

THE RED SYMBOL

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

MAURICE WYNN, hero of the tale, was an American newspaperman attached to the staff of Lord Southbourne, publisher of a great London daily, and just assigned to important duty in Russia. He was in love with Anne Pendennis, a girl of remarkable beauty, and his love was reciprocated.

Wynn was visited in his apartment by an old, poverty-stricken Russian, who was in search of one Cassavetti (known to the stranger as Selinski), a mysterious newspaper correspondent who posed as a Greek. The Russian astounded Wynn by producing a photograph of Anne and mumbling something about a red geranium being "the symbol," and that he wished to warn her against danger. At a dinner party Anne handed a red geranium to Cassavetti, and Maurice overheard the latter exclaim under his breath, "The symbol! Then it is she!"

Southbourne, in giving final instructions to Maurice, announced that Carson, one of his correspondents, an intimate friend of Maurice's, had been murdered in Russia because of his connection with a mysterious woman, and produced a bloodstained photograph of Anne which had been found on his body. Carson's hand clutched a red geranium.

When on the way home late at night Maurice saw Anne with two men rowing down the Thames, and found a scarlet geranium on Westminster Bridge steps.

Cassavetti was found murdered in his rooms, and the police discovered that a red-haired woman had visited him the same night. Anne had red hair.



BY JOHN IRONSIDE

Drawing by P. C. Yohn



swift flowing, murky tide, I argued the matter out with myself. Jim was right. I had behaved like an idiot in the garden just now. Well, I would take his advice and brace up, be on guard. I would do more than that. I would not even vex myself with conjectures as to how much he knew, or how he had come by that knowledge. It was impossible to adopt one part of his counsel, impossible to forget that such a person as Anne Pendennis ever existed; but I would think of her only as the girl I loved, the girl whom I should see in Berlin within a few days.

I wrote to her that night, saying nothing of the murder, but only that I was unexpectedly detained and would send her a wire when I started, so that she would know when to expect me. Once face to face with her, I should tell her everything, and she would give me the key to the mystery that had tortured me so terribly. But I must never let her know that I had doubted her, even for an instant!

The morning mail brought me an unexpected treasure, only a postcard, penciled by Anne herself in the train, and mailed at Dover.

It was written in French, and was brief enough; but, for the time being, it changed and brightened the whole situation.

I scarcely hoped to see you at the station, *mon ami*; there was so little time. What haste you must have made to get there at all! Shall I really see you in Berlin? I do want you to know my father. And you will be able to tell me your plans. I don't know even your destination. The Reichshof, where we stay, is in Friedrichstrasse, close to Unter den Linden. *Au revoir!* A. P.

A simple message; but it meant much to me. I regarded it as proof that her hurried journey was not a flight, but a mere coincidence.

Mary had a postcard too, from Calais; just a few words with the promise of a letter at the end of the journey. She showed it to me when I called round at Chelsea on Monday evening to say goodbye once more. The inquest opened that morning, and was adjourned for a week. Only formal and preliminary evidence was taken, my own principally, and I was able to arrange to leave next day. Inspector Freeman made the orthodox statement that the police were in possession of a clue which they were following up. I had a chat with him afterward and tried to ferret out about the clue, but he was mum as a clam.

We parted on the best of terms, and I was certain he did not guess that my interest in the affair was more than the natural interest of one who was as personally concerned in it as I was, with the insatiable curiosity of the journalist superadded. Whatever I had been yesterday, I was fully master of myself to-day.

JIM was out when I reached Chelsea, somewhat to my relief, and Mary was alone for once.

She welcomed me cordially, as usual, and commended my improved appearance. "I felt upset about you last night, Maurice; you weren't a bit like yourself. And what on earth did you mean in the drawing room—about Anne?" she asked.

"Sheer madness," I said, with a laugh. "Jim made that peg too strong, and I'm afraid I was—well, a bit off. So fire away, if you want to lecture me; though, on my honor, it was the first drink I'd had all day."

I knew by the way she had spoken that Jim had not confided his suspicions to her. I didn't expect he would.

She accepted my explanation like the good little soul she is. "I never thought of that. It's not like you, Maurice. But I won't lecture you this time, though you did scare me. I guess you felt pretty bad after finding that poor fellow. I felt shuddery enough even at the thought of it, considering that we knew him and had all been together such a little while before. Has the murderer been found yet?"

"Not that I know of. The inquest has adjourned, and I'm off to-morrow. I'll have to come back if necessary; but I hope it won't be. Any message for Anne? I shall see her on Wednesday."

"No, only what I've already written; that I hope her father's better, and that she'll persuade him to come back with her. She was to have stayed with us all summer, as you know, and I'm not going to send her trunks on till she writes definitely that she can't return. My private opinion of Mr. Pendennis is that he's a cranky and exacting old pig. He resented Anne's leaving him, and I surmise this illness of his is only a ruse to get her back again. Anne ought to be firmer with him."

I laughed. Mary, as I knew, had always been "firm" with her "papa" in her girlish days; had, in fact, ruled him with a rod of iron—cased in velvet, indeed, but inflexible, nevertheless.

I started on my delayed journey next morning, and during the long day and night of travel my spirits were steadily on the up grade.

Cassavetti, the murder, all the puzzling events of the last few days, receded to my mental horizon, vanished beyond it, as boat and train bore me swiftly onward, away from England, toward Anne Pendennis.

BERLIN at last! I drove from the Potsdam station to the nearest barber's,—I needed a shave badly, though I had made myself otherwise fairly spick and span in the parlor car,—and thence to the hotel Anne had mentioned. She would be expecting me; for I had despatched the promised wire when I started.

"Send my card up to Fräulein Pendennis at once. I said to the waiter who came forward to receive me.

He looked at me, at the card, but did not take it. "Fräulein Pendennis is not here," he asserted. "Herr Pendennis has already departed, and the fräulein has not been here at all."

CHAPTER X.

Disquieting News

I STARED at the man incredulously. "Herr Pendennis has departed, and the fräulein has not been here at all!" I repeated. "You must be mistaken, man! The fräulein was to arrive here Monday, at about this time."

He protested that he had spoken the truth, and summoned the manager, who confirmed the information.

Yes, Herr Pendennis had been unfortunately indisposed; but the sickness had not been so severe as to require that the so charming and dutiful fräulein should hasten to him. He had a telegram received, doubtless from the fräulein herself, and thereupon with much haste departed. He drove to the Friedrichstrasse station; but that was all that was known of his movements. Two letters had arrived for Miss Pendennis, which her father had taken, and there was also a telegram, delivered since he left. Both father and daughter, it seemed, were well known at the hotel, where they always stayed during their frequent visits to the German capital.

I was keenly disappointed. Surely some malignant Fate was intervening between Anne and myself, determined to keep us apart. Why had she discontinued her journey, and had she returned to England, to the Cayleys? If not, where was she now? Unanswerable questions, of course. All I could do was to possess my soul in patience and hope for tidings when I reached my destination. And meanwhile, by breaking my journey here for the sole purpose of seeing her, I had incurred a delay of twelve hours. One thing at least was certain, her father could not have left Berlin for the purpose of meeting her en route, or he would not have started from the Friedrichstrasse station.

With a rush all the doubts and perplexities that I had kept at bay ever since I received Anne's postcard reinvaded my mind; but I beat them back resolutely. I would not allow myself to think, to conjecture.

I moped around aimlessly for an hour or two, telling myself that Berlin was the beastliest hole on the face of the earth. Never had time dragged as it did that morning! I seemed to have been wandering for a century or more by noon, when I found myself opposite the entrance of the Astoria Restaurant. "When in difficulties, feed," Jim Cayley had counseled, and a long lunch would kill an hour or so, anyhow.

I HAD scarcely settled myself at a table when a man came along and clapped me on the shoulder. "Wynn, by all that's wonderful! What are you doing here, old fellow?"

It was Percy Medhurst, a somewhat irresponsible but very decent youngster, whom I had seen a good deal of in London, one way and another. He was a clerk in the British Foreign Office; but I hadn't the least idea that he had been sent to Berlin. He had dined at the Cayleys' only a week or two back.

"I'm feeding, or going to feed. What are you doing here?" I responded as we shook hands. I was glad to see him. Even his usually frivolous conversation was preferable to my own meditations at the moment.

"Just transferred; regular stroke of luck. Got here only last night; haven't reported myself for duty yet. I say, old chap, you look rather hipped. What's up?"

"Hunger," I answered laconically. "And I guess that's easily remedied. Come and join me."

We talked of indifferent matters for a time, or rather he did most of the talking.

"Staying long?" he asked at last, as we reached the coffee and liqueur stage. We had eaten very well, and I, at least, felt in a much more philosophic frame of mind than I had for some hours.

"No, only a few hours. I'm en route for Petersburg."

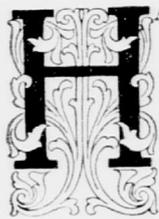
"What luck! Wish I was. Berlin's all right, of course, but a bit stodgy; and they're having a jolly lot of rows at Petersburg, with more to come. I say, though, what an awful shame about that poor chap Carson! Have you heard of it?"

"Yes; I'm going to take his place. What do you know about him, anyhow?"

"You are! I didn't know him at all, but I know a fellow who was awfully thick with him. Met him

CHAPTER IX.

Not at Berlin



ANGED or condemned to penal servitude for life!"

There fell a dead silence after Jim Cayley uttered those ominous words. He waited for me to speak; but for a minute or more I was dumb. He had voiced the fear that had been on me more or less vaguely ever since I broke open the door and saw Cassavetti's corpse, which had taken definite shape when I

heard Freeman's assertion concerning a "red-haired woman." And yet my whole soul revolted from the horrible, the appalling, suspicion. I kept assuring myself passionately that she was, she must be, innocent! I would stake my life on it!

Now, after that tense pause, I turned on Jim furiously. "What do you mean? Are you mad?" I demanded.

"No; but I think you are," Jim answered soberly. "I'm not going to quarrel with you, Maurice, nor allow you to quarrel with me. As I told you before, I am only warning you, for your own sake and for Anne's. You know, or suspect at least—"

"I don't!" I broke in hotly. "I neither know nor suspect that—that she— Jim Cayley, would you believe Mary to be a murderess, even if all the world declared her to be one? Wouldn't you—"

"Stop!" he said sternly. "You don't know what you're saying, you young fool! My wife and Anne Pendennis are very different persons. Shut up, now! I say you've got to hear me! I have not accused Anne Pendennis of being a murderess. I don't believe she is one. But I do believe that, if once suspicion is directed toward her, she would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to prove her innocence. You ought to know that too, and yet you are doing your best by your ridiculous behavior to bring suspicion to bear on her."

"I!"

"Yes, you! If you want to save her, pull yourself together, man; play your part for all it's worth! It's an easy part enough, if you'll only dismiss Anne Pendennis from your mind, forget that such a person exists. You've got to give evidence at this inquest. Well, give it straightforwardly, without worrying yourself about any side issues, and for Heaven's sake get and keep your nerves under control, or—"

He broke off and we both turned as the door opened and a smart parlor maid tripped into the room.

"Beg pardon, sir. I didn't know you were here," she said with the demure grace characteristic of the well-trained English servant. "It's nearly supper time, and I came to see if there was anything else wanted. I laid the table early."

"All right, Marshall. I've been giving Mr. Wynn some supper, as he has to be off. You needn't sound the gong for a few minutes."

"Very well, sir. If you'll ring when you're ready, I'll put the things straight."

She retreated as quietly as she had come, and I think we both felt that her entrance and exit relieved the tension of our interview.

I rose and held out my hand. "Thanks, Jim. I can't think how you know as much as you evidently do; but, anyhow, I'll take your advice. I'll be off now, and I won't come back to-night, as Mary asked me. I'd rather be alone. See you both to-morrow. Goodnight."

I WALKED back to Westminster, lingering for a considerable time by the river, where the air was cool and pleasant. The many pairs of lovers promenading the tree-shaded embankment took no notice of me, nor I of them.

As I leaned against the parapet, watching the