

HIS GREAT ADVENTURE*

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SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

THE story opens in New York, where Edgar Brainard, an unsuccessful young playwright, nearly at the end of his resources, happens to pass a man who has fallen in a fit on the street. He befriends the sufferer, and takes him to his own room, which is close by, to await an ambulance. While waiting, though he is seemingly near death, the sick man rallies his powers sufficiently to entrust Brainard with a strange commission. Giving him a power of attorney, which he signs "H. Krutzmacht," he bids the young man go to his office in San Francisco, empty out his safe, and take the contents to Berlin.

"Give it all to Melody," he concludes, but here his strength fails, and who or what Melody is Brainard cannot guess.

Using money from the sick man's wallet, Brainard goes to San Francisco. He learns that Krutzmacht was a well-known figure in finance, and had been engaged in a bitter war with rival interests. The envoy finds his office, and although Krutzmacht's stenographer tries to prevent it, he packs the contents of the safe in a trunk and a valise, with which he hurries to the ferry for Oakland. From a newspaperman who assists him, he learns that Krutzmacht has died in the New York hospital to which he was taken.

VI

AT the Oakland station there was a nervous ten minutes for Brainard while the overland passengers and their luggage were being transferred from the ferry to the train. He sat in his seat, furtively scanning each person that entered the car, expecting momentarily to feel the touch of a man's hand upon his shoulder. The stenographer had already had nearly thirty minutes in which to start the battery of her revenge.

By the time the train had pulled out of the ferry-shed, Brainard had already made up his mind to drop off at the first stop, even at the sacrifice of the little trunk, which was checked through to Chicago, and which now lay under a pyramid of tourist luggage at the other end of the long train. He could find it later.

While he was still debating with himself, the train slowed up, and he heard some one say:

"It's the Santa Fe crossing."

It came to Brainard in a flash that he might be able to catch the south-bound

limited on the Santa Fe and go eastward through Arizona and New Mexico.

He seized his heavy bag, and rushed for the door. Fortunately there was no one on the platform of his car. As he opened the vestibule, and pitched out his bag, the train began to move forward. He jumped into the darkness, and landed, unharmed, on top of his bag.

After the long train had passed him, he crawled to the track and made his way down to the other line, his heart quite light. No one, he thought, had observed his hasty departure, or even knew that he had been aboard the train.

When Brainard awoke the next morning, the Santa Fe train was entering the Mohave Desert. He lay for some time in his berth, collecting himself. It was intensely hot in the little coop of the Pullman berth. The heat reflected from the desert sands was blinding, and he drew down the curtain. When he stretched himself, his feet touched the heavy bag at the bottom of the berth.

With a start, his adventure came over him. What was he going to do now?

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Hitherto he had been carried on a wave of events that demanded instant action, and he had not bothered himself with the future. Even when the reporter had given him the news of Krutzmacht's death in the hospital, he had hesitated only for a moment, although he realized that the flimsy power of attorney, which had given him his sole right to loot the old man's safe, had lost its force the instant its maker had ceased to breathe. After that he was, as the stenographer had said over the telephone, a mere thief. Nevertheless, he had not hesitated to obey the will of the dead man. But now?

Thus far he had followed Krutzmacht's orders. The old man who had fallen in a fit at his threshold had seized upon him as the nearest tool, had imposed on him his own purpose, and sent him across the continent on an errand the full nature of which was as yet unknown to him. He had obeyed the dying man with a curious faith in his reasonableness—had responded as to the command of a natural master. Now that he was dead, should Brainard desert him?

He knew, now, that Krutzmacht had been engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the control of large properties, a fight carried on by the aid of bankers and of courts. Apparently his enemies had been closing in on him in the final grapple. He had almost succeeded in eluding them, and then had been stricken, as Brainard now fully believed, by the dastardly hand of a hired murderer, and thrown on the pavement to die. Even in the torture of his convulsion, the old man had exerted his will to defeat these cowardly enemies, and had lingered on in life just long enough to enable his agent to snatch their prey from their very jaws.

But what was Brainard to do with his plunder?

The obvious thing would be to apply to the nearest Federal authority, explain his action, deposit his plunder, and allow an impartial court to judge the dispute between the dead man and his enemies. A few days before, such a timid and safe course of conduct would have seemed to Brainard the only thing to do. Now, however, it was not in the least to his taste.

He had become an altogether different creature from the beaten man, at the end of hope, who had stumbled homeward in the gloom of the April day. For one brief week

he had been alive—fully alive—and with his hand in the thick of the tangle he was not willing tamely to withdraw. The man who had used him as a tool was dead, but Krutzmacht's will lived on in him, not yet fulfilled, and to that will a strange kind of loyalty responded. He would not desert the old man, no matter what the legal aspects of the situation might be.

"Take everything," Krutzmacht had said. "Get it out of the country—to Berlin."

But then what?

There was that name—Mel, or Melody, that the dying man had been at such effort to enunciate. What had Melody to do with the matter? Was it the name of a person? The puzzle remained. It might be solved in Berlin. At any rate, that must be his next destination.

All that long day he pondered these things, while the train slowly traversed the mighty Arizona plains—arid, boundless, austere; fringed here and there by solitary peaks that rose majestically in the still, clear air. Which way should he lay his course to escape from the country safely?

As the day wore on, he lost the sense of security he had had at first when he gained the Santa Fe train. He grew anxious about possible messages that might even now be speeding past him on the wires, to intercept his flight at some convenient point.

At first he had thought of making for New Orleans, having altogether abandoned the idea of returning to New York, which would be the first place where he would be looked for. Now even New Orleans seemed a dangerously long way off. The sooner he could put an international boundary between himself and those people in California, the better would be his chance of escaping to Europe.

He studied the rough little map in his time-table, and saw that by taking the southerly line at Selva Junction he could cross into Mexico. He decided to do so.

The day drew slowly to its conclusion. The sun streamed horizontally across the arid plains, touching the bare outlines of the mountains with blood-red tints. Brainard's eyes roved from the landscape to the few passengers in the car, who seemed somnolent and harmless. He did not dare to open his overflowing valise while he remained on the car, although it tempted his curiosity.

He was abundantly supplied with ready

money. In addition to the large sum he had taken from the old wallet, he had found in one of the inner drawers of the safe a package of bank-notes and a little bag of gold coin, placed there, no doubt, by Krutz-macht, for just such an emergency as this. In all, he had on his person very nearly twenty thousand dollars, which would be sufficient for an extended journey. Ready money gave Brainard a comfortable sense of assurance in his own powers that he had not often experienced.

"What is your name, stranger?"

Brainard started as the big conductor laid a hand on his shoulder. He replied mechanically:

"Edgar Brainard—why?"

"Don't be scared, stranger!" the conductor exclaimed with a chuckle, glancing at a yellow envelope he held in his hand. "I'm looking for a party named Wilky, or Wilkins."

Brainard controlled himself just in time not to snatch the telegram. It flashed over him that it was from the *Despatch* man, who had divined his wandering course, and probably wished to warn him of some impending danger. The trainman passed on down the car, asking the passengers their names, and exhibiting his telegram.

Brainard waited until the conductor left the car; then he took his valise into the dressing-room, as if he were about to make a toilette. Presently, when the train slowed up, he looked out; but he could see nothing on the darkening desert except a huge wooden tank set aloft on stilts.

"This is my chance," thought Brainard.

There happened to be no one in the dressing-room or on the platform of his car; and when the train began to move, he quietly dropped off close to the water-tank.

It was dusk, and the distant mountains were covered with purple shadows. So far as Brainard could see, there was not even a section-house in sight—nothing but the huge tank, now dripping water into the thirsty plain.

As the reverberation of the retreating train died from the rails, he heard the beat of a horse's hoofs, and out of the cactus growth a pony dashed up with a girl astride, who peered after the train.

"Lost your train?" Brainard asked.

The girl on the pony turned in his direction, but made no reply.

"Can you tell me where the nearest town happens to be?" he said presently, and

added, with a doubtful look at the dusky plain: "If there is any!"

The answer from the figure on the pony was a girlish laugh, and then, in a soft voice—

"I reckon you won't find much of a town this side of Phoenix, stranger—and that's a mighty long way to the saouth!"

"I can hardly put up there to-night!"

"I reckon you cain't. You lookin' for some one?"

"I want to get to Diondas on mining business," Brainard replied glibly, the name being one that he remembered to have seen on the railroad folder.

"Where's that?"

"In northern Mexico, I think," Brainard explained in a doubtful voice.

"Mexico!" the girl drawled, with a charming accent of surprise. "Why, that's an awful ways saouth across them mountains. I reckon you won't get there, either, to-night, stranger!"

"I must have got off at the wrong place," Brainard remarked cheerfully.

"Reckon you did, stranger. Phantom ain't much of a place."

"So it seems," Brainard agreed, looking for the water-tank, which had been swallowed up in the night.

The girl rode closer, and peered out of the dark at the man sitting on the big yellow valise beside the railroad-track. She was a thin little figure. On her head she wore an old sombrero which screened her face from Brainard's searching glance.

"Where do you think I could spend the night?" he inquired rather helplessly. "I don't much care about camping here until daylight."

"Well," the little girl drawled, after a moment's reflection, "there's old man Gunnison. He lives back up the trail a ways. If he's to home, he might take you in."

"Won't you show me the way?" Brainard asked, gazing into the dark in the direction in which the girl pointed.

"I might," she admitted, hesitating, and looking up the track as if she expected to see a train. "I reckon the west-bound train won't be coming yet," she said to herself.

The girl slipped from her horse, and quickly swung Brainard's valise to the saddle, making it fast to the seat with thongs. Then, taking the reins, which she slipped over the animal's head, she strode out into the darkness. Brainard followed as best he could.

"What are you doing here at this time of night?" he asked, after they had proceeded in this unsociable fashion for some minutes.

The reply came softly back from the gloom ahead.

"Lookin' for the train, stranger."

"Going away?" he inquired.

"Perhaps."

"To California?"

No reply came to this question; and Brainard, realizing that his curiosity had been politely rebuked, relapsed into silence. After a time, as his eyes became accustomed to the dark, he advanced beside the pony, and, putting a hand on the bag to steady it, made another attempt at conversation.

"Live about here?" he asked.

"Reckon nothin' lives hereabouts but lizards and old man Gunnison."

"Where do you live, then?"

"I used to live up in the mountains over yonder." She made a gesture toward some distant spot that was lost upon Brainard. "It's called Monument," she added.

"Monument!" Brainard repeated.

The name seemed to be familiar, but he could not tell whether he had seen it in the railroad folder or on one of the numerous documents from Krutzmacht's safe which he had hurriedly examined. "Monument!"

"It's some ways from here," the girl vouchsafed.

"You used to live there—where do you live now?" Brainard persisted, his interest in his guide rising.

But she had urged the tired pony to a slow trot, as if to avoid further questions, and Brainard found some difficulty in keeping up with the pace. After more of this blind progress into the night, the girl stopped before what seemed a mound of dirt, and remarked:

"Here's Gunnison's. Maybe the old man is abed—I'll raise him for you."

She proceeded to pound vigorously with the butt of her whip on the door of the dugout. Presently there was a sound within, and a human head appeared at the door.

"Here's a gentleman who wants to go to some place in Mexico," the girl said in her gentle Southern voice. "I told him it was pretty fur from these parts, but I reckon you know how to git there if any one does."

"Will you put me up for the night, any way?" Brainard asked. "That's the first thing."

"I can do that," the sleepy Mr. Gunni-

son replied after a time, coming out of the door. "But if you be in a hurry to reach Mexico, stranger, you'd better go back to the railroad you come from, and take the next train."

"I'll see about that in the morning," Brainard replied.

The girl had already unfastened the bag and mounted her pony.

"Much obliged to you, miss, for all your help!"

"That's all right, stranger," she said cheerily, starting the pony.

"Going back to the railroad now?" Brainard asked.

"Yes!"

There was something pathetic in this childish figure, astride the tired pony, riding back to the lonely water-tank at Phantom.

"Good-by!" he called after her. "Hope we shall meet again some day!"

"Reckon we might, stranger!" came back to him in the soft voice.

Then the pony's feet padded rapidly off into the darkness, and the girl was gone.

"Who is she—do you know?" he asked the man.

"Belongs over in Moniment, in one of them mining-camps, I expect," the old man replied indifferently. "I seen her riding past this afternoon."

"Where is she going alone at night?"

"I dunno—guess she knows her own business."

"Such a small girl!"

"They know how to look after themselves, in these parts, as soon as they can creep," the old man remarked calmly.

"They have to!"

"Monument!" Brainard repeated to himself, wondering where he had heard that name before.

"That's what they call it. It ain't much of a place now. There used to be a big mine near there, and some feller expected to get awful rich out of it; but he didn't. You can come in and bunk alongside of me, stranger."

VII

BRAINARD did not follow the old plainsman's advice to stick to the railroad for his travels. Instead, he induced Gunnison to leave his dugout and guide his chance guest across the Mexican border.

It was not as easy as it looks on the map in the railroad folder to get from Phantom,

Arizona—which was the name of the water-tank where he had dropped from the train—into the State of Chihuahua; but Brainard did not feel pressed for time, and those weeks on the trail, with old Gunnison and the pack-train of two horses and a mule, were full of joy to the city-bred man, who had rarely wandered beyond the confines of Harlem and the Battery. The altitude, the vivid desert colors, the beauty and the wildness of this neglected part of the world, filled Brainard with ecstatic happiness. Never before in all his life had he felt so much alive, so eager to act, to plot, to embrace the struggle of life; so light and free from pressing doubts, so willing to test what destiny had in store for him.

This was life as he had tried to write of it, and had miserably failed. No wonder! He had never had the least experience of it.

The nights under the glittering cover of the Arizona heavens, the long days of travel in the sunlight, the silence and the majesty of the vast desert spaces brought out all his latent powers. It seemed that he was embarked upon some mysterious mission, which must end finally in a great experience.

Lying awake beneath the glittering stars, his head pillowed on his bag, which had rapidly lost all signs of newness, he speculated about Krutzmacht and his fragmentary instructions. That last mumbled word, "Melody," especially piqued his curiosity. Melody meant something connected with music, and music, or any of the fine arts, seemed remote from the purposes of the old man. Could it be the name of a place, or of a woman? Brainard could not guess.

From this his mind wandered back to his recent guide. He resolved to return some day to this wonderful country, his adventure completed, and discover Monument, the abandoned mining town, and see again the little girl on the pony who had guided him through the darkness. He had an amused recollection of the thin little Southerner who rode forty miles to see a railroad-train. Old Gunnison, when questioned about her, hinted vaguely of some one she went down to the railroad to look for.

"Her father, most likely," he said; "one of the miners I was telling you about. But I guess she won't find him soon. He left her and her mother behind when he left the mine."

This slight information added a new

touch of pathos to the girl's long ride to find the father who had abandoned her.

Nearly a month later, Brainard entered the City of Mexico, lean and brown and hard, with a very much travel-stained valise. So far as he could learn from the few American newspapers he had come across, there had been no great excitement over Krutzmacht's death and the robbery of his safe. If a pursuit had been undertaken, the fact had been carefully kept from the press; and he felt confident that by this time either it had been given up, or the persons interested were watching the wrong places.

There was a steamer sailing for Havre from Vera Cruz at the end of the week, and he resolved to take it, meanwhile resting and making a few preparations for his voyage. It was the first time in his life that he had been outside his own country, and every sight and sound in this bastard Spanish metropolis filled him with curiosity and pleasure. He secured his cabin on the Toulouse, and then set out to do the sights.

The second evening, as he was resting after a busy day in the cool courtyard of the old Hotel Iturbide, a little man in a bedraggled linen duster hitched his chair across the stones toward Brainard.

"Just come down from the States?" he inquired.

Brainard nodded.

With this slight encouragement, the stranger launched forth upon a rambling talk about himself. He had come to Mexico, several years before, to manage a rubber-planting enterprise, and the "dirty dagoes" had done him out of his last cent. Soon he proposed having a drink with his compatriot, "in honor of the greatest country in God's world." When Brainard refused, saying that he was tired and was going to bed, the American shambled along by his side through the corridors.

Judging that his fellow countryman was a harmless dead-beat, Brainard put his hand into his pocket, and drew forth a bill, as the easiest way of ridding himself of an unwelcome companion. At sight of the money, the man's eyes filled with tears. Taking his benefactor's arm, he poured forth a flood of personal confession and thanks that lasted until they were at the door of Brainard's room.

"Let me come in and talk to you a minute," the stranger begged. "Ain't often I

see a decent man from God's country, and I get lonely down here," he whimpered.

"All right," Brainard replied reluctantly, wondering how he could rid himself of the fellow.

When he turned on the electric light, the stranger's eyes roamed carelessly over the room. It seemed to Brainard that his guest exhibited much more keenness than his forlorn and lacrimose state warranted.

As Brainard turned to the wardrobe to fetch a box of cigars, he caught the man's eyes fastened on the valise which was shoved under the bed. Brainard gave him a cigar, but did not invite him to sit down, and after a little while he left, thanking Brainard profusely for his hospitality. As he went out of the door, his eyes rested once more on the bag beneath the bed.

After his visitor had left, Brainard prepared to undress. First he placed his watch and pocketbook on the night table. Over them he laid his revolver, which he had purchased in his wanderings, and, under Gunnison's directions, had learned to use. Now that he was outside the States, whoever might dispute with him the possession of Krutzmacht's property would have to make good his demands.

He had lost every trace of that nervous fear which had made miserable the day after his departure from San Francisco. Before turning out his light, he glanced into the courtyard, and caught sight of his recent acquaintance skulking behind a pillar. For several minutes Brainard stood behind his curtain, looking into the courtyard, and in all this time the man did not move from his post.

There was no reason, Brainard said to himself, why the dead-beat should not spend the night in the courtyard of the Hotel Iturbide. Turning out the light, he got into bed; but he could not sleep, and presently he rose and peered cautiously out into the dark. The courtyard, faintly lighted by the lamps in the office, was empty. This disturbed him rather more than the skulking presence of the American, although he could give no reason for his suspicion beyond the stranger's apparent interest in his valise.

He got back into bed, but not to sleep. After tossing restlessly for several hours, he rose, dressed, took his bag, and groped his way through the dark corridors to the office. There he roused the night porter, and found that there was an early morning

train on the new International line, which had just been completed. The man offered to get him a cab, but he refused, and, lugging his heavy bag, he departed by the rear entrance of the hotel.

As the porter, who had been awakened by a good tip, unbarred the door, Brainard asked him casually:

"Do you know that *Americano* who was talking to me last evening—the one who was hanging about the courtyard?"

"No, *señor*," the man replied. "He's been about the hotel for a week or more. Just come from the States, and lost all his money at cards. A bad lot!"

"He told me he had been here several years!" Brainard exclaimed.

"That cannot be; he knows no Spanish. Probably he wanted to get money from you to go back to the States."

"Very likely!"

After a short walk, Brainard came out upon the plaza in front of the cathedral. Discovering a cab, he waked the driver and told him to drive to the railroad-station.

As they rattled through the empty streets, Brainard thought rapidly. If the contents of his battered valise were as valuable as he thought they probably were, the persons interested in capturing Krutzmacht's fortune would spare no effort or expense in tracking him. And it could not be difficult to follow his trail—a slim, unshaven young man dressed in a brown suit, with steel-rimmed spectacles, carrying a large cow-hide valise!

If this fellow really was after him, it was not likely that he was alone. The next day, when he and his associates discovered that Brainard had given them the slip overnight, they would ransack the country for him. It was important that he should find some town, not too small, where he could remain quietly during the three remaining days before the sailing of the Toulouse; and it must be some place not far from Vera Cruz, where he was to take the steamer.

By the dim light of the carriage-lamp he scanned the list of names on his timetable, and selected the station of Jalapa, which was only a short ride from the coast on a branch line of railroad. He liked the name, and the fact that it was printed in capital letters, indicating that Jalapa was a junction, attracted him. It would be an easy place to get away from in case he had to fly again.

At five o'clock in the morning, just as the first light of the dawn was revealing the sleeping city, the north-bound train pulled into the great plateau, bearing Brainard and his valise, tucked away in an empty compartment.

VIII

If there was a spot on the earth where a fugitive might spend forty-eight undisturbed hours, it was surely the little city of Jalapa. Thus Brainard reflected the next afternoon while he lounged in the plaza, listening to the band, and breathing the delicious fragrance of the Easter lilies, which bloomed in great luxuriance.

To the eye, Jalapa consisted of a couple of squares of old plaster-covered buildings with irregular tiled roofs, a squat, drab cathedral of the Spanish-American type, half a dozen streets of houses wandering about the summit of the hill, and, on the lower slopes, fertile green gardens carefully walled in. All about the old town lofty trees made a dense circle of green, and to the south towered the snowy crown of Orizaba, on whose lower slopes stretched the coffee-plantations.

Brainard was relieved to find no strangers in the place. It was already too late for tourists, although it was the loveliest season of the year in that semitropical climate.

At the midday dinner in the hotel, he had made acquaintance with the one American resident in Jalapa—a lean, lank, bronzed Southerner, who was manager of the Jalapa division of the railroad. Calloway had been talkative and friendly, and had asked no questions. He had lived in the country, so he told Brainard, more than thirty years, and still did not feel at home there. He offered to take Brainard, the next morning, to a hacienda in the neighborhood, where they would have such coffee as Brainard had never drunk before.

So, early in the morning, while the heavy dew still drenched the soil like rain, the two set forth on horseback. They rode some miles through the thick forest to the eastward, emerging finally in a region of plantations that were being cultivated by the peons.

The Englishman who owned the Hacienda de Rosas seemed delighted to see Calloway and his friend, and showed them over the plantation with languid interest. At the midday breakfast, which was served in the

cool courtyard beneath the running tendrils of climbing roses, Brainard met the Englishman's wife, a dull-looking Mexican woman, and the daughter of the house, Señorita Marie, a fascinating little creature who spoke English with a dainty accent and mixed good American slang freely with French and Spanish phrases.

The *señorita* told Brainard that she had been educated at a convent in New York State, and also, for the last two years, near Madrid. Now she had come home, "finished," to stay with her parents. She let Brainard perceive that life on a coffee-plantation was dull for a clever young woman who had seen something of the world, and that the advent of a stranger from New York was an event.

After luncheon, while the Englishman and Calloway smoked long black cigars, the *señorita* entertained Brainard by singing to him, and then took him for a walk—"as girls do in America," she remarked naively. Brainard was easily persuaded to stay for dinner, and the family idled away the evening in the courtyard, listening to the cool drip of the fountain and chatting lazily.

In the still, starlit night, with the heavy scent of roses and the tinkle of the flowing water, Brainard was captivated by the naive little lady, half Spanish, half English. When his host urged him to make them a visit, he was tempted to yield. Why not wait over a fortnight for another boat? By that time he might escape all pursuit, and there could be no such great hurry about his errand to Berlin.

A sense of loyalty to his dead employer, however, urged him on, and he declined the alluring invitation. He would return some day, he said, when his business was finished.

The girl looked sad. Men did not come back, once lost in the great world.

"I shall surely return," Brainard said, "and then I shall stay a long time!"

He felt very tenderly for the lonely little creature after the day in her company. She reminded him oddly of that other girl he had met in this adventure—the one in Arizona, who had ridden long miles to watch the train go by. As he returned to Jalapa with his companion, riding through the wonderful night in the moonlight, with the snowy dome of Orizaba glittering above them, he became sentimentally reflective. Yes, he surely would come back!

Calloway was also confidential, and told Brainard the history of their recent host. Twenty-five years ago the Englishman had arrived in Mexico and bought this plantation. It seems that he had absconded from a shipping firm in Liverpool, and had carried away with him ten thousand pounds. He had married a Mexican woman, and had prospered, but he had never been able to leave the country.

"It must be hard on his wife and daughter!" Brainard exclaimed.

The Southerner laughed cynically.

"What do they care? He is rich and respected in this country. They have everything money buys, and the girl has been well educated. It was a long time ago when he took the money, and, as you see, he lives like a perfect gentleman with his own wife and daughter. Oh, there are many down here who have no better antecedents than Harlow, and aren't as respectable." He looked shrewdly at Brainard, as if inquiring his business. "After you've lived here a while, you don't ask questions about the newcomers, so long as they don't try to borrow money of you. Live and let live—that's a good motto, young man. You never can tell when you will need the same charity for yourself that you give another fellow!"

Brainard suspected that the Southerner might have his own story, which would explain why he was living so far away from Alabama in this little Mexican town, which he had never learned to like. But he did not press the subject; another twenty-four hours would see him out of Jalapa, on board the Toulouse, bound for Havre.

It was late by the time they reached the hotel. Before going to bed, Brainard stepped out on the balcony of his room, to take a last look, in the moonlight, at the snow-capped mountain that dominated the southern horizon. He lingered there, charmed by the stillness of the deserted streets, by the soft, scented air, by the beauty of the white mountain towering into the heavens.

He heard voices in the next room, which came to him through a window opening upon the balcony. He listened, but at first could not distinguish words, as the talkers were seated within the room at some distance from the window. He thought that they were speaking English. Then a woman's voice came nearer, saying distinctly:

"I don't see how Mossy let him slip

through his fingers in Mexico City. Lucky we stopped off here and got his wire!"

Brainard thought he knew that voice, with a pert, crisp twist to the words. A heavier voice said something from within the room, and then, still nearer, came the woman's answer:

"I wish we knew which way he meant to jump next. I wonder if he's fool enough to try to go back North!"

The speaker came out on the balcony, and Brainard noiselessly glided back into the shadow of his unlighted room. He had seen the profile of the woman, and was sure that she was the stenographer in Krutzmacht's office!

"We'll get him either way," the woman said, in answer to a remark from within, and turned back into the room.

IX

BRAINARD stood without moving until his muscles ached. Then he dropped to the floor, crawled over to the bed, and felt beneath the bolster, where he had taken the precaution to conceal his bag when he had left that morning. It was still there. The room had been casually searched, or possibly his pursuers had only just arrived by a delayed train.

At any rate, he had until the next morning. The woman and her companion would not be likely to make a disturbance that night, feeling that they had him and his plunder safe within grasp. They knew as well as he that all escape from Jalapa was impossible before the early morning train for the north.

While he thought, Brainard took off his shoes, tied them together by the laces, and slung them around his neck, as he had done as a boy, when he wished to make an early escape from the parental house. Then, placing his precious bag on his shoulder, he crept inch by inch toward the open window. It was hazardous, but it was his only chance. He was morally certain that the door into the hall would be watched.

When he reached the balcony, he listened. Not hearing any sound from the next room, he stepped out into the moonlight, and walked as rapidly as he could along the open balcony to the corner of the building, and around to the other side. Then he looked over the rail to the street, thinking to drop his bag and follow it as best he could. It was a good twenty feet from the balcony to the hard pavement beneath.

As Brainard debated the chances of breaking a leg, he saw approaching the spot the figure of a night officer on his rounds. Instinctively he drew back, felt for the nearest window, and pushed it open. He prayed that it might be an empty room; but he was no sooner within than he heard the loud snoring of a man.

Perplexed, Brainard listened for a few moments, then quietly crossed to the bed. Feeling about over the night table, he secured the pistol that he suspected might lie there, then boldly struck a match. With a snort, the sleeper sat bolt upright. Luckily it was Calloway, the manager of the railroad. Brainard whispered tensely:

"It's all right, but don't speak! There's your gun—only don't shoot!"

"What's the matter?" the Southerner demanded coolly, now wide awake.

"You said," Brainard whispered, "that there was always a time when a man might need charity. I want your help. I have a bag here that contains I don't know what amount of valuable papers, belonging to some other person. I'm trying to get to a safe place, as I was told to. I haven't stolen it, you understand, but of course you won't believe that. I've been followed here by some enemies of the man who owns the stuff. They'd kill me as quickly as they would a fly to get hold of this bag. If they can't murder me, and get it that way, they will probably put me in prison to-morrow, and keep me there. You must help me get out of this town!"

"You can't do that before to-morrow morning," the Southerner replied, yawning, as if he wished Brainard would take himself off to bed and let him alone.

"I must get out of this hotel now, to-night, and away from Jalapa, and not have a soul know where I've gone. I'll pay you well for your trouble!"

"Keep your money, my son," the man answered gruffly. "It wasn't for *that* I had to come down here. But I'll help you out if you are in trouble."

He reflected yawningly for a few moments, while Brainard held his breath with impatience. For all he knew, the man and the woman next door might already have entered his room and discovered his flight!

"If it were daylight, it would be different, but you know I couldn't start a train out of here at this time without the whole town knowing about it; and I reckon that isn't what you want."

"Not much!"

"Can't you camp here until morning?"

Brainard shook his head.

"I'd run you down myself in an engine to the coast—"

"That's it!"

"But there isn't an engine in the place. The first train comes up in the morning."

"I might get a horse and go over to the hacienda," Brainard suggested.

The Southerner scratched his sleepy head for a while.

"You might," he admitted. "But that wouldn't put you out of trouble. You want to get clear of the country."

"That's so."

"Got some nerve?"

"Enough to come all the way from Frisco with this"; and he patted his valise.

"Come on, then!"

The Southerner drew on his trousers and boots. As Brainard turned impatiently toward the door, he said:

"Not that way!"

He pulled back a hanging at the foot of his bed, revealing a little wooden door, which he opened, and, candle in hand, led the way through a close, dusty passage. After making several turns, they descended a flight of narrow stairs, and Brainard's guide pushed open a door at the bottom. The musty odor of old incense told him that they had entered a church, and the wavering candle-light partially revealed the statues of the saints and the altars of the chapels.

"The cathedral," the Southerner explained, and added: "Handy for the *señoritas* sometimes!"

Brainard followed him closely across the nave of the church to a door, which Calloway unlocked with a key, after some fumbling. They emerged upon a narrow lane with blank walls on either side.

"That hotel used to be the bishop's palace," the Southerner explained. "It's a pretty handy place to get out of on the quiet, if you know the way!"

It was only a short distance to the railroad terminal. Calloway walked rapidly and noiselessly on the toes of his boots, and kept to the dark side of the lane. They entered the yards beyond the station-building, and went to the farther end, where several tracks were occupied by antiquated coaches that looked like a cross between open street-cars and English third-class carriages.

"We used these rattletraps before they changed the line to steam. It took six mules to haul one of 'em up from the junction of the Mexico and Vera Cruz road; but they can go down flying! It's down grade all the way for nearly forty miles. They are rather wabby now, but if you get one with a good brake it will last the trip."

He tried several of the old cars, and finally selected one with a brake that worked to his satisfaction. Together they could just start it, and they pushed it out to the main track. Brainard threw his valise aboard, and took his post, as the railroad man directed him, at the hand-brake.

"I'll open the gate for you, and set the switch; then it's clear sailing. Go slow until you learn the trick, then let her sail. There's a bad curve about seven miles out, and a couple of miles farther on you'll find a considerable hill and some up grade. You must let her slide down the hill for all she can do, and take the grade on her own momentum. If you don't, you may get stuck. I can't think of anything else. You'll roll down to the junction in an hour or so, as pretty as coasting, if that confounded peon hasn't left the switch open at Cavallo. If he has, you'll just have to jump for it, and foot it down through the chaparral, if you haven't broken your neck. Needn't bother to return the car," he chuckled. "Is there anything else I can do for you, young man?"

"You've got me out of a tight hole," Brainard replied warmly, "and I can't begin to thank you for it. I hope I shall see you up North some day, and be able to do something for you!"

"It isn't likely we'll meet in the States. They don't want me up there!" the Southerner answered slowly. "But perhaps, some time, you'll be able to help a poor fellow out of *his* hole in the same way."

"That woman may strike the scent, and come hot-foot to Vera Cruz by the first train. Well, I'll have to take my chances there before the boat sails."

"I'll give her a tip that you have gone north." Calloway laughed. "If she won't take it, there are other ways of stopping her activity. There's a good deal of smallpox hereabouts, you know, and if the mayor suspected these *Americanos* had the disease, he'd chuck 'em into the pest-house. Don Salvador does pretty much what I tell him—and the hotel-keeper, too. I think we can keep your friends busy."

"Get me twelve hours, if you can!"

The two men shook hands; Calloway pushed back the great gate; and the car slid down the track out into the warm, black night, groaning to itself asthmatically as it gathered impetus.

X

THE Transatlantique line steamer Toulouse lay off the breakwater of Vera Cruz, smoking fiercely, anchor up, passengers all aboard, ready to sail for Havre. Her departure had been delayed nearly eighteen hours by a fierce "norther," which had not yet exhausted its fury. They had been anxious hours for Brainard, who had gone aboard the night before, in the expectation of sailing immediately. Now the black smoke pouring from the funnel indicated that the captain had decided to proceed, and Brainard's spirits rose.

The Southerner at Jalapa had been better than his word. He had succeeded in delaying the stenographer and her companion almost two whole days, and had kept them away from the telegraph, too.

Brainard was about to leave the deck, where he had been anxiously watching the land, when his attention was caught by a small launch that was rounding the end of the pier and heading for the steamer. His hands tightened on the rail; he suspected what that launch might contain. He noted that the steamer was moving slowly. Would the captain wait?

The Toulouse had swung around; her nose pointed out into the Gulf of Mexico, and her screw revolved at quarter speed. The launch approached rapidly, and signaled the steamer to wait. Brainard could see the smart French captain, on the bridge above, examining the small boat through glasses. He himself could detect two figures in the bow, waving a flag, and he smiled grimly at the comedy about to take place.

The screw ceased to revolve. As the launch came within hailing distance, there was an animated colloquy in French between the officers on the bridge of the Toulouse and the man in charge of the launch.

"Some late passengers," remarked the third officer, who was standing beside Brainard. "A woman, too!"

Apparently neither the stenographer—for now he could recognize the young woman—nor her companion, a stout, middle-aged, red-cheeked American, understood the French language. They kept

gesticulating and pointing to Brainard, whom they had discovered on the deck. The captain of the launch translated their remarks, and threw in some explanations of his own. The officers from the bridge of the Toulouse fired back vigorous volleys. It was an uproar!

Brainard, in spite of his predicament, burst into laughter over the frantic endeavors of the two Americans to make themselves understood. The captain tried his English, but with poor results. Finally, with a gesture of disgust, he yanked the bell-rope. Brainard could hear the gong sound in the engine-room beneath for full speed. The Toulouse would not wait.

The steamer began to gather speed, the launch to fall behind, while the woman at the bow shrieked and pointed to Brainard. The captain of the Toulouse merely shrugged his shoulders and walked to the other side of his vessel.

"Some friends of yours?" the third officer said to Brainard, with a grin, as the little launch fell into their wake and finally turned back toward the inner harbor. "The lady seemed anxious to join you—might be a wife, *non*?"

Apparently he knew enough English to gather what the two Americans had been trying to make the captain understand. If, thought Brainard, the captain had known as much English as his third officer, it might not have gone so happily for him!

"The lady isn't exactly my wife," Brainard replied, with a laugh; "not yet!"

"Ah!" the Frenchman said, with a meaning smile. "What you in the States call a breach of the promise?"

"Exactly!" Brainard replied hastily, glad to accept such a credible fiction.

"She seems sorry to let you make the journey alone, eh?"

"Rather!"

The story circulated on the ship that evening, and gave Brainard a jocular notoriety in the smoking-room among the German and French business men, who composed most of the Toulouse's first-cabin list. It was forgotten, however, before he emerged from his cabin, to which the remains of the "norther" had quickly driven him. By this time—it was the fourth day out—the Toulouse was in the grasp of the Gulf Stream, lazily plowing her twelve knots an hour into the North Atlantic, and the passengers were betting their francs on the probable day of arrival at Havre.

That evening, at dinner, Brainard ordered a bottle of champagne, and murmured, as he raised the glass to his lips:

"Here's to Melody—whoever and whatever she may be!"

His youthful fancy, warmed by the wine, played around the idea of an unknown mistress for whom he was bound across the seas with her fortune in his grip. With the ease of youth, he had made up his mind that Melody must be a woman—what else could she be? He always saw her as a young woman, charming, beautiful, of course, and free!

And yet she might well be some aged relative of Krutzmacht, or a fair friend of his youth, to whom, in the moment of decision allowed him, he had desired to leave his fortune; or some unrecognized wife, to whom, at the threshold of death, he thought to do tardy justice.

"Some old hag, perhaps!" the young man murmured with a grimace. "We'll see—over there!"

But his buoyant fancy refused to vision this elusive Melody as other than young and beautiful. He began to think of her as living in some obscure corner of the great world, waiting to be dowered with the fortune that he had bravely rescued for her.

When Brainard felt that his stomach and his sea-legs were both impeccable, he descended to his cabin, bolted the door, pulled the shade carefully over the port-hole, pinned newspapers above the wooden partitions, and proceeded to make a leisurely examination of the valise. It was the first safe moment that he had had to go through the contents of the bag; and when the key sank into the lock, his curiosity was whetted to a fine edge.

He had already made a careful count of the notes and gold left after his devious journey to Vera Cruz. The sum was eighteen thousand dollars and some hundreds. This he had entered on a blank leaf in a little diary, under the heading—"Melody, Cr." On the opposite page he had put down all the sums that he remembered to have spent since leaving New York, even to his cigarettes and the bottle of champagne which he had drunk in honor of his unknown mistress.

"Here goes!" he said at last. "Let's see what Melody's pile is, anyway."

It took the best part of the night to examine thoroughly what the bag held. Even after he had gone over every piece, Brain-

ard, untrained in business matters, could but guess at the full importance of his haul. There were contracts and deeds and leases relating to a network of corporations, of which the most important, apparently, was the Pacific Northern Railway.

Despairing of understanding the full value of these documents without some clue, Brainard contented himself with making a careful inventory of them. The meat of the lot, he judged, lay in certain bundles of neatly engraved five-per-cent bonds of the Pacific Northern, together with a number of certificates of stock in the Shasta Company. In all, as he calculated, there were eight millions of bonds and fifteen millions, par value, of stock.

"Melody doesn't look to me to be a poor lady," Brainard muttered, bundling up the bonds and stock, and packing them carefully away at the bottom of the valise. "They are welcome to the rest, if they'll let me off with these pretty things!"

What was more, he had come across the name of Schneider Brothers, bankers, Berlin, on the letter-head of several communications, indicating that they had been the dead man's foreign fiscal agents. That would be of use to him, he noted, as he wrote the name in his little diary. Then he went on deck, lighted a long Mexican cigar, and began to think. The value of his haul made him very serious.

The days of the lazy, sunny voyage slipped away. As the vessel drew nearer Europe, Brainard speculated more and more anxiously on what might be waiting for him on the dock at Havre.

Now that he knew how valuable his loot was—he could not understand how the Shasta Company and the railroad could get on without the papers in his possession—he felt certain that old Krutzmacht's San Francisco enemies, who had tracked him to the dock at Vera Cruz, would hardly be idle during the sixteen days that the Toulouse had taken to cross the seas. There had been ample time for them to hear from the stenographer and their agents in Mexico, to communicate with the French authorities, to have detectives cross from New York by one of the express boats and meet him at Havre. There would be a fine reception committee prepared for him on the dock!

Cudgel his brains as he might, hour after hour, he could see no way out of the predicament that was daily drawing nearer.

After the incident at Vera Cruz, he could not approach any of the officers of the vessel and seek to enlist their help. He thought of bribing the sociable third officer to secrete the contents of his valise, but he mistrusted the Gallic temperament.

There was a Frenchwoman who sat next him at the table, a dark-haired little person, clever and businesslike, who had been very agreeable to Brainard, and had undertaken to teach him French. He could tell his story to Mme. Vernon, and ask her to assume charge of the troublesome valise. But an instinctive caution restrained him from taking any one into his confidence. He preferred to run his chance of arrest, and to fight against extradition.

Whenever he resigned himself to this prospect, his sporting blood rebelled, and there rose, also, a new sentiment of loyalty to the interests of his unknown mistress, Melody. He had come too far in his venture to be beaten now!

"Whether the old man was straight or not, whether he really owned the bunch of bonds and stock or not, it would be a pity not to get something out of it for Melody. She's not in the scrap," he said to himself. "No, I don't chuck the game yet!"

His anxieties were quieted by another fit of seasickness on the day before they were due to arrive at Havre. As she approached the coast of Brittany, the Toulouse lost the balmy weather which had prevailed since they entered the Gulf Stream, and ran straight into a gale that was sweeping over the boisterous Bay of Biscay. Brainard went to bed, to spend altogether the most wretched twenty-four hours he had ever experienced.

In his more conscious moments he gathered that the old Toulouse was having as hard a time with the weather as he was. Her feeble engines at last lay down on the job, and the captain was forced to turn about and run before the storm. It mattered little to Brainard, just then, whether the ship was blown to the Azores, or went to the bottom, or carried him into Havre, there to be arrested and finally deported to the United States for grand larceny. He turned in his berth, thought of the Bour-gogne, and closed his weary eyes.

Toward evening the gale blew itself out, and the battered old Toulouse was headed north once more across the Bay of Biscay. Some time in the night, the engines ceased to thump, and Brainard awoke with a start.

When he hurried into his clothes, and groped his way to the deck, he was astonished to see ahead, through the gray fog of early morning, faint lights and, farther away, the stronger illumination that came from some city.

"Is it Havre?" he demanded of the third officer, whom he met.

"No, *monsieur* — St. Nazaire!" the Frenchman answered. "*Monsieur* will be disappointed?"

"I don't think so!" exclaimed Brainard.

It was, indeed, the port of Nantes. The captain had not chosen to risk the voyage around the stormy coast of Brittany with his depleted coal-supply, and had taken the old Toulouse to the nearest port.

"Here's where Melody scores!" Brainard muttered, when he realized the significance of the news. "Now for a quick exit to Paris, before the telegraph gets in its deadly work and notifies the civilized world where we are!"

XI

THREE hours later the passengers of the Toulouse were aboard a special train for Paris, and in a first-class compartment Brainard was seated, facing his valise, and looking out upon the pleasant landscape of the Loire valley, a contented expression on his brown young face.

He had already formulated to himself the exact plot of his movements from the moment he reached Paris. From the pleasant Frenchwoman who had been his neighbor at the ship's table he had learned the address of a little hotel in the Bourse quarter, where she assured him that Americans rarely appeared. It was not far from the large bank in which he intended to deposit Melody's burdensome fortune until he could make arrangements for disposing of it.

It did not take him long, therefore, to get his room at the little Hôtel des Voyageurs et Brésil, and to rid himself of his troublesome loot. Then he wrote a letter to Schneider Brothers, of Berlin—who, he had learned at the Crédit Lyonnais, were a well-known firm of bankers with an agency in New York. He wrote the Messrs. Schneider that in obedience to the instructions of the late Mr. Herbert Krutzmacht, of San Francisco, he wished to consult with them in regard to the disposal of some securities that he had in his possession. He would remain for the present in Paris, and he begged to suggest that the bankers should

send a responsible agent to meet him at some place—preferably The Hague, whither he was going the following week.

He had selected The Hague as a safe middle ground, after consulting the map of Europe in his guide-book.

"That will draw their fire," he thought complacently. "We shall see on which side of the game they are!"

Having mailed the letter, he strolled out to the boulevards to enjoy his first whiff of Paris. This was the city that he had walked in his dreams! He had never hoped to see it; but now he was strolling along the Boulevard des Italiens, and there before his eyes lay the great Place de l'Opéra, with its maze of automobiles, buses, and pedestrians. And there—Brainard stopped in the middle of the crowded *place*, wrapped in wonder, staring at the gilded figures on the façade of the Opéra, until an excitable official with a white baton poured a stream of voluble expostulation into his ear, and he dodged from under an omnibus just in time to fall into the path of a motor, causing general execration.

The official with the white stick finally landed him on the curb before he became an obstruction to traffic. He sank into an inviting iron chair and ordered a drink, as he saw that that was what the Parisians used their sidewalks for. In answer to his labored French, there came back in the purest Irish:

"Whisky, sor? Black and White, sor? Very good, sor!"

"Well, I never!" he murmured, radiant with happiness.

When the waiter reappeared with the drink, he was gazing down the broad avenue, entranced.

"Where does that go?" he whispered to the waiter, thrusting a bill into the curving palm and pointing vaguely before him.

"The Luver, sure, sor. You'll be wanting a nurse before the day is done!" the Irishman muttered.

And indeed the self-contained young American began to act like a lunatic let loose. Gulping down his whisky, he set off at random, plunging again into the sea of traffic, finally escaping to the shelter of a cab. The driver, after vain attempts to extract an order from his fare, just drove on and on through the boulevards, across great squares, up the noble avenue to the lofty arch, and then brought him back and stopped suggestively before a restaurant.

Somehow Brainard managed to get fed, and then the fatherly cabby received him and bore him on through the gas-lighted streets, soft and lambent and vocal, and at the end of another hour deposited him in front of what Brainard took to be a theater—a modest-looking building enough. From the poster he saw that it was the Français.

The great Théâtre Français! He beamed back at cabby, who gesticulated with his whip and urged him on. Cabby had begun sympathetically to comprehend his lunatic.

They played "Cyrano" that night, it happened. Though the fluent lines rolled too swiftly over Brainard's head for his feeble comprehension of the language, he understood the wonderful actors. For the first time in the twenty-eight years of his existence, he realized what is art—what it is to conceive and represent life with living creatures, to clothe dull lines of print with human passions. This was what he had dreamed might be when he descended from his gallery seat in a Broadway theater—but what never was.

Cabby was asleep on the box outside when Brainard emerged from his dream. At the young American's touch, he awoke, and, chirping to his decrepit horse, bore the stranger to his hotel. At the door they exchanged vivid protestations of regard, and a couple of pieces of gold rolled into cabby's paw.

"He understood!" Brainard murmured gratefully. "*Demain—demain!*" he cried; and the *cocher* cracked his whip.

The next two days were the most wonderful that Brainard had ever spent. He slept but a few hours each night—was there not all the rest of life to sleep in? Under the fat cabby's guidance he roamed day and night. He would murmur from time to time some famous name which seemed to act on cabby like a cabalistic charm—Louvre, Pantheon, Arc de Triomphe, Invalides, Bastille, Luxembourg, Notre Dame. At noon and at night they drew up before some marvelous restaurant, where the most alluring viands were to be had. Each evening there was a theater, carefully chosen by cabby; and there Brainard spent enchanted hours, drinking in at every sense the meaning of the play, savoring the charm of intonation, of line, of gesture—the art which seemed innate in these people.

For was he not, as he had said to Krutzmacht, a dramatist?

The third day he bethought him of the French lady of the Toulouse, and gave her address to his guardian. With her he made an expedition to Versailles. On their return from the château, they dined at a little restaurant at Ville d'Avray, the Frenchwoman carefully selecting the wines.

As the twilight fell across the old ponds and over the woods where Corot had once wandered, Brainard murmured softly:

"Melody, my dear, I owe you a whole lot for this—more than I can ever pay you, no matter how much I can squeeze out of those Dutchmen for your bonds and stock!" And then, aloud: "Here's to Melody—God bless her!"

"Mel-odye!" said the French lady daintily. "It is a pretty name. Is that the name of your *fiancée*?"

"No, *madame*! I have never seen the lady—but I hope to, some day!"

The Frenchwoman smiled and made no comment, puzzled by this latest manifestation of the lunatic American.

After dinner they strolled through the ancient park of St. Cloud to the river, and took a *bateau mouche* for Paris. Mme. Vernon seemed to understand all the pleasant ways of spending money. It was a warm, starry night. The French lady sat close to Brainard, and looked up tenderly into his eyes, but though his lips were wreathed in smiles, and his eyes were bright, he did not seem to comprehend what such opportunities were made for.

"Not even took my hand once!" she murmured to herself with a sigh, as she mounted the stairs to her apartment alone. "What are these Americans made of? To drink to the name of an unknown, and spend their dollars like sous. And always business!"

For when she had suggested an excursion for the morrow, the young man had excused himself on the plea of "my business."

"Always business!" she murmured.

But the lady did Brainard an injustice. He was thinking little of business. If she had but known it, he was in love, and dreaming—in love with life, and dreaming of the wonderful mystery of Krutzmacht and of the still more mysterious Melody!

At his hotel there was a despatch from the Schneider Brothers, appointing a meeting at a hotel in The Hague for the following evening.

(To be continued)

THE STAGE

TOO MANY HITS

THERE is no satisfying some people. Not in years has an opening theatrical season witnessed so many good plays as that of 1912-1913, and yet this very fact has given the grumblers a chance to complain.

"What is the use," they ask, "of having a piece that pleases the critics and the public, if there are so many other good ones in town that there are not enough playgoers to make audiences for all of them?"

Poor business with poor plays is bad enough, but poor business with good plays

is worse, because, after all, it is easier to find plays than audiences. Of course, it is nobody's fault but the managers' own, for they have gone ahead putting up new theaters without considering for a moment whether there was a demand for them; and still the building game goes merrily on. By Christmas Forty-Eighth Street, which, two years ago, was without any theater at all, will have four of them running; to say nothing of two more that are being hurried to completion in Forty-Fourth Street.

Among the many hits there is one that I could have dispensed with. This is "The Case of Becky," a play of dual personality,



JOSE COLLINS, WHO SINGS THE TITLE-RÔLE IN THE CASINO HIT, "THE MERRY COUNTESS"

From her latest photograph by Gould & Marden, New York