to his feet, he gripped the boy’s arm. “Jimmie! You’re a wonder! You’ve got it!”

He was right. One minute more and a box was being lifted from the hole, battery wires torn loose, an alarm clock stowed in Peter’s car pocket, and a pile of dynamite sticks was carried far out into the open field to be buried once more.

“How’d you find it?” Peter asked.

“Just my luck, I guess,” was Jimmie’s reply.

“We’ll let that stand for the present,” said Peter. “Get out that little camera of yours. The dynamite was wrapped in this paper. It’s some foreign paper. In a case like this, every detail counts. We’ll photograph everything, then file the prints away. But as an added precaution, just in case,—since it is now a quarter to ten, we’ll lock up and go down the road to my car.”

“My car is over there,” said one of the guards. There was great relief in his voice. “Just you pile in and I’ll take you to your own car in a jiffy.”

“Jimmie,” said Peter, after the pictures had been taken and they had climbed back into their car. “There was an old man once who worked out some sort of theory that all life on this

earth started with a single living cell, and that over millions of years, we worked our way up through frogs and fishes, cats, dogs, pigs and monkeys, to where we are now,—supposedly intelligent men and women.

“But, Jimmie,” his voice was mellow, “I think the old fellow got the wrong end to. I think that in the past men were getting along all right living in small communities, being kind to each other, and all that.

“But now look!” He leaned forward. “Look what nearly happened tonight. If it hadn’t been for that note!”

“And the girl with the big black eyes,” said Jimmie.

“Jimmie, who was that girl?” Peter demanded, forgetting his sermon for the minute.

“She was dressed like a nun,” said Jimmie. “But I have a hunch she works in that tenth floor camera shop.”

196

“I’d sure like to meet her.”

“Something tells me you are going to,” said Jimmie.

“But let me finish,” said Peter. “I think that old man was all wrong. Look at us now. Every nation making things to destroy the people of other nations. Airplanes, cannon, poison gas. And not one of them daring to stop. Don’t you see, Jimmie,” he laughed quietly, “we were getting along splendidly, but now we’re turning from men to monkeys, every mother’s son of us!”

“It does begin to look that way,” Jimmie agreed soberly.

“Tomorrow morning,” said Peter, “we are to move part of the explosives out to the spot where the new gun is to have its tryout. The rest will be moved to a secret hide-out. Then our little family next door may move back.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” said Jimmie.

“Do you know, Jimmie,” said Peter, “it is strange how important little things are and small people sometimes seem to count for so much. Here we are, working on inventions that may mean the rise or fall of a great nation, and yet we are greatly interested in one small family, a father, mother, and one cute kid.”

197

“Yes,” said Jimmie, “that’s the way it is, and I’m glad. What’s the good of asking the reason why?”

“Well!” Peter breathed a short time later. “Looks like our night’s work was over. I’ll tell the guards to patrol the place in their car all night. Then we’ll head back for the city.”

Before they parted in the city some little time later, Peter handed Jimmie a map.

“X marks the spot,” he whispered. “Guard this map with your life. We don’t want any spies about tomorrow. You can figure the place out by your road map. Meet us there at 3:00 P.M. And bring that mountain boy with the motor-stopper along. I want a look at that thing. See you tomorrow. Today, too!”

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CHAPTER XXIII

SQUIRRELHEAD STOPS A MOTOR

It was an interesting group that gathered in an obscure spot the next day. The scene was a small clearing at the center of a scrub oak forest. Peter was there, also Tom Howe and John Nightingale. There were six high ranking army officers in cap and braid.

The gun was there. Its barrel was so long that it was necessary to haul it, like a long telephone pole, on a truck and trailer. They were setting it up when Jimmie and Joe Caps, in Joe's rattly old truck, arrived. The officers looked at the truck and smiled to one another, but made no comment.

"That gun reminds me of the long-range one that threw shells into Paris," said Colonel Farwell.

"Why must the barrel be so long?" Jimmie asked.

"The longer you can confine the gas behind the projectile in the gun, the greater will be the force behind it and the further it will go."

199

"Look!" exclaimed Joe Caps. "There go the balloons!"

And up they went. Four small captive balloons, each fastened

to one corner of a wire screen, were rising slowly in the air.

“They’ll be allowed to go up just so far,” the Colonel explained. “Then we’ll take three shots at the screen. Watching it with a glass, our officers will note the general effect. After that, if conditions are satisfactory, the balloons will be allowed to go higher. This will be repeated until we have found the maximum firing height of our new anti-aircraft gun. Jimmie!” he exclaimed, “this is a mighty important day in our lives.”

“It will be if that gun bursts,” said Jimmie.

“Oh, it won’t do that, Jimmie. It was tested for maximum strain before it left the steel mill. It’s a great gun. And our country will not soon forget that you saved us the chagrin that would have followed the losing of those plans to our enemies.”

“Just luck,” said Jimmie, with a faintly happy smile.

200

“Look,” said Joe Caps. “What’s that airplane doing up there?”

“Where? Where?” came in a chorus.

Joe pointed, but for a time only his hawk-like eyes could pick out the silvery speck against the sky.

“Colonel Farwell,” said one of the Officers, “was an airplane from the army base detailed to observe this test?”

“No such orders were given.”

“Then——”

Who knew the answer? Should they go on with the test?

“Shall we proceed?”

“Sure! Go ahead,” said Peter Grim. “If they are a bunch of spies and they drop too low, we’ll present them with a sample shell right in their fuselage. Then we’ll be jolly well rid of them.”

Jimmie watched the firing of those first three shots with interest. The second round was less exciting, and the third pretty much the same old thing.

“It’s a marvelous performance.” The Colonel rubbed his hands in high glee. “That gun has an almost limitless range. Now let them attack Chicago! We’ll bring them down like blackbirds. We,——”

201

He stopped abruptly to gaze skyward. “That plane,” he muttered. “It’s circling, and it has dropped lower. Damn them!” he swore softly. “I wonder who they think they are!”

From that time on, Jimmie lost all interest in the new gun. He had eyes only for that circling plane. At each wide circle, like a hawk half afraid of a trap but longing for a tender young rabbit, it sank a little lower.

“Peter!” the Colonel shouted in exasperation at last. “Those people are exceeding their rights. Let them have a shell close to their tail!”

“I am afraid, sir,” Peter hesitated, “that this gun would reach them. Its possibilities seem almost limitless. And after all, sir, they may be only some idly curious citizens.”

“We’re a parcel of fools, we Americans!” the Colonel grumbled. “Risk anything for a thrill!”

“Begging your pardon, sir, would you all mind leavin’ me have a try at them varmints?” It was Squirrelhead Joe Caps who spoke.

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“With this gun?” the Colonel stared. “Why! Good Grief! No, son! You might hit them!”

“Not with that thar gun,” Squirrelhead drawled. “Youall don’t know ’bout my motor-stopper, I reckon. Hit’ll stop them varmints, sure’s dogwood blooms in the spring hit will, sir. That thar contraption of mine hit is the most motor-stoppin’ est thing you all most ever seed.”

“What does he mean?” The Colonel seemed slightly dazed.

“Let him try it,” Peter grinned. “Won’t do any harm.”

So with the distant drone of a powerful motor in his ears as the plane circled still lower, Squirrelhead went solemnly about the task of aiming his motor-stopper at the offending plane, then, touching the buttons and levers that set it humming, they waited.

Ten seconds passed. Nothing happened. Twenty. Nothing. Thirty. A wrinkle formed on Squirrelhead’s brow.

“Nigh—nigh too far,” he muttered.

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Just then the airplane’s motor skipped, gave a great cough, thundered louder than ever, then stopped dead. The silence that followed was the most complete Jimmie had ever known. Great army officers, accustomed to all manner of shock and destruction, watched open-mouthed as the powerless plane came dropping in a wide spiral toward the earth.

“Back!” the Colonel shouted suddenly. “This’ll land in this narrow clearing! They may mow us down.”

There was a rush for the nearby timber. They reached it just as the plane bumped to a landing. It missed hitting the mounted anti-aircraft gun by a narrow margin, taxied half way across the clearing, then came to a stop.

A full half-minute passed and no one left the plane.

“Dangerous situation,” the Colonel rumbled. “They’re spies right enough. Otherwise they’d be out here roaring about things in general. Who of you have your side-arms?”

Not a man spoke.

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“Good God!” the Colonel exploded. “No arms?”

“You leave them varmints to me.” Once again it was Squirrelhead who spoke. “I’m totin’ a pistol-gun an’, not meanin’ to boast, I’m the best pistol-gun-shootin’ est feller that ever wet his feet in Poundin’ Mill Creek!”

Before anyone could say “Yes,” or “No,” he advanced

crouching low like a cat, toward the plane.

“Now then, you varmints.” His voice was low but had strange carrying power. “Come outa thar afore I shoot you all like skunks in a rotten log.”

There came no answer. The door to the plane’s cabin remained closed.

Squirrelhead moved straight on, but Jimmie knew that the instant a shot was fired, he would be flat behind a tree trunk.

“No-ow!” the mountain boy hissed. “I’m a speakin’ to you.”

Jimmie saw a white stone the size of an egg directly before Squirrelhead. Lifting the long, blue-barreled gun, the mountain boy fired one shot. The white stone leaped high in the air.

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“No-ow!” he hissed once again.

At that a large man, hands held high, fairly tumbled from the plane. He was followed at once by a tall Spanish type of man, a short, dark-faced fellow, and to the great astonishment of half of the party, old Rubens, the mendicant violinist.

When the prisoners had been disarmed, Squirrelhead found himself in possession of three automatics and two dangerous-looking knives. After that, with orders from no one, he ranged them up on a log, and sat down on a stump in front of them.

“There’s a boy I want for my bodyguard in the next war,” said a young major.

“Shall we allow them to see the remainder of the tests?”
Colonel Farwell said to Peter Grim.

“Why not?” Peter grinned broadly. “We want the rest of the world to know what we’ve got. Perhaps then they’ll leave us alone. And that is all we ask.

“Besides,” he added, with grim satisfaction, “those fellows won’t see the outside of prison walls for ten years to come. Thanks to Jimmie’s candid camera and Squirrelhead’s motor-stopper, we’ve got all we need to put them away for a good long stretch.”

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“But old Rubens!” Jimmie could scarcely believe his eyes.

“The most dangerous man of them all,” said the Colonel. “I found out all the facts about him only yesterday. And yes, Jimmie, he was the Maestro of our party. He’s a great musician and a great rascal.”

“And I can’t help but love him still,” Jimmie thought to himself in some amazement.

The test was soon completed. Then it was that Colonel Farwell turned to Squirrelhead Joe Caps. “Joe,” he said, “can you do that most any time?”

“Do which?” the boy stared.

“Stop a motor.”

“Certain,” said Joe. “Jest any time at all, providin’ it ain’t more ’n half a mile off.”

“How’d you come by that thing?” There was a touch of awe in the Colonel’s voice.

“Jest naturally come by it, I reckon.”

“How?”

“Experimentin’ an’ hit jest naturally popped out at me. An’ I said: ‘Joe, old son, you got somethin’ thar’.” Joe became excited. “So I driv up to Chicago. You see it’s this a way.” He leaned forward. “My pappy, he’s a coal miner down on Poundin’ Mill Creek. He’s a gittin’ mighty nigh old, you might say, an’ I thought it’d be right smart keen if’n I could git him a little farm on the fur side of Big Black Mountain. If’n now I could git a thousand dollars——”

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“A thousand dollars!” the Colonel exploded. “Those men,” he nodded toward the four sitting on a log, “they’d give you a cool million. And so your country will do right handsomely by you.”

“That,” said Squirrelhead, “will be plum extraordinary swell.”

“The most important thing just now,” said Peter Grim, “is to get this motor-stopper in our big vault. After that we can study it at our leisure.”

“Look!” Jimmie exclaimed. “Old Rubens has toppled over!”

It was true. The haggard old man had fallen off the log. They were to hurry him away to a hospital where six hours later he was to die of a heart attack. As if to do penance for his sins, they were to find his coat sewed full of hundred

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dollar bills, and a last Will, leaving these and his priceless violin to an orphanage for refugees of his own race.

“Poor old Rubens!” Jimmie thought. “If only he had had a country that would own him as a son, how different his life might have been!”

“Peter,” said Jimmie, thinking back, “Old Rubens must have been with the Spaniard when he was talking over a beam of light from that fishing boat and when he thought he was going to be captured, he must have tied himself up.”

“That’s the way I figure it,” Peter agreed.

“Peter,” there was a note of anxiety in Jimmie’s voice, “the Peskanoski’s weren’t in on this, were they?”

“Oh! No, Jimmie,” Peter seemed shocked at the suggestion, “Rubens fooled them, just as he has others all over the world. It must be strange to be an international spy, but it’s all over with him now.

“Jimmie,” said Peter, when they were headed for the city, “I’ll have to see that these prisoners are put behind bars. I want you to take two of my men and go to the tenth floor camera shop. I’ve felt for some time that the place might be run by this gang as a blind. Now I know it.”

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“I’m sure of it,” Jimmie agreed. “That big man who got out of the plane first is the fellow who ran the shop.”

“He’s the man who barked at you when you opened that cabinet,” Peter added with a laugh.

“Yes and he’s the man who locked me in that place the night before Christmas,” said Jimmie. “He wore a false beard. It must have been very cleverly made. But, Peter,” he exclaimed, “what about that little Oriental? He wasn’t in the plane.”

“We don’t want him very bad,” was Peter’s reply. “He is only one of the little fellows, besides, we know where he is working and can pick him up any time.

“What I want you to do,” Peter went on, “is to get over to that camera shop and see that nothing is removed before the Colonel and I get there. There may be some mighty important papers hidden there.”

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“Trust me,” said Jimmie.

It was with a strange feeling that Jimmie, with two husky Federal men at his back, came near to the door of that camera shop. Would the dark-eyed girl be there? And, if she were?

“I wonder if you would mind allowing me to go in alone at first,” he said to the men. “There is but one door and no windows from which one may leave. I—I won’t be long.”

“Sure,—Oh! sure son,” the leader of the pair agreed.

The girl was there right enough. She was standing looking down at the street when he entered. He opened the door so softly, she did not hear him. When, at last she became conscious of his presence, she started and exclaimed:

“Oh!”

“Nervous?” Jimmie asked with a smile that was hard to manage. She was, he noticed, wearing two rings. He was ready to swear they were the same he had seen and photographed the night before Christmas. With sudden decision, he took a picture from his pocket. It was an enlargement of that picture of a hand. Without a word, he placed it beside her hand that, for the moment, rested on a show-case.

“Oh!” she breathed. “Where did that come from?”

“I took it Christmas Eve,” said Jimmie, finding it difficult to speak quietly. “That same hand reached out from beneath a black gown and handed me a note which saved the laboratory and the lives of a whole family, a father, mother and a kid. I wonder why.”

“He isn’t any relation to me, that big man who runs this shop,” the girl said in a strange, tight voice, “Not really. I come from the same country, that is all. He was my father’s friend in Europe, before he—he became what he is. My father is now dead. I am an orphan. When he came to America, he offered me a job here. I needed it badly. He said it was a camera shop. It is not. It is a—a den for spies. This, America, is my country. When I discovered what they were doing, I didn’t know how to act. So when I found out things they were going to do I tried to stop them. You see I—needed work. But now—now I—I’m through.” She turned her head quickly but Jimmie understood.

“Yes,” said Jimmie. “You are through, more through than you think. These men were captured two hours

ago.”

“Al—all of them?” The emotions that flashed across the girl’s face, were strange to see. Fear, hope, joy, sorrow, despair were all written there.

“All but the little Oriental,” said Jimmie. “Even old Rubens, whom I only half-suspected. Poor old Rubens. He had a heart attack. I am afraid he is done for.”

“It is best,” the girl’s face reflected the relief in Jimmie’s own. “He could play the violin in such a heavenly manner. It was truly sad. But some people can’t be good, all the time, not even when they try.

“But,” a sudden tempest of emotion seemed to come upon her, “what is to become of me?” She hid her face.

“Nothing bad,” said Jimmie. “You did nothing wrong and you have served our country well. If there are illegal papers, maps and such things hidden here, it is your duty to turn them over to the Federal men.”

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“They are here.” The girl stepped across the room to a secret panel.

“All right,” said Jimmie, opening the door and motioning to the men, “come on in.”

* * * * *

“Well, Jimmie,” said Peter when, two hours later, in this very shop, with the dark-eyed Betty still there, he faced the boy

once more, “you have done a fine job. We’ve got enough evidence here,” he nodded at a great basket of papers and maps, “to send them all down for a long stretch. What shall be your reward?”

“Nothing,” said Jimmie. “Just nothing at all, except,” he blushed, “Betty here is out of a job. She needs one. She has helped you as willingly as I. What about it?”

“She gets a swell job with the service,” Peter replied instantly. “And you, Jimmie,” he laughed teasingly, “may have the right to call at our office, just any time at all, to talk with Betty.

“But, Jimmie,” he added, “that’s not enough. You shall 214 have more. That talk-down-a-beam-of-light thing.” He nodded at the mechanism that had been dragged from its place of hiding. “It looks interesting.”

“I am sure of it,” said Jimmie.

“Then, when the trial of those men is over, it shall be yours, and that unusual camera as well.”

“Thank—ah thanks,” stammered Jimmie, “That will be keen! And I—I’ll use them to catch some more spies.”

Would he? That remained to be seen.

THE END



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- Copyright notice provided as in the original—this e-text is public domain in the country of publication.
- In the text versions, delimited italics text in underscores (the HTML version reproduces the font form of the printed book.)
- Silently corrected palpable typos; left non-standard spellings and dialect unchanged.

[The end of *Caught by the Camera* by Roy J. Snell (as David O'Hara)]