crumbling yellow brick on a sepulchrally quiet narrow street that had its beginning at the west side of the old cathedral. No doubt the hotel clerk had told them about the house. They looked through it, guided by the crone who owned it, who lived next door and knew enough United Statese to get her price; and when I saw the Treasurer forking gold pieces into her hand on the front steps, after their inspection of the house, I knew that they had rented it. My affair in Vera Cruz, of course, was an electric light concession; but, all the same, as I swung through the quiet little street and sensed the nature of that renting transaction, I felt like calling the tired looking couple aside and suggesting to them that the air and scenery of a town or hamlet in a non-extradition country were what they were really looking for. But I didn't. Sometimes I think that, among my multifold talents, the most useful one is a knack of knowing the right minute when not to do things.

On the following day I saw the Treasurer and his wife, both with bowed heads, but the man with sidelongishly observant eyes, strolling aimlessly about in the shade of the cathedral, the lachrymose-eyed rat of a two-pound hairless dog, chirking up under the heat of his native slime, tagging along barking at nothing. And on the morning after that I saw them rocking back and forth, still silent, on the porch of the crumbling yellow brick house.

Again I was impelled to send to the man a list of non-extradition countries still remaining in the western hemisphere; that list having then, as now, contracted to one country, the same being Honduras. But again I did not. It was safe to assume, I considered, that I was the only hombre in Vera Cruz who knew them—yet. Somehow, though, I took on a new diligence in watching the debarkation of passengers from the arriving steamers. The silent, moody, down-and-out pair, so incongruously placed, had gained a clutch on what we'll call my lawless side, if you like things smoothed over that way. It was December, near Christmas. I knew they had children and grandchildren. I was sorry they were not at home, thinking holly and tinsel and stuffed stockings. And so I watched the passengers getting off the arriving steamers.

AND that watchfulness proved to be a pretty fairish idea. On the third morning after the arrival at Vera Cruz of the Treasurer and his wife a freighter dropped in from New Orleans. She carried four passengers. One of them was one of those star big-agency sleuths. I had known him in four countries between Capricorn and Cancer; for the titbit trips after runaways who streaked for the South generally fell to him. I could never tell you why. His hat, I had always considered, rimmed many pounds of inert ivory. But he was a star big-agency sleuth, and there he was, coming down the gangway.

He hello-Turk'd me at the gangway's foot, and proceeded sleuthily to tell me all about what he was there for. There wasn't the least need for him to do that; but mayb you've noticed that the starrier the sleuth the gassier he is. So he told me—State Treasurer—wife—hairless dog—five weeks gone—the whole narrative, as if I'd been living near the main peak of the Mountains of the Moon and hadn't heard a word of it. In New Orleans, a few days before, he'd been tipped by cable from Havana that the packet bound for Vera Cruz had on board an elderly man whose wife carried a Mexican hairless dog. And he smiled and petted his mustache. No doubt they were his people! Had I seen them?

I took him to the Hotel Mexico and poured into him all the mescal and things that could be had while I reflected. My desire was to make locomotion difficult, if not impossible, for him for the time being. It is hard to do that to a big-agency star sleuth. Absorption is the middle name of most of them. And so I could not keep him from walking. The cathedral was the big thing in sight. I wanted to show him the remains of an old fortress, with funny brass howitzers, in the other direction. But he was for the cathedral. So I had to stroll in that direction with him. The Treasurer and his wife and the hairless dog with his aged, muffled woof-wooing were strolling in the big cool shadow of the cathedral. The sleuth saw them and petted his mustache again.

"This," said he to me, "is like detaching a penny from the loose mitt of a little girl under ether."

I asked him if they were his people. His reply was to pull from his pocket a mate to the circular I had in my pocket.

"It is like," he went on, "leaning up against a half-melted snow man in the front yard and watching him topple."

"Too bad," said I. "Chisels you out of a sure-enough trip, instead of this little one-port jump. You might have got as far south as Lima if you hadn't been too keen to spring your man."

"Oh, that's all right," said he. "I get plenty of trips. But I don't often nudge into anything so soft as this. Let's go back to the hotel. I'll wire headquarters that I've got him located and will convoy him up on the next steamer."

I liked the idea of his going back to the hotel right then to do his telegraphing. But the star changed his mind. He decided to shadow the pair to find out where they were living; which, you are to consider, was pretty bright of him in the circumstances. And so, after half an hour or so, he saw them move slowly from the cathedral plaza to their little house on the quiet street, where, for awhile before going in, they sat on the porch and rocked and fanned themselves. Then the pet of the big agency returned to the Hotel Mexico; I with him. He sent his gloaty little wire to his headquarters, announcing that he had his man cutely corraled. I will say this for myself, that when bedtime arrived that night I did not shirk my sense of responsibility to a fellow American. I put him to bed, seeing that he could not have got there without my assistance.

Having got him to bed and heard the prelude of his snoring symphony, I oozed out into the night and invited the large, friendly stars to seep some immediate wisdom into me. They responded. They informed me that the freighter that had brought the star sleuth from New Orleans was leaving at six o'clock that morning—it was then one o'clock of the same morning—for Puerto Cortés, Honduras.

Honduras, you savvy,—Honduras, in which then, as now, an extradition paper would serve to light a cigarette or an alcohol lamp, or even make a pretty fair lining for the band for a too large hat.

And so I made a little visit to the crumbling yellow brick house on the weirdly quiet street, branching off from the cathedral, where the Treasurer and his wife and the snuffling hairless dog were asleep.

I went to bed about eight o'clock that morning.

WHEN I turned out, about three in the afternoon, I found the star sleuth smoking with great tranquillity in the hotel exchange.

"This," said he, "is like tinaking the rug out of a baby carriage while the nursemaid is talking in an areaway and the cops are having their annual parade."

"So soft as that?" I inquired.

"Softer," said he. "I've just been around to where my people are living. That hairless mutt of theirs was on the second-story porch, barking his gummin' little head off. Terrible soft, isn't it?"

"Scandalously," said I.

"Y'see," he went on, "I don't want to worry 'em, nor myself, either. I don't like this tragedy stuff. And there's no hurry. The up steamer for the States doesn't leave for three days. Well, let 'em have those three days in peace. I got old folks myself, see? I'll have the papers vised by the Consul and the Greaser authorities here tomorrow, and I won't hand my man the clap on the shoulder until the up steamer sails. Get me? And all I've got to do in the meantime is to trudge a few blocks, couple times a day, and watch a dog without any hair and weighing about a pound and three-eighths racing up and down a porch and barking his head off. That shows, too, that his folks still linger in our midst, as the feller says. Say, feel sorry for me—why don't you? I'm in awfully bad. I'm overworked. Let's play fifteen or twenty games of billiards."

I forgathered a lot with that star big-agency sleuth during the next three days. True, he was so full of chuckles and other things more most of the time that it was difficult for him to articulate properly. But I didn't mind that. I didn't need to understand him. He had told me everything he knew on the first day of our forgathering.

Three or four times every day, between games of billiards and pin pool, we'd saunter out of the hotel and make for the quiet little street where the crumbling yellow brick house was, and there each time we'd find the hairless dog mouching round on either the second story or lower porch, sometimes barking in a tone of voice that could be heard all of seven feet away, or else squatting on a chair, taking in the prospect, and snapping at flies. And each time the star sleuth's shoulders would shake at the thought of it.

"Say, honest," he'd say, "I never thought I'd trickle into anything so soft as this. All I got to do is to take a slant at a mutt that looks like a cross between a lizard and a woodchuck three or four times a day, and then the whistle blows for me. It's a sin and a shame, this strain on me. It is, honest. Let's go back and play thirty-five or forty more games of something."

It didn't worry him that the Treasurer and his wife weren't taking their short daily walks. He figured that probably they'd decided to be more discreet or something. The frequent sight of the dog on one or other of the porches satisfied him. He was a regular sleuth, never doubt that!

AND so, on the day when the up steamer was due to make her afternoon sailing, the big-agency man, with his papers all fixed up and his own dunnage on board the steamer, summoned me.

"Might as well trudge along with me," said he, "and watch me gather him in. It's some case, y'know, and, seeing that you're not such a bad sort of a duck, I'll let you see how the thing's done."

So I went with him. The hairless dog, jumping up and down on the lower porch, barked furiously at us, or thought he was barking furiously; but the sleuth, not frightened a bit by this demonstration, went right up the steps and rapped loudly on the door.

Nothing occurred to disturb the tranquillity of the quiet street. Even the dog stopped barking to sniff at our shoe leather. So Friend Sleuth rapped again, this time louder. I could see that he was becoming annoyed.

Then the door of the little house next door opened, and the crone who owned the house on whose steps we were standing appeared, wiping her leathery hands on her apron. She asked what was wanted.

"I'll get what I want, don't bother about that!" replied the star sleuth quite snortfully. "I want the man that's living in this house, that's who I want!"

The crone told him, in Greaserese that I had to straighten out, that the man who had been living in that house had sailed, with the senora, for Puerto Cortés three or four days previously, she had forgotten which.

If I had known what the first aid for apoplexy was, I'd have staked that big-agency man to it then and there. I'd seen purplish and even near-magenta human countenances before; but that was the first time I ever saw one that was a true vermilion. He couldn't speak, and so he did the next best thing from a sleuth's point of view; that is, he put his shoulder to the door and burst it in. Then he searched the house from top to bottom, crawled through the cellar, and even climbed out on the roof.

"I reckon," I told him, "the old dame next door must have been telling the truth."

"But how about this infernal mutt?" he bawled at me, pointing to the hairless dog which whoonly followed us around.

At that moment—we were standing on the porch again—the next-door crone appeared in her door again, and, seeing the dog squatting at my feet, called out to it in Spanish:

"Come here, Chiquita, little vampire—come home!"

"What's that she's saying?" the sleuth asked me, his jaw dropping lower with each tick of his watch.

"She's calling her dog," I told him.

"*Her* dog!" gasped the big-agency star. "Why, what-what-what the—"

"My Chiquita became friends with the little dog of the American actor and actress who went away," the old

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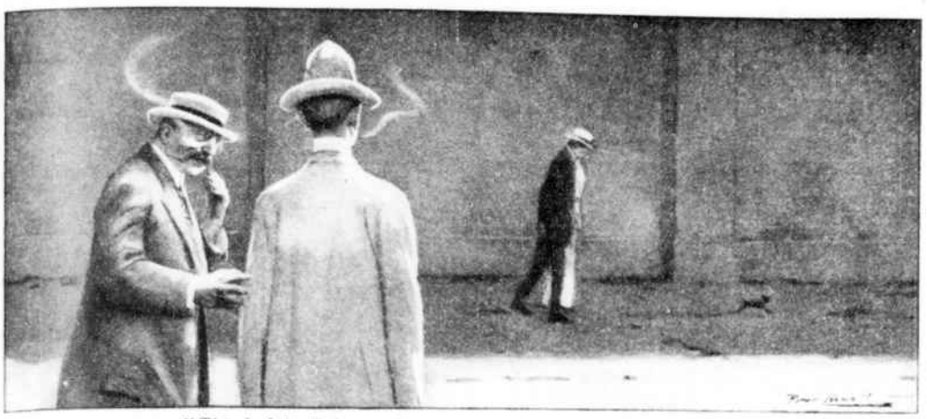

"This Is Like Taking a Penny from a Little Girl Under Ether."

So He Did the Next Best Thing.