

The Treasure-Train

By

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The Treasure-Train

"I am not by nature a spy, Professor Kennedy, but--well, sometimes one is forced into something like that." Maude Euston, who had sought out Craig in his laboratory, was a striking girl, not merely because she was pretty or because her gown was modish. Perhaps it was her sincerity and artlessness that made her attractive.

She was the daughter of Barry Euston, president of the Continental Express Company, and one could readily see why, aside from the position her father held, she should be among the most-sought- after young women in the city.

Miss Euston looked straight into Kennedy's eyes as she added, without waiting for him to ask a question:

"Yesterday I heard something that has made me think a great deal. You know, we live at the St. Germaine when we are in town. I've noticed for several months past that the lobbies are full of strange, foreign-looking people.

"Well, yesterday afternoon I was sitting alone in the tea-room of the hotel, waiting for some friends. On the other side of a huge palm I heard a couple whispering. I have seen the woman about the hotel often, though I know that she doesn't live there. The man I don't remember ever having seen before. They mentioned the name of Granville Barnes, treasurer of father's company--"

"Is that so?" cut in Kennedy, quickly. "I read the story about him in the papers this morning."

As for myself, I was instantly alive with interest, too.

Granville Barnes had been suddenly stricken while riding in his car in the country, and the report had it that he was hovering between life and death in the General Hospital. The chauffeur had been stricken, too, by the same incomprehensible malady, though apparently not so badly.

How the chauffeur managed to save the car was a miracle, but he brought it to a stop beside the road, where the two were found gasping, a quarter of an hour later, by a passing motorist, who rushed them to a doctor, who had them transferred to the hospital in the city. Neither of them seemed able or willing to throw any light on what had happened.

"Just what was it you overheard?" encouraged Kennedy.

"I heard the man tell the woman," Miss Euston replied, slowly, "that now was the chance--when any of the great warring powers would welcome and wink at any blow that might cripple the other to the slightest degree. I heard him say something about the Continental Express Company, and that was enough to make me listen, for, you know, father's

company is handling the big shipments of gold and securities that are coming here from abroad by way of Halifax. Then I heard her mention the names of Mr. Barnes and of Mr. Lane, too, the general manager." She paused, as though not relishing the idea of having the names bandied about. "Last night the--the attack on him--for that is all that I can think it was--occurred."

As she stopped again, I could not help thinking what a tale of strange plotting the casual conversation suggested. New York, I knew, was full of high-class international crooks and flimflammers who had flocked there because the great field of their operations in Europe was closed. The war had literally dumped them on us. Was some one using a band of these crooks for ulterior purposes? The idea opened up wide possibilities.

"Of course," Miss Euston continued, "that is all I know; but I think I am justified in thinking that the two things--the shipment of gold here and the attack--have some connection. Oh, can't you take up the case and look into it?"

She made her appeal so winsomely that it would have been difficult to resist even if it had not promised to prove important.

"I should be glad to take up the matter," replied Craig, quickly, adding, "if Mr. Barnes will let me."

"Oh, he must!" she cried. "I haven't spoken to father, but I know that he would approve of it. I know he thinks I haven't any head for business, just because I wasn't born a boy. I want to prove to him that I can protect the companies interests. And Mr. Barnes-- why, of course he will approve."

She said it with an assurance that made me wonder. It was only then that I recollected that it had been one of the excuses for printing her picture in the society columns of the Star so often that the pretty daughter of the president of the Continental was being ardently wooed by two of the company's younger officials. Granville Barnes himself was one. The other was Rodman Lane, the young general manager. I wished now that I had paid more attention to the society news. Perhaps I should have been in a better position to judge which of them it was whom she really had chosen. As it was, two questions presented themselves to me. Was it Barnes? And had Barnes really been the victim of an attack--or of an accident?

Kennedy may have been thinking the problems over, but he gave no evidence of it. He threw on his hat and coat, and was ready in a moment to be driven in Miss Euston's car to the hospital.

There, after the usual cutting of red tape which only Miss Euston could have accomplished, we were led by a white-uniformed nurse through the silent halls to the private room occupied by Barnes.

"It's a most peculiar case," whispered the young doctor in charge, as we paused at the door. "I want you to notice his face and his cough. His pulse seems very weak, almost imperceptible at times. The stethoscope reveals subcrepitant sounds all over his lungs. It's like bronchitis or pneumonia--but it isn't either."

We entered. Barnes was lying there almost in a state of unconsciousness. As we stood watching him he opened his eyes. But he did not see us. His vision seemed to be riveted on Miss Euston. He murmured something that we could not catch, and, as his eyes closed again, his face seemed to relax into a peaceful expression, as though he were dreaming of something happy.

Suddenly, however, the old tense lines reappeared. Another idea seemed to have been suggested.

"Is--Lane--hiring the men--himself?" he murmured.

The sight of Maude Euston had prompted the thought of his rival, now with a clear field. What did it mean? Was he jealous of Lane, or did his words have a deeper meaning? What difference could it have made if Lane had a free hand in managing the shipment of treasure for the company?

Kennedy looked long and carefully at the face of the sick man. It was blue and cyanosed still, and his lips had a violet tinge. Barnes had been coughing a great deal. Now and then his mouth was flecked with foamy blood, which the nurse wiped gently away. Kennedy picked up a piece of the blood-soaked gauze.

A moment later we withdrew from the room as quietly as we had entered and tiptoed down the hall, Miss Euston and the young doctor following us more slowly. As we reached the door, I turned to see where she was. A distinguished-looking elderly gentleman, sitting in the waiting-room, had happened to glance up as she passed and had moved quickly to the hall.

"What--you here, Maude?" we heard him say.

"Yes, father. I thought I might be able to do something for Granville."

She accompanied the remark with a sidelong glance and nod at us, which Kennedy interpreted to mean that we might as well keep in the background. Euston himself, far from chiding her, seemed rather to be pleased than otherwise. We could not hear all they said, but one sentence was wafted over.

"It's most unfortunate, Maude, at just this time. It leaves the whole matter in the hands of Lane."

At the mention of Lane, which her father accompanied by a keen glance, she flushed a little and bit her lip. I wondered whether it meant more than that, of the two suitors, her father obviously preferred Barnes.

Euston had called to see Barnes, and, as the doctor led him up the hall again, Miss Euston rejoined us.

"You need not drive us back," thanked Kennedy. "Just drop us at the Subway. I'll let you know the moment I have arrived at any conclusion."

On the train we happened to run across a former classmate, Morehead, who had gone into the brokerage business.

"Queer about that Barnes case, isn't it?" suggested Kennedy, after the usual greetings were over. Then, without suggesting that we were more than casually interested, "What does the Street think of it?"

"It is queer," rejoined Morehead. "All the boys down-town are talking about it--wondering how it will affect the transit of the gold shipments. I don't know what would happen if there should be a hitch. But they ought to be able to run the thing through all right."

"It's a pretty ticklish piece of business, then?" I suggested.

"Well, you know the state of the market just now--a little push one way or the other means a lot. And I suppose you know that the insiders on the Street have boosted Continental Express up until it is practically one of the 'war stocks,' too. Well, good-by--here's my station."

We had scarcely returned to the laboratory, however, when a car drove up furiously and a young man bustled in to see us.

"You do not know me," he introduced, "but I am Rodman Lane, general manager of the Continental Express. You know our company has had charge of the big shipments of gold and securities to New York. I suppose you've read about what happened to Barnes, our treasurer. I don't know anything about it--haven't even time to find out. All I know is that it puts more work on me, and I'm nearly crazy already."

I watched him narrowly.

"We've had little trouble of any kind so far," he hurried on, "until just now I learned that all the roads over which we are likely to send the shipments have been finding many more broken rails than usual."

Kennedy had been following him keenly.

"I should like to see some samples of them," he observed.

"You would?" said Lane, eagerly. "I've a couple of sections sawed from rails down at my office, where I asked the officials to send them."

We made a hurried trip down to the express company's office. Kennedy examined the sections of rails minutely with a strong pocket-lens.

"No ordinary break," he commented. "You can see that it was an explosive that was used--an explosive well and properly tamped down with wet clay. Without tamping, the rails would have been bent, not broken."

"Done by wreckers, then?" Lane asked.

"Certainly not defective rails," replied Kennedy. "Still, I don't think you need worry so much about them for the next train. You know what to guard against. Having been discovered, whoever they are, they'll probably not try it again. It's some new wrinkle that must be guarded against."

It was small comfort, but Craig was accustomed to being brutally frank.

"Have you taken any other precautions now that you didn't take before?"

"Yes," replied Lane, slowly; "the railroad has been experimenting with wireless on its trains. We have placed wireless on ours, too. They can't cut us off by cutting wires. Then, of course, as before, we shall use a pilot-train to run ahead and a strong guard on the train itself. But now I feel that there may be something else that we can do. So I have come to you."

"When does the next shipment start?" asked Kennedy.

"To-morrow, from Halifax."

Kennedy appeared to be considering something.

"The trouble," he said, at length, "is likely to be at this end. Perhaps before the train starts something may happen that will tell us just what additional measures to take as it approaches New York."

While Kennedy was at work with the blood-soaked gauze that he had taken from Barnes, I could do nothing but try to place the relative positions of the various actors in the little drama that was unfolding. Lane himself puzzled me. Sometimes I felt almost sure that he knew that Miss Euston had come to Kennedy, and that he was trying, in this way, to keep in touch with what was being done for Barnes.

Some things I knew already. Barnes was comparatively wealthy, and had evidently the stamp of approval of Maude Euston's father. As for Lane, he was far from wealthy, although ambitious.

The company was in a delicate situation where an act of omission would count for as much as an act of commission. Whoever could foresee what was going to happen might capitalize that information for much money. If there was a plot and Barnes had been a victim, what was its nature? I recalled Miss Euston's overheard conversation in the tea-room. Both names had been mentioned. In short, I soon found myself wondering whether some one might not have tempted Lane either to do or not to do something.

"I wish you'd go over to the St. Germaine, Walter," remarked Kennedy, at length, looking up from his work. "Don't tell Miss Euston of Lane's visit. But ask her if she will keep an eye out for that woman she heard talking--and the man, too. They may drop in again. And tell her that if she hears anything else, no matter how trivial, about Barnes, she must let me know."

I was glad of the commission. Not only had I been unable to arrive anywhere in my conjectures, but it was something even to have a chance to talk with a girl like Maude Euston.

Fortunately I found her at home and, though she was rather disappointed that I had nothing to report, she received me graciously, and we spent the rest of the evening watching the varied life of the fashionable hostelry in the hope of chancing on the holders of the strange conversation in the tea-room.

Once in a while an idea would occur to her of some one who was in a position to keep her informed if anything further happened to Barnes, and she would despatch a messenger with a little note. Finally, as it grew late and the adventuress of the tea-room episode seemed unlikely to favor the St. Germaine with her presence again that night, I made my excuses, having had the satisfaction only of having delivered Kennedy's message, without accomplishing anything more. In fact, I was still unable to determine whether there was any sentiment stronger than sympathy that prompted her to come to Kennedy about Barnes. As for Lane, his name was scarcely mentioned except when it was necessary.

It was early the next morning that I rejoined Craig at the laboratory. I found him studying the solution which he had extracted from the blood-soaked gauze after first removing the blood in a little distilled water.

Before him was his new spectroscope, and I could see that now he was satisfied with what the uncannily delicate light-detective had told him. He pricked his finger and let a drop of blood fall into a little fresh distilled water, some of which he placed in the spectroscope.

"Look through it," he said. "Blood diluted with water shows the well-known dark bands between D and E, known as the oxyhemoglobin absorption." I looked as he indicated and saw the dark bands. "Now," he went on, "I add some of this other liquid."

He picked up a bottle of something with a faint greenish tinge.

"See the bands gradually fade?"

I watched, and indeed they did diminish in intensity and finally disappear, leaving an uninterrupted and brilliant spectrum.

"My spectroscope," he said, simply, "shows that the blood-crystals of Barnes are colorless. Barnes was poisoned--by some gas, I think. I wish I had time to hunt along the road where the accident took place." As he said it, he walked over and drew from a cabinet several peculiar arrangements made of gauze.

He was about to say something more when there came a knock at the door. Kennedy shoved the gauze arrangements into his pocket and opened it. It was Maude Euston, breathless and agitated.

"Oh, Mr. Kennedy, have you heard?" she cried. "You asked me to keep a watch whether anything more happened to Mr. Barnes. So I asked some friends of his to let me know of anything. He has a yacht, the Sea Gull, which has been lying off City Island. Well, last night the captain received a message to go to the hospital, that Mr. Barnes wanted to see him. Of course it was a fake. Mr. Barnes was too sick to see anybody on business. But when the captain got back, he found that, on one pretext or another, the crew had been got ashore--and the Sea Gull is gone--stolen! Some men in a small boat must have overpowered the engineer. Anyhow, she has disappeared. I know that no one could expect to steal a yacht--at least for very long. She'd be recognized soon. But they must know that, too."

Kennedy looked at his watch.

"It is only a few hours since the train started from Halifax," he considered. "It will be due in New York early to-morrow morning-- twenty million dollars in gold and thirty millions in securities-- a seven-car steel train, with forty armed guards!"

"I know it," she said, anxiously, "and I am so afraid something is going to happen--ever since I had to play the spy. But what could any one want with a yacht?"

Kennedy shrugged his shoulders non-committally.

"It is one of the things that Mr. Lane must guard against," he remarked, simply. She looked up quickly.

"Mr. Lane?" she repeated.

"Yes," replied Kennedy; "the protection of the train has fallen on him. I shall meet the train myself when it gets to Worcester and come in on it. I don't think there can be any danger before it reaches that point."

"Will Mr. Lane go with you?"

"He must," decided Kennedy. "That train must be delivered safely here in this city."

Maude Euston gave Craig one of her penetrating, direct looks.

"You think there is danger, then?"

"I cannot say," he replied.

"Then I am going with you!" she exclaimed.

Kennedy paused and met her eyes. I do not know whether he read what was back of her sudden decision. At least I could not, unless there was something about Rodman Lane which she wished to have cleared up. Kennedy seemed to read her character and know that a girl like Maude Euston would be a help in any emergency.

"Very well," he agreed; "meet us at Mr. Lane's office in half an hour. Walter, see whether you can find Whiting."

Whiting was one of Kennedy's students with whom he had been lately conducting some experiments. I hurried out and managed to locate him.

"What is it you suspect?" I asked, when we returned. "A wreck-- some spectacular stroke at the nations that are shipping the gold?"

"Perhaps," he replied, absently, as he and Whiting hurriedly assembled some parts of instruments that were on a table in an adjoining room.

"Perhaps?" I repeated. "What else might there be?"

"Robbery."

"Robbery!" I exclaimed. "Of twenty million dollars? Why, man, just consider the mere weight of the metal!"

"That's all very well," he replied, warming up a bit as he saw that Whiting was getting things together quickly. "But it needs only a bit of twenty millions to make a snug fortune--" He paused and straightened up as the gathering of the peculiar electrical apparatus, whatever it was, was completed. "And," he went on quickly, "consider the effect on the stock-market of the news. That's the big thing."

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