

the letters to him for signature, and later to get his cigarettes?"

"Certainement, monsieur.—I mean, that seems to be true. But where is he? Why should he not come back? What does it mean? Madame Boisségur is frantic, prostrated! She wanted me to go to the police; but I did not think it wise that it should become public, so I came here."

"Very well," commented Grimm. "Let it rest as it is. Meanwhile you may reassure madam. Point out to her that if M. Boisségur signed the letters Tuesday night, he was at least alive; and if he came or sent for the cigarettes Wednesday night, he was still alive. I shall call at the Embassy this afternoon and look around. No, it isn't advisable to go with you now. Give me your latch key to the front door, please."

Rigolot produced the key, and passed it over without a word.

"And one other thing," Grimm continued, "please collect all the revolvers that may be in the house, and take charge of them yourself. If anyone, by chance, heard a burglar prowling around there to-night, he might shoot, and in that event kill either M. Boisségur, or—or me."

THE white rays of a distant are light filtered through the half-drawn velvet hangings, and cast a faint illuminated path across the Ambassador's desk; the heavy leather chairs were mere impalpable splotches in the shadows; the cut glass knobs of a mahogany cabinet caught the faint glint of light, and reflected it dimly. Outside was the vague, indefinable night drone of a city asleep, unbroken by any sound that was distinguishable, until finally there came the distant boom of a clock. It struck twice.

Seated on a couch in one corner of the Ambassador's office was Grimm. He was leaning back in a corner, against the high arm of leather, with his immaculate feet on the seat, thoughtfully nursing his knees. If his attitude indicated anything, except sheer comfort, it was that he was listening. He had been there for two hours, wide awake, and absolutely immovable. Five, ten, fifteen, minutes more passed, and then Grimm heard the grind and whir of an automobile a block or so away, coming toward the Embassy. Now it was in front.

"Honk! Hon-on-onk!" it called plaintively. "Hon-on-onk! Honk!"

The signal! At last! The automobile went rushing on, full tilt, while Grimm removed his feet from the seat, and dropped them noiselessly to the floor. Thus, with his hands on his knees, and listening, listening with every faculty strained, he sat motionless, peering toward the open door which led into the hall. The car was gone now, the sound of it swallowed up in the distance; still he sat there. It was obviously some noise in the house that he was waiting for.

Minute after minute passed, and still nothing. There was not even the whisper of a wind stirred drapery. He was just about to rise, when suddenly, with no other noise than that of the sharp click of the switch, the electric lights in the room blazed up brilliantly. The glare dazzled Grimm with its blinding flood; but he didn't move. Then, softly, almost in a whisper:

"GOOD evening, Mr. Grimm."

It was a woman's voice, pleasant, unsurprised, perfectly modulated. Grimm had heard it only twice in his life, and certainly did not expect it now; but he knew it instantly,—there was not another quite like it in the world,—and though he was still blinking a little, he came to his feet courteously.

"Good morning, Miss Thorne," he corrected gravely.

Now his vision was clearing, and he saw her,—Miss Isabel Thorne—My Lady of Mystery,—a graceful figure, silhouetted against the rich green of the wall draperies. Her lips were curled the least bit, as if she might have been smiling, and the blue-gray eyes reflected a glint of—of—was it amusement? The folds of her evening dress fell away from her, and one bare, white arm was extended, as her hand still rested on the switch.

"And you didn't hear me!" she taunted, still in the half whisper. "I didn't think you would. Now I'm going to put out the lights for an instant, while you pull the shades down, and then—then we must have a—conference."

The switch snapped. The lights died as suddenly as they were born, and Grimm, moving noiselessly, visited each of the four windows in turn. Then the lights blazed again.

"Just for a moment," Miss Thorne explained to him quietly, and handed him a sheet of paper. "I want you to read this,—read it carefully,—then I shall turn out the lights again. They are dangerous. After that we may discuss the matter at our leisure."

Grimm read the paper, while Miss Thorne's eyes questioned his impassive face. At length he looked up indolently, listlessly, and the switch snapped. She crossed the room and sat down; Grimm sat beside her.

"I think," Miss Thorne suggested tentatively, "that that accounts perfectly for M. Boisségur's disappearance?"

"It gives one explanation at least," Grimm assented musingly. "Kidnapped—held prisoner—fifty thousand dollars demanded for his safety and

release." A pause. "And to whom, may I ask, was this demand addressed?"

"To Madame Boisségur," replied Miss Thorne. "I have the envelop in which it came. It was mailed at the general postoffice at half-past one o'clock this afternoon, so the canceling stamp shows, and the envelop was addressed, as the letter is written, on a typewriter."

"And how," inquired Grimm, after a long pause,— "how did it come into your possession?" He waited a little. "Why didn't Rigolot report this development to me this afternoon when I was here?"

"M. Rigolot did not inform you of it because he didn't know of it himself," she replied, answering the last question first. "It came into my possession directly from the hands of Madame Boisségur. She gave it to me."

"Why?"

"Your Secret Service, Mr. Grimm, doesn't know so much about me as it would like," she mocked. "I know to the last detail just what your bureau knows about me. I'll tell you the rest of it now,—that is, as much as it is necessary for you to know."

Grimm was peering through the inscrutable darkness, straight into her face,—a pallid daub in the gloom, shapeless, indistinct.

"I have known Madame Boisségur for half a dozen years," My Lady of Mystery continued. "We have been friends for that long. I met her first in Tokio, later in Berlin, and within a few weeks here in Washington. You see I have traveled." She hesitated a moment, then: "For your information and satisfaction I will explain that I am an agent of the Italian Government. I too am in the Secret Service."

"Oh! That's it!" commented Grimm. "Please go on."

"The only two persons in Washington who are aware of this are you and Madame Boisségur," she resumed, "and it is not desirable that anyone else should know it. Even the Italian Ambassador, Count di Rosini, doesn't know. He merely knows that I brought him a letter from Her—from a

source that makes it imperative upon him to obey my commands, and to stand sponsor for me. I believe," and she laughed gaily, "that answers a question in your mind? Well, Madame Boisségur received this letter about half-past four o'clock this afternoon, and about half-past five she sent for me and placed it in my hands, together with all the singular details following upon the Ambassador's disappearance. So it would seem that you and I are allies for this once, and the problem is already solved. There merely remains the task of finding and releasing the Ambassador."

Grimm sat perfectly still, twisting the seal ring on his aristocratic finger. "And why," he asked slowly, "are you here now?"

"For the same reason that you are here," she replied readily,— "to see for myself if the person who twice came here at night—once for the Ambassador's letters and once for his cigarettes—would by any chance make another trip. I knew you were here, of course."

"You knew I was here!" repeated Grimm musingly. "And may I—"

"Just as you knew that I, or some one at least, had entered this house a few minutes ago," she interrupted. "The automobile horn outside was a signal, wasn't it?"

Grimm didn't say. "Didn't you anticipate any personal danger when you entered?" he queried instead. "Weren't you afraid I might shoot?"

"No. You are not the harebrained type that shoots."

THERE was a long silence. Grimm still sat with his elbows on his knees, staring at the vague white splotch that was Miss Thorne's face and bare neck. One of her white arms hung like a pallid serpent, and her hand was at rest on the seat of the couch.

"You know, Miss Thorne," Grimm informed her pleasantly at length, "you haven't—I mean, admitting all you have said—and, believe me, I shall respect your confidence—you haven't convinced me yet that you are not the one that came here for

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IN THE BACK YARD OF THE WAR GOD

By J. E. JENKS

THE military museum of original and voluntary suggestion is otherwise and officially known as the army board of ordnance and fortification. It is composed of officers that have the duty of attending to the preparedness of this country for foreign assault and invasion. Most of their time is taken up with their respective duties in the military establishment; but they meet at least once a month for general conference on the subject of sea coast artillery and the thousand odds and ends of equipment and mechanism that impart accuracy to gun fire. Some of their time is taken up in considering crank inventions, of which about the same proportion reaches the board every year.

There are times when these propositions take a particular form, with the trend in one or another direction and partiality for a particular weapon or form of warfare. For a time it was the flying machine; but lately it seems to be the variety of use to which the automobile may be put on the field of carnage. Recently there have been a number of suggestions concerning the armored car, some of them crude in their conception of what is necessary in the way of protecting a vehicle of this sort.

One of these propositions came from a man that wished to be assured that his invention would not be appropriated without credit to himself. He was asked to send some definite information, and this request was sent to a box number in the town that he had given in his letter. A reply was received stating that it was impossible for the inventor to come to Washington "at present," since his position was such that he could not avail himself of this privilege of a personal interview with the army board. It developed then that the "position" occupied by the inventor was that of convict in one of the penitentiaries. His invention, however, proved to have no special value, and was not so good as some of the other propositions to place armor on motor cars, the value of which vehicles in the field in time of war is bound to have its restrictions.

There is still a disposition on the part of inventors to devise methods by which armies may be exterminated by unusual and of course devastating methods. For a long time the favorite proposition was to drop bombs and other destructive shells from great heights; and one such plan has been submitted recently to use small balloons with an automatic releasing clutch which shall let the deadly missile fall on the enemy at the psychological moment. The inventor overlooked the fact that the vagaries of the wind might take this carrier over the camp or line of the friend quite as rapidly as it would in the direction of the foe.

Then there is the familiar invention of bringing confusion on the enemy by firing shells filled with pepper and causing such discomfort that the opposing force may easily be overcome. Other forms of embarrassment in the same line contemplate the use of snuff; so that the enemy might be set a-snee-

ing and meet his defeat or capture while in this overwhelming nasal convulsion. Still another idea was to employ chloroform and literally put the enemy to sleep, and then seize him while in this enforced somnolent state.

It is of record also that during the war with Spain some one seriously proposed to the navy department that thirteen-inch projectiles be laden with pamphlets printed in the Spanish language, pointing out the defects and cruelties of the Spanish Government. This literature was to be thrown by our battleships into the interior of Spain, and so communicate to the occupants of the virgin soil the true state of affairs, inducing them to rise in arms and aid in the overthrow of the Spanish crown.

Methods of attack are also represented by such propositions as that of placing oil cups on the projectiles, so that in their passage through the bore of the gun they will lubricate that avenue and promote the speed of the shell. Akin to this suggestion is the use of electric magnets on the interior of the gun, so that the shell will gain in velocity as it passes along. There is also another use of the magnet proposed, to place it in the projectile so that it will be attracted to the enemy's works and directed in its flight to hit squarely, and of course with deadly effect.

Opposing these implements of destruction is the varied assortment of means of defense, such as the bullet proof clothing which comes up every now and then with all sorts of claims of the inventor. Whenever there is a persistent presentation of a bullet proof vest or coat, the military authorities recall an incident in the career of Lieutenant General Miles, who was being bothered by a man that had brought into his office a piece of cloth which he claimed would turn aside the swiftest bullet fired at no matter what close range.

General Miles listened to the claims of the agent and then calmly rang his bell. When the messenger appeared, he pointed to a rifle in the corner and asked that it be brought to him with some ammunition. He turned to the man and said, "Now put on your bullet proof vest and stand across the room."

The man gasped, held on the furniture, and tried to cover his confusion with a stammering appeal for time.

General Miles added, "I want to see if what you say is really true. I have no doubt of it; but if you are as certain of it as you say, you certainly have no objection to letting me fire at the bullet proof garment."

The story ends with this remark of General Miles. It is presumed that he was troubled no more by the bullet proof man.

There are also protective aprons which are to be used as shields against torpedoes; the use of rockets and fire attached to shells so as to disclose the location of the enemy; along with numerous other means of protection and attack.

They are all the pets of those that wish—for a consideration—to make war more certain, and they are added to the lumbering archives of futile invention.