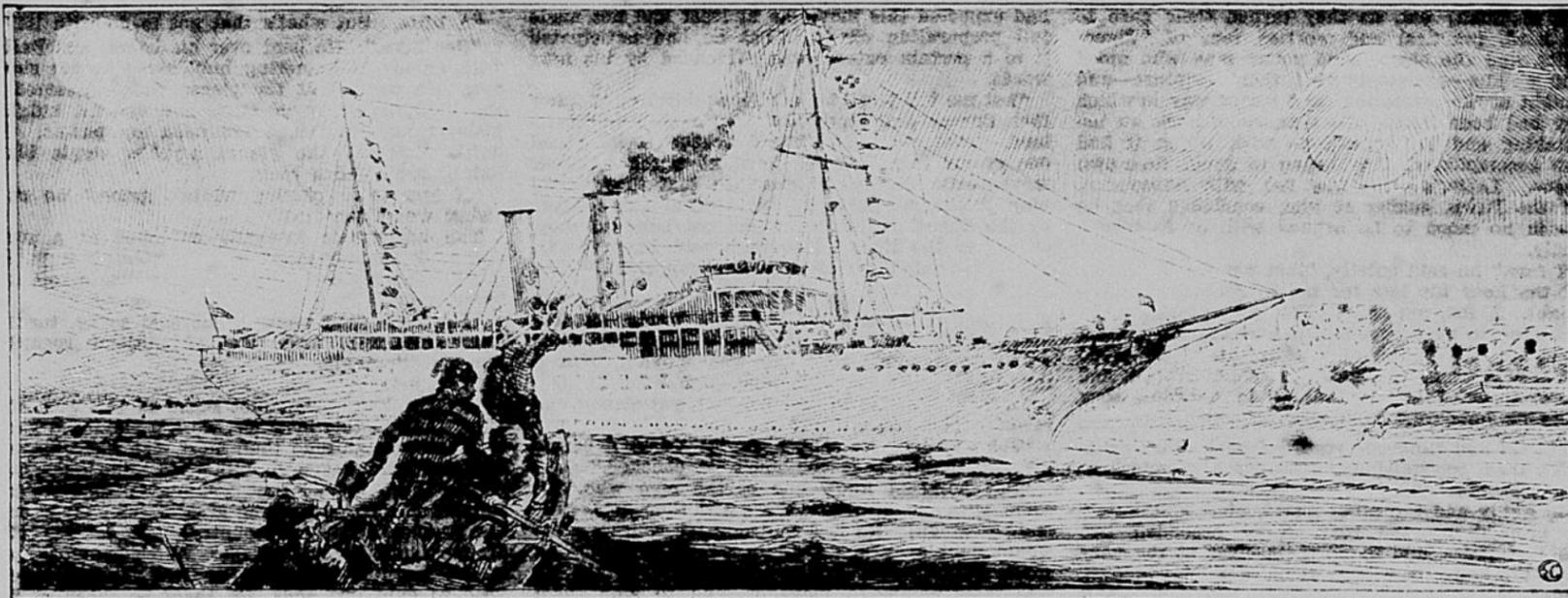


The Nation's Pawn

By Roy Norton

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BOOK TWO.

CHAPTER IV.

IT was just before sunset, thirty hours after the country had been stupefied by the disappearance of the men who were to take oath of office as president and vice president, when a big yacht hove to in New York harbor. The yacht had steam well up, as was shown by her slowly smoking funnel, and the wisecracks of the water front conjectured that she had come from a spring cruise, the fishing banks perhaps, or some other equally indefinite place off below the sweep of bay. She was not contented with her ground or else had other business, for, when night had settled more closely and the lights of the city fled through a sheen of thin March rain, she slowly swung off, and, without attracting any attention, crawled slowly up the North river until she came abreast of Ninety-seventh street, where she nosed her way cautiously in against the long idle wharf. In the darkness and dreariness of the night, the few old barges that were moored there looked like ghosts of forgotten traffic watching the shunting of the freight cars which had supplanted them.

No one save a policeman up in Riverside park saw the yacht pull in, and he gave no attention as he continued his lonesome way beyond a mild envy for those of the wealthy and great who could afford luxuries such as yachts and big automobiles like the one that suddenly swung down along the driveway and came to a halt as if in waiting.

"Tiger" Reilly, the athletic looking guard and the two captives stepped out on the planks, and two men walked sedately behind as if this were merely the party of some wealthy up-town New Yorker, homeward bound. They crossed the cinder tracks, the strip of open where Riverside park stretched its lean length and over to the automobile. The four men in the lead entered it, and the two others returned to the yacht, which soon swung out and away to its customary berth at the foot of Thirty-fourth street, its voyage at an end.

The automobile gave loud coughs and sputterings, and puffed noisily away, leaving the policeman in the distance still filled with envy, and the night as it was before any one came.

The captives and captors were taciturn as they rode through the upper streets of the city, the former having been convinced that anything they might do would merely bring violence down upon themselves, yet remaining watchful for opportunity to make an outcry for help. No such opportunity came. The drive was not a long one, and the machine stopped abruptly outside a darkened place, where an iron gate creaked dismally on its hinges as they passed through, and, arm-in-arm with Reilly and his companion, walked up the

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

WHILE Secretary of State Lester and his official party were returning on board the steamship Brazil from a remarkable tour of the South American republics, the Secretary was nominated for the presidency by the united Conservative, Prohibitionist and Independent parties, and Secretary Lester's one time friend, but now political enemy, Senator Barnes of Ohio, was nominated by the Liberal, Labor and Socialist parties, making certain that the country would be divided into two great political camps for the bitterest campaign of the country's history.

With Secretary Lester on official duty was Captain Dick Barnes, a son of Senator Barnes and the accepted suitor of Secretary Lester's daughter, also on board the Brazil. Before the news of Senator Barnes' nomination had been received, Captain Barnes had been invited to take part in confidential conferences to plan the Lester campaign. Afterward, the young army officer was publicly denounced as a traitor by Secretary Lester's political lieutenants. On the day of his arrival in New York, Captain Barnes discovered that some one impersonating him had given the newspapers an interview purporting to tell in a bravado way how his father's political enemies had been tricked. The interview was published under glaring headlines and the young man denounced.

In the campaign that followed the alleged treachery played a large part, adding to the unhappiness of Captain Barnes and finally resulting in a break between the Captain and Miss Lester at a chance meeting in a Washington cafe immediately after the election. But "Tiger" Reilly a former Tammany boss, sticks by Barnes and promises to see him through.

The election was so close that the result hinged on the decision of the contest between two sets of delegates from Alaska who raced by sea and land to Washington to establish their claims. While the senate heard the contest, armed men came to Washington by thousands and when it decided in favor of Lester, civil war seemed certain if an effort were made to inaugurate Lester. During the tense situation in Washington, a warning was posted, threatening dire things unless the trouble were peaceably adjusted, and signed mysteriously, "The Nation's Pawn." The warning going unheeded after the first excitement over it, the country was startled on the eve of the inauguration by the mysterious disappearance of President-elect Lester and his vice-president. In spite of this alarming contingency, the two opposing forces continue their warlike activities. The regular army is woefully small in contrast with the great armed camps it seeks to subdue, and utterly unable to check or prevent the impending conflict. At this juncture, another mysterious warning is posted by "The Nation's Pawn," followed by a letter to the President from some mysterious source declaring that Japan and China plan to make war on the United States. These two nations do actually make a show of force and then the country is further amazed by the kidnaping of Senator Barnes, the defeated candidate for president, from a rapidly moving train. The country is deeply stirred and then awed as another warning from "The Nation's Pawn" appears. In this crisis the President issues an almost heart-broken plea to his countrymen for peace.

Then the unexpected happens. Stirred by the President's appeal and moved by the danger to their common country, the leaders of the opposing armies meet and pledge their men to the common defense. Also the unexpected happens to Captain Barnes—Miss Lester seeks him out, first accuses him of a part in her father's abduction and then declares her old love for him.

With the opening of Book Two, the reader is given his first glimpse of "the man behind"—Norman Moore, who is disclosed as "The Nation's Pawn." He is a tremendously wealthy old man who lives as a recluse in an old New York mansion. He has a notable interview with his physician, who tells him that he has only a few months to live, and he resolves to do some great deed for his country.

Summoning Reilly, to whom he had once rendered a great service, he outlined to him a way to prevent civil war. It is a desperate, dangerous way, but Reilly does the bidding of the man who calls himself the "Pawn." Reilly lures President-elect Lester and his vice-president from their quarters in Washington, kidnaps them and puts them on board a private yacht and steams away with them.

gravelled way to the door of the mansion, which opened to receive them as if the noise of the machine now departing, had given announcement of their arrival.

They stepped inside into a dim light, noted the soft and profuse adornment of the hallways, heard heavy bolts of outer doors shut behind them, and were then ushered into the big library, which had been well lighted for the occasion. As if to give them time for thought and to note the fact they were in the home of some one who could scarcely be other than of peaceful intent, they were compelled to wait for a few minutes, sitting stolidly and hopelessly in their chairs, and watching for the next turn of events.

THE curtains behind parted, "Tiger" Reilly and his fellows rose to their feet, and Norman Moore, placid, white and thoughtful, entered and advanced to the president-elect. Lester also arose, discovering something of compelling dignity in the newcomer.

"Ah! You are Morgan Lester, I presume," the self-styled "Pawn" said, holding out his hand. "My involuntary guest."

The hand was not accepted, nor was it withdrawn. It was still held there, slender and extended.

"You do not shake hands with me. I am sorry. May we not at least discuss the perversities of our situation in an amicable and friendly spirit befitting gentlemen? Or must we show our mu-

tual pique by declining all courtesies? I had thought better of you than that."

The voice was calm and its usual incisive tones filled with a faint note of regret amounting almost to reproof. Morgan Lester's hand came up suddenly and grasped the other as if he were ashamed of having displayed enmity until he had further cause. It was difficult to choose the attitude he should assume in the face of such conditions and such overtures.

Moore turned toward the vice president-elect; and Reilly, as if to hasten and close unpleasant preliminaries, started to introduce them with, "Mr. Holbrook, this is —," when the recluse turned and held up a warning, deprecatory hand.

"The Nation's Pawn," he said, with a half-whimsical smile, "Only a pawn! Mr. Holbrook, I am glad to meet you, and to find that neither of you gentlemen appears the worse for your experiences, which, of necessity, must at times have been unpleasant. For that only, I grieve."

He motioned them to be seated, and, to their surprise, he stopped before his chess board. Morgan Lester, watching the man's every movement, saw that he placed the two most prominent black pieces in a position of jeopardy, where they were threatened by a scattered army of whites. He vaguely wondered if he were watching the movements of an insane man, but there was nothing in the man's appearance to indicate anything other than a high and finely controlled order of intellect. The face was that of one who at some time had undergone experiences leaving ineradicable marks, and its serenity was of the will. It was the face of a student, who, if the trend of life had been different, might have been a general, or a master of finance. It gave the impression of a tamed eagle, which, though old, might yet break the bounds and soar high above the heads below. Lester, notwithstanding his sullen anger, his terrible predicament, his helplessness and his belief that, unless he were at once liberated to take the helm of national affairs, disaster might come to the United States, was compelled to give a grudging admiration to his captor, even though a criminal on a novel and unprecedented scale. When the chess player turned around, Lester voiced his feeling.

"I have no doubt," he said, "that you appreciate the gravity and criminal character of your act in having us brought here. Why have you done it? What object could you have? What do you expect to accomplish? Are you seeking a ransom?"

The concluding question aroused a spark in the recluse.

"Ransom? Ransom? In money—no; for there is not money enough in the world, nor position in the gift of man, that could induce me to liberate