

THE SULTAN'S PEARLS

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CHAPTER I.

THE MAN WHO WAS LOST.

“Man overboard!”

Nick Carter—known to the captain and crew of the tramp steamer *Cherokee* as Sykes, the bos’n—heard this shout, taken up by man after man, as he lay stretched out on the foc’s’le head, in the early morning, just as the ship nosed her way into San Juan harbor, on the northern coast of Porto Rico.

The thrilling warning that somebody has fallen into the sea, which always sends a shock through both crew and passengers whenever heard, does not permit any ordinary person to remain quietly dozing.

The famous detective was one of the first to rush over to the side of the ship when the alarm had been given.

Close by him were his two assistants, Chick and Patsy Garvan, who, in the rôles of common sailors, had come down to Porto Rico to help him get back the fortune in jewels which had been stolen from Stephen Reed, the well-known New York millionaire.

“Who is it, chief?” asked Patsy, forcing his way to the front.

“I haven’t heard.”

“One of the crew, I suppose?” hazarded Chick.

“No doubt. There is only one passenger on board now, Paul Clayton. It isn’t he, for there he is, behind you.”

Meanwhile, under orders from Captain Bill Lawton himself, two life rings, each with some thirty fathoms of line attached, had been hurled over in the direction of where the drowning man might be expected to be.

It was too dark to make out plainly anything in the water, but a sharp lookout was kept for an hour, until the vessel reached her anchorage and the “mud hooks” were let go.

“Well, we couldn’t do any better,” grunted Captain Lawton, through his shaggy mustache, as he and his big, two-fisted first mate, Van Cross, stood together on the bridge. “We might have a roll call of the crew. I don’t know who it was went over. I reckon it wasn’t anybody who might have become President of the United States, nor nothing like that.”

The saturnine skipper gave vent to a husky “Haw-haw!” at his own joke, and Van Cross joined in with an equally raucous guffaw.

Nick Carter was the only person on board the *Cherokee* who thought of a certain possibility which would attach more importance to the falling off the vessel of the man than its commander had supposed.

“Patsy!” whispered Nick. “Go to Mr. Clayton’s cabin and see if that suit case of his, containing the Reed jewelry, is safe.”

“I can’t see it unless Clayton is there,” objected Patsy.

“Naturally. But he is there. I saw him go down just now. You may tell him I sent you to inquire.”

“Who shall I say? Sykes?”

“Of course. I have no other name on the *Cherokee*.”

As Patsy Garvan disappeared to obey his chief, although without understanding what it all meant, Nick Carter beckoned to Chick, and the two went down a forward hatch.

“What’s the idea, chief?” asked Chick.

“I want to see that the prisoners are secure, Chick. It has always been difficult to keep John Garrison Rayne behind the bars—except when he is inside the stone walls of a State’s prison—and I have not much faith in the place they have him in on the *Cherokee*.”

“The same about his man French, I suppose?”

“French is an insignificant scoundrel,” returned Nick. “He is entirely under Rayne’s influence. I dare say he regrets that he ever was persuaded to come on this ship—to act as assistant engineer and to do what he could toward robbing Clayton of the Reed jewelry.”

“The whole case strikes me as curious,” observed Chick. “To begin with, the robbery of Stephen Reed was traced directly to Paul Clayton, the passenger they call Miles.”

“I know, Chick. But I don’t want that talked about.”

“Nobody’s talking about it,” rejoined Chick. “Except to you. Of course, I think enough of Clayton—and his sweetheart, Lethia

Ford—to be glad you are letting him go. But that isn't all. If there should be any hitch about the delivery of the loot to Stephen Reed, it might put you in a bad position.”

Chick spoke with a gravity and directness that no one else would have ventured on with Nick Carter. But as the principal assistant of the great detective he had gained the right to advise with his chief, and the latter valued his counsel.

“There will not be any hitch,” answered Nick positively. “Paul Clayton has kept a constant eye on his suit case ever since we got it away from Rayne the other day.”

“Rayne nearly had it, in the engine room, that time,” remarked Chick, with a shrug.

“I cannot admit that,” was the detective's quick negative. “He had stolen the suit case, jewelry and all, from Clayton's stateroom, it is true. Also, he had stowed it away in the engine room. But, unless he got it off the ship, of what use could it ever have been to him?”

Chick shook his head dubiously.

“He's as cunning as any old-time Indian, and you can't tell what he might have done. No wonder they call him the Apache.”

“He is called the Apache partly because he is so ruthless when pursuing any object,” said Nick. “Remember that. I don't believe I ever knew another white man with quite so cruel a disposition. He neither asks nor gives quarter. I give him credit for being a fighter. Only, like the Indian warrior of thirty or forty years ago, he is not satisfied with merely overcoming his

foe. He wants to torture and kill him, too. But, come on, Chick! We'll take a look at the door of his glory hole, anyhow. I don't suppose it was Rayne who jumped or fell overboard just now. But I want to make sure."

Chick was a few paces ahead of his chief as they turned a corner in a narrow passage, lighted by an oil lantern swinging from the ceiling, and it was Chick who exploded in a shout of astonishment and dismay.

"Chief! He's gone!"

"Who?"

"Rayne!"

Nick Carter required only one glance at the open door of the confined space used as a prison cell on the *Cherokee* to understand that the man who had gone overboard was really John Garrison Rayne, the international crook, known as the Apache.

There were three cells in a row. When not employed as prisons they were used as storerooms for rope, spare canvas, and similar material. Now one was full of such stuff, the second was locked, and the third stood open.

"Well, it doesn't so much matter," remarked Nick Carter, when satisfied that Rayne had got away. "Of course he dived off the ship and swam to shore. He may hang about San Juan. But most likely he will get away as soon as there is a ship sailing that suits him. We have the comfort of knowing that he failed to

steal the Reed jewelry, and that is the main point, after all. Come on, Chick! We'll go on deck."

Hardly had they got there when they heard Captain Lawton raging profanely up and down.

"Six hundred dollars!" howled the skipper. "In good American money! Took it out of my locker, and had to break a lock that was strong enough for a jail door! But I'll get the thief somehow. Mr. Cross!"

Van Cross, who had been enjoying a quiet cigar, looked down from the bridge, and, in a surly tone, asked what was wanted.

"Line up the whole crew and find out first who it was that went overboard," growled Captain Lawton.

"I can tell you that," put in Nick Carter, in his character of Sykes, the boatswain.

"Whoever he is, he got six hundred dollars out of my cabin!" roared the skipper. "I'll skin him alive when I get my hands on him. Who is he?"

"The passenger you shut up for'ard for trying to steal the property of the passenger you call Mr. Miles," replied Nick. "He has got out of the brig, and he is not on the ship."

"What?" bellowed the wrathful skipper. "Do you mean to tell me that lubber has broken out? Who is he, anyhow? He says he is a business man, and he looks like it. Do you know anything about him?"

"I think I do," replied the detective. "I believe he is an ex-convict named John Garrison Rayne."

"John Garrison Rayne?" shouted Lawton. "I've heard of that fellow. He operates all over this continent."

"And on others, too," put in Chick.

"Come down to my cabin with me, Sykes, and help me go through my sea chest again. Bring your two men with you. Come on, Cross! I'll rummage it from top to the very bottom."

That is exactly what they did do. The locker belonging to Captain Lawton was an old-fashioned affair, such as seamen were more accustomed to use fifty years ago than in these days.

They had everything out and in again before the skipper was convinced that his money really was gone.

"Cross!" he bellowed.

The mate stepped to his side, looking at him questioningly.

"I'm going ashore!" announced Captain Lawton.

"When?"

"Now!" thundered the commander. "I'm going to find that lubber who dived overboard with my money. And, when I get him, I'll turn him inside out. Then I'll——"

"I wouldn't," advised Van Cross. "You have to look after the ship now we are in port."

"You can do that," interrupted Lawton savagely. "A captain can trust his first mate to do some things, can't he?"

"Sure!" assented Van Cross. "But I don't believe you'd ever find that man if you did go after him. Now, here's this Sykes, who has just said he knows the man. Why don't you let him go?"

"How do I know he'd ever come back?"

"He hasn't got his wages, has he?" grinned Cross. "Don't give him anything to spend, and he's bound to come back. Besides, he's got it in for that tall, gray-haired lubber himself. I know that from some words he let drop when he didn't know I was near."

Nick Carter overheard this confab, notwithstanding that it was conducted in hoarse whispers, and it coincided with his inclinations exactly.

He wanted to get ashore, for he was nervous over the way Rayne had left the ship.

He knew it was not like the Apache to give up a purpose he had nearly carried to fruition without fighting it to the end, and he believed something more would be heard of him before they were out of San Juan.

It would suit Nick exactly to go ashore, and, as he did not know just when he would be back, he resolved that he would take at least one of his assistants with him.

He was glad when he found that the master of the *Cherokee* was willing that he should go.

"Will you go into the town and see if you can get any trace of that lubber who jumped overboard, Sykes?" asked Captain Lawton, turning to him with as propitiatory an expression as his rocky face would permit. "Just loaf around in saloons and places where you'd be likely to pick up news."

"And if I find the man?" asked Nick.

"Bring him aboard, and I'll deal with him," was the significant answer. "Once you find him, that will be enough."

"How many men can I have with me?" asked Nick.

"How many do you want?"

"Two. Give me my two old shipmates. We've worked together before, and I'd rather have them than anybody else."

The captain gave a growling consent, and Nick Carter went forward to get his two assistants.

"The suit case is all right," announced Patsy. "I talked to Clayton, and he said he would not let it out of his hands until he had taken it to a bank in San Juan."

"The wise course!" approved Nick. "We are going ashore—you and Chick—with me."

"Bully! To get Rayne?" asked Patsy.

"If we can."

"Well, you bet we can," was the confident response, accompanied by a chuckle of delight at the prospect of some real action.

CHAPTER II.

A HEADQUARTERS DETECTIVE.

Nick Carter and his two assistants had been gone since the morning, and no report had come from them, nor had any one else gone ashore from the *Cherokee*, when, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, Captain Lawton told Van Cross he was going to see the agents to whom were consigned his miscellaneous cargo, so that he could begin to unload in the morning.

"Those fellows here would never come to me unless I went to them," growled the commander. "They think a tramp steamer doesn't need to be treated like a ship belonging to a regular line. Well, I'll make them pay for that, too. You'll see. Cross—you'll see!"

He dressed himself in what he called his shore-going toggery, and gave orders for a boat to be brought around to the foot of the sea ladder, with four men.

Captain Bill Lawton had his own little vanities. One of them was to go ashore in a strange port in state, with four oarsmen to propel him from his ship to the landing stage.

As the captain prepared to descend to his boat, he turned to Van Cross and shook his fist at the town across the harbor.

"What are you going to do, cap?" asked Cross carelessly. "What have the people of San Juan done to you?"

“Done? Some of them have got my six hundred dollars.”

“You mean that high-toned passenger of ours has it?” grinned the mate. “You can’t blame the people of Porto Rico for that.”

“Can’t I?” yelled Lawton. “Well, I do. When I get ashore the police have got to get my wad back for me. If they don’t, by Cæsar, I’ll raise a revolution in politics in the town that will put half of ’em out of a job.”

It was at this moment that he saw a boat coming up to the *Cherokee* in a businesslike way, with a frowning, dignified man in some sort of uniform cap in the stern, while two fellows, who looked like ordinary dock wallopers, plied the oars.

The official in the stern was dark-haired, and wore a heavy black mustache. He had eyes that seemed to pierce anything at which they looked. It was not easy to say just what color they were. In some lights they seemed to be a yellowish green, like an angry cat’s.

“Hello!” he shouted, in a gruff voice, as he saw Lawton.

“Hello!” replied Lawton, equally gruff.

“This the *Cherokee*, from New York?”

“Yes.”

“Captain William Lawton in command?”

“That’s my name.”

The captain had had an occasional argument with the police of San Juan, as he had in many other ports, on account of doubtful

cargoes. He did not care for the police on general principles, therefore.

As this man in the boat, who looked like a lieutenant in undress uniform, questioned him, he tried to think of anything he had done against the law in Porto Rico the last time he had been there.

The man in the boat did not give him much time to think, however. He told his men to row up to the ladder and make fast.

They hardly had had time to obey, when he stepped out of the boat, and with one hand touching the hand rope lightly, as if he did not need its help, mounted to the deck.

His eyes seemed to take in everything at a glance, including the crew and captain. He touched Lawton on the elbow in a peremptory way.

"Take me to your cabin. I want a word with you," he snapped. "There is my card."

He thrust the card into Lawton's hand, and pointed, with an offhand gesture, to the companionway. The captain read the words on the card with anything but a comfortable feeling. They were:

"Detective Lieutenant Sawyer, New York City."

That was all, but it was more than enough for the skipper of the *Cherokee*. He did not know that he ever had seen a detective's card before, but he supposed this was the regular formula.

Only a few moments previously, Captain Lawton had been anxious to get to the police, to complain about the loss of his six hundred dollars. Now that there was a detective at his elbow—probably a good one—he felt nervous. His own record was not clean, and he feared that this stern-mannered Sawyer might know more than would be healthful for him.

When they reached the cabin, the detective shrugged his shoulders as he glanced about him.

“Lost anything?” he snapped. “Looks as if you’d been making a search down here.”

“I’ve lost six hundred dollars.”

“Stolen?”

“Yes.”

“Some of the crew?”

“One of ’em. A man I signed on in New York, just to help him out. He was flat broke. This is what he did to me in return. Came down here and looted the cabin. But I’ll get him! I’ll sure get him! If he’s anywhere in Porto Rico, I’ll get him.”

“Don’t you think he was drowned?”

“No. Some of the crew saw him swimming, and he was headed for shore. It was early morning, and not light. That gave him a chance to get away, and he made the shore all right, no doubt.”

“You only think that, don’t you? You are not sure?”

“Sure enough to satisfy me,” growled Lawton. “In fact——”

“Well, that’s no business of mine,” interrupted Sawyer. “I want you to answer a few questions.”

The imperative manner of this man from police headquarters, New York, awed Captain Bill Lawton, in spite of himself, and he prepared to tell anything that might be asked of him.

“All right, lieutenant,” he grunted.

“Have you a passenger on board named Miles?”

“Yes.”

“Where is he?”

“In his stateroom, I believe. He went in there a while ago, and I have not seen him on deck since.”

“Is he a young man, who looks as if he might be a sort of society darling—plenty of money and nothing to do but to blow it in?”

“That fits him.”

“Tall, rather light-brown hair, gray eyes, and straight nose?”

“That’s a photograph of him,” replied Lawton. “You’ve got his description all right. What about him?”

“Nothing much.”

As the detective lieutenant said this carelessly, he took a pair of handcuffs from the left-hand pocket of his coat and placed them in one on the right.

The captain started. This looked like serious business for somebody. So long as it was not for himself, however, he did not care. Excitement was pleasant to him, as a rule.

"What do you want him for?" he asked, in a low tone. "He has kept himself away from me and the other officers all through the trip. I didn't think much about it, but I can see now why it was."

"That was the reason," remarked Sawyer dryly. "He's charged with stealing about eighty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds and other jewelry from Mr. Stephen Reed, of New York."

"What, the multimillionaire?" exclaimed the captain.

Sawyer nodded.

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Lawton. "I heard of that job before I left New York. But it never struck me that I had the man who did it right on my ship. Why, say!" he added eagerly, moved by a sudden thought.

"Well?"

"I'll bet it was he who took my six hundred dollars! I'll——"

Captain Lawton made a dive across the saloon toward the door of a stateroom. Sawyer grinned momentarily, straightening his face before the other could look around.

"Wait a minute, captain!" he ordered. "Don't ask him anything about your six hundred. Leave that to me."

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