

SERIAL STORY

ELUSIVE ISABEL

By JACQUES FUTRELLE

Illustrations by M. KETTNER

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CHAPTER I.

Miss Isabel Thorne.

All the world rubs elbows in Washington. Outwardly it is merely a city of evasion, of conventionalities, sated with the commonplace pleasures of life, listless, blasé even, and always exquisitely, albeit frigidly, courteous; but beneath the still, suave surface strange currents play at cross purposes, intrigue is endless, and the merciless war of diplomacy goes on unceasingly. Occasionally, only occasionally, a bubble comes to the surface, and when it bursts the echo goes crashing around the earth. Sometimes a dynasty is shaken, a nation trembles, a ministry topples over; but the ripple moves and all is placid again. No man may know all that happens there, for then he would be diplomatic master of the world.

"There is plenty of red blood in Washington," remarked a jesting legislative gray-beard, once upon a time, "but it's always frozen before they put it in circulation. Diplomatic negotiations are conducted in the drawing-room, but long before that the fight is fought long before they put it in circulation. Diplomatic negotiations are conducted in the drawing-room, but long before that the fight is fought long before they put it in circulation. Diplomatic negotiations are conducted in the drawing-room, but long before that the fight is fought long before they put it in circulation."

So, this is Washington! And here at dinner are the diplomatic representatives of all the nations. That is the British ambassador, that stolid-faced, distinguished-looking, elderly man; and this is the French ambassador, dapper, voluble, plus-correct; here Russia's highest representative was a huge, blond beard; and yonder is the phlegmatic German ambassador. Scattered around the table, brilliant spots of color, are the uniformed envoys of the Orient—the smaller the country the more brilliant the splotch. It is a state dinner, to be followed by a state ball, and they are all present.

The Italian ambassador, Count di Rosini, was trying to interpret a French bon mot into English for the benefit of the dainty, doll-like wife of the Chinese minister—who was educated at Radcliffe—when a servant leaned over him and laid a sealed envelope beside his plate. The count glanced around at the servant, excused himself to Mrs. Quong Li Wei, and opened the envelope. Inside was a single sheet of embassy note paper, and a terse line signed by his secretary:

"A lady is waiting for you here. She says she must see you immediately, on a matter of the greatest importance."

The count read the note twice, with wrinkled brow, then scribbled on it in pencil: "Impossible to-night. Tell her to call at the embassy to-morrow morning at half-past ten o'clock."

He folded the note, handed it to the servant, and resumed his conversation with Mrs. W. Half an hour later the same servant placed a second sealed envelope beside his plate. Recognizing the superscription, the ambassador impatiently shoved it aside, intending to disregard it. But irritated curiosity finally triumphed, and he opened it. A white card on which was written this command was his reward: "It is necessary that you come to the embassy at once."

There was no signature. The handwriting was unmistakably that of a woman, and just as unmistakably strange to him. He frowned a little as he stared at it wonderingly, then idly turned the card over. There was no name on the reverse side—only a crest. Evidently the count recognized this, for his impassive face reflected surprise for an instant, and this was followed by a keen, bewildered interest. Finally he arose, made his apologies, and left the room. His automobile was at the door.

night, was a young woman, rather tall and severely gowned in some rich, glistening stuff which fell away sheerly from her splendid bare shoulders. She turned and he found himself looking into a pair of clear, blue-gray eyes, frank enough and yet in their very frankness possessing an alluring, indefinable subtlety. He would not have called her pretty, yet her smile, slight as it was, was singularly charming, and there radiated from her a something—personality, perhaps—which held his glance. He bowed low, and closed the door.

"I am at your service, Madam," he said in a tone of deep respect. "Please pardon my delay in coming to you."

"It is unfortunate that I didn't write the first note," she apologized graciously. "It would at least have saved a little time. You have the card?"

He produced it silently, creased down, and handed it to her. She struck a match, lighted the card, and it crumbled up in her gloved hand. The last tiny scrap found refuge in a silver tray, where she watched it burn to ashes, then she turned to the ambassador with a brilliant smile. He was still standing.

"The dinner isn't over yet?" she inquired.

"No, Madam, not for another hour, perhaps."

"Then there's no harm done," she went on lightly. "The dinner isn't of any consequence, but I should like very much to attend the ball afterward. Can you arrange it for me?"

"I don't know just how I would proceed, Madam," the ambassador objected diffidently. "It would be rather unusual, difficult, I may say, and—"

"But surely you can arrange it some way?" she interrupted demurely.

"The highest diplomatic representative of a great nation should not find it difficult to arrange so simple a matter as—"

"Pardon me for suggesting it, Madam," the ambassador persisted courteously, "but anything out of the usual attracts attention in Washington. I dare say, from the manner of your appearance to-night, that you would not care to attract attention to yourself."

She regarded him with an enigmatic smile.

"I'm afraid you don't know whom I mean," she said slowly, at last. "There's nothing dearer to a woman's heart than to attract attention to herself."

self." She laughed—a throaty, silvery note that was charming. "And if you hesitate now, then to-morrow—why, to-morrow I am going to ask that you open to me all this Washington world—this brilliant world of diplomatic society. You see what I ask now is simple."

pleased to proceed as you may suggest."

She nodded. He folded the note, replaced it in the envelope and returned it to her with another deep bow. She drew her skirts about her and sat down; he stood.

"It will be necessary for your name to appear on the invitation," the ambassador went on to explain. "If you give me your name I'll have my secretary—"

"Oh, yes, my name," she interrupted gaily. "Why, Count, you embarrass me. You know, really, I have no name. Isn't it awkward?"

"I understand perfectly, Madam," responded the count. "I should have said a name."

She meditated a moment.

"Well, say—Miss Thorne—Miss Isabel Thorne," she suggested at last. "That will do very nicely, don't you think?"

"Very nicely, Miss Thorne," and the ambassador bowed again. "Please excuse me a moment, and I'll give my secretary instructions how to proceed. There will be a delay of a few minutes."

He opened the door and went out. For a minute or more Miss Thorne sat perfectly still, gazing at the blank wooden panels, then she rose and went to the window again. In the distance, hazy in the soft night, the dome of the capitol rose mistily; over to the right was the congressional library, and out there where the lights sparkled lay Pennsylvania Avenue, a thread of commerce. Miss Thorne saw it all, and suddenly stretched out her arms with an all-enveloping gesture. She stood so for a minute, then they fell beside her, and she was motionless.

Count di Rosini entered.

"Everything is arranged, Miss Thorne," he announced. "Will you go with me in my automobile, or do you prefer to go alone?"

"I'll go alone, please," she answered after a moment. "I shall be there about eleven."

The ambassador bowed himself out. And so Miss Isabel Thorne came to Washington!

(TO BE CONTINUED)

RETURN OF THE PILGRIMS

Interesting Ceremonial When the Escort of the Sacred Carpet Gets Back to Cairo.

TOO MUCH OF A BATH

SWIMMERS UTTERLY UNABLE TO APPRECIATE JOKE.

Tyson and Botts, Kept in Water for Hours by Two Fool Friends, Emerged Therefrom in Most Unchristianlike Mood.

They take boarders out at Dr. Jones', and among them are Messrs. Tyson and Botts, two young men who are engaged in business in the city.

One day in July, after supper, Tyson and Botts went down to the creek to take a swim. As soon as they left the house, two or three of the other fellows hinted that it would be a good joke for two of them to dress in women's clothes and go over and scare Tyson and Botts.

So several of them borrowed some skirts and hats and other female fixings, and, after assuming them, started toward the creek.

The two swimmers saw them coming and began to paddle up stream to get out of their way. The female figures came nearer and took seats on the bank of the stream, so close to the clothes of the swimmers that there was no chance at all for Tyson and Botts to sneak out and dress themselves hurriedly. And the supposed women sat there in the most aggravating manner, while Tyson and Botts stayed in the water shivering.

Presently they got up to go, the swimmers thought; but, to the horror of the latter, they perceived the women get into a boat and begin to paddle up stream. They went very slowly, and so Tyson and Botts had time enough to swim farther up, in order to get out of the way.

The boat followed them up for about a mile, and then Tyson concluded to do something to explain the situation to the ladies. He was beginning to feel sick.

Accordingly he shouted at the top of his voice, and Botts shouted; but those idiotic women still continued to pull up stream. The swimmers were almost crazy, and at last they made a dash for the bank and hid behind the bushes.

Then the women in the boat turned round and began to row down the stream. Botts and Tyson got in the water again and swam after the boat. The women landed close by their clothes, and, to the amazement of the swimmers, picked them up and began to walk off with them. Then Tyson and Botts became excited and swam in close to the shore to hulloa at the women, and then the women began to laugh, and the victims of the joke saw just how it was.

When they emerged from the water they didn't join in the merriment. They seemed gloomy and sad. As soon as Botts got his shirt on he went up to Peters and shook his fist under his nose, and said:

"You red-headed idiot, I've got a notion to bang the liver out of you! Oh, you may laugh, but if you ever try any of your jokes on me again I'll murder you! Now, you mind me!"

Tyson and Botts will board elsewhere next summer.—New York Weekly.

The Peasant's View.

One of Lord Desborough's best anecdotes relates to a clergyman who was far more at home in the hunting field than in the pulpit, says Tit-Bits.

On the morning of a meet he was much annoyed at having to officiate at a funeral, but this over, he mounted his horse and started in pursuit of his friends. On the road he sought information of an old woman with a donkey cart.

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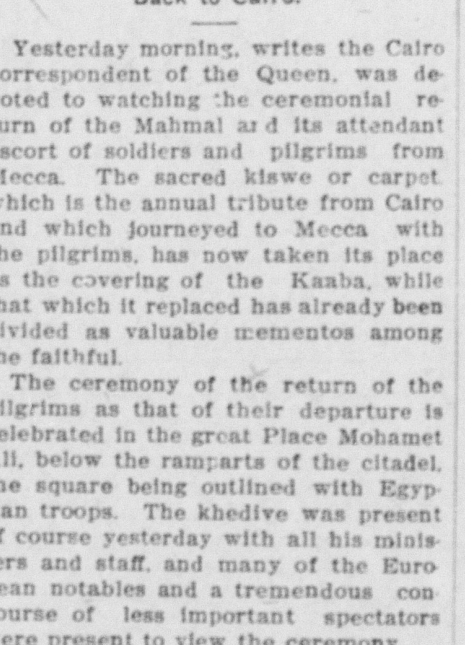
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