

The Kingdom of Slender Swords

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Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.
Barbara Fairfax, a beautiful American girl, at the age of twenty-three, finds herself mistress of a liberal fortune and her own future. Her uncle, Bishop Randolph, of Tokyo, has been touring America, and as Japan was the scene of her parents' romance, Barbara decides to visit that country, and fulfill a desire, long in her heart, to see the beautiful land where her father and mother met and loved, and where her father died. She is to be the guest of Patricia Dandridge, daughter of the American Ambassador, Duke Daunt, whom she met a few years before, in Japan as secretary of the Embassy. For the sake of college memories, he tries to influence Philip Ware, brother of Austen, to let her better friend, Philip, to get into the clutches of Dr. Bersonin, a dangerous scientist. Austen Ware is a suitor for the hand of Barbara and his yacht, "Barbara," is in the harbor when the bishop and Barbara arrive.

Haru is engaged to teach Barbara the Japanese language. She is not of the servant class, but is the only child of an old samurai who has lost his fortune. She bewails the fact that she is a girl and can do nothing for her country, and this feeling on her part is proven to be sincere when she casts aside all thought of self in her efforts to save her country. Aloysius Thorn, maker of Buddhas, is introduced into the story. He lives alone in a chapel surrounded by a beautiful garden, and his time is devoted entirely to the making of deities of bronze, silver and priceless gold-lacquer.

window and in the dim light she sat down and let her fingers wander idly in long arpeggios. She could see one side of the Japanese garden, with a glimpse of a tiny dry lake and a pebbled rivulet spanned by an arching bridge of red lacquer. It seemed to her that in this living, sentient breath of Japan, her father was nearer to her than he had ever been before.

The thought brought to her vague memories of her mother and of her childhood. Old airs began to mingle with the chords and on the shrill fairy sound-carpet woven by the myriad insect-looms of the garden, the bits of melody went treading softly out across the perfume of the wistaria.

CHAPTER VIII.
"Sally in Our Alley."
She thought no one heard, but out by the azalea hedge, a man was standing, listening to the hushed chords floating through the open window. Daunt thrust his cold pipe into his pocket and listened with head thrown back.

It was no brilliant display of technique that held him, for the player was touching simple chords, but these were singing old melodies that took him far to other scenes and other times. He smiled to himself. How long it had been since he had sung them—not since the old college days! That happy, irresponsible era of senior dignities came back vividly to him, the campus and the singing. For years he had not recollected it all so keenly! He had been glee-club soloist, pushed forward on all occasions and applauded to the echo. Praise of his singing he had accepted somewhat humorously—never but once had it touched him deeply, and that had been on commencement afternoon.

He had slipped away from the waning cheers at the station, because he could not bear the farewells, and, far down one of the campus lanes, had come on pretty Mrs. Claybourne sitting on a rustic bench. Again he heard her speak, as plainly as if it were yesterday: "Why, if it isn't Mr. Daunt! I wonder how the university can open in the fall without you!" He had sat down beside her as she said: "This very insistent young person with me has been heartbroken because we could not get tickets for the Glee-Club concert last night. She wanted to hear you sing."

He had looked up then to see a young girl, seated on the leaning trunk of a tulip tree. Her neutral-tinted skirt lay against the dark bark; her face was almost hidden by a spray of the great, creamy pink blossoms. Some quality in its delicate loveliness had made him wish to please her, and sitting there he had sung the song that was his favorite. Mrs. Claybourne had pulled a big branch of the tulip tree to hand him like a bouquet over the footlights, but the girl's parted lips, her deep brown eyes, had thanked him in a better way!

The music, now floating over the garden, by such subconscious association, recalled this scene, overlaid, but never forgotten. Hark! A cascade of silver notes, and then an old air that had been revived in his time to become the madness of the music halls and the pet of the pianolas—the one the crowded campus had been wont to demand with loudest voice when his tenor led the "Senior Singing." It brought back with a rush the familiar faces, the gray ivied dormitories with their slim iron balconies, the throbbing pliant of mandolins, and his own voice—"Of all the girls that are so smart, There's none like pretty Sally. She is the darling of my heart, And she lives—"

The song was smitten from Daunt's lips. In the instant that she stood outlined on the broad piazza, a fierce snarling yelp and a clatter came from within the house and there rang out a screamed Japanese warning. An outer door flew open and the huge figure of Doctor Bersonin ran out, pursued by a leaping white shadow, while the air thrilled to the savage cry of a hound, shaken with rage.

"Run, Barbara!" The Ambassador's voice came from the doorway. But the white, moonlit figure, in its gauzy evening gown, turned too late. Empty-handed, Daunt dashed for the piazza, as with a crash, a heavy porch chair, hurled by a Japanese house boy, penned the animal for an instant in a corner. He caught the white figure up in his arms, sprang into the shade of the wistaria arbor, and set her feet on its high railing. The voice from the doorway called again, sharply.

"This way, Doctor! Quick!" The wolf-hound, trailing its broken chain, had leaped the barrier and was launched straight at the crouching expert. The latter had dragged something small and square from his pocket and he seemed now to hold this out before him. Daunt, wrenching a cleat from the arbor railing, felt a puff of cold wind strike his face, and something like an elfin note of music, high and thin as an insect's, drifted across the confusion. He rushed forward with his improvised weapon—then stopped short. The dog was no longer there.

The Ambassador made an exclamation. He stepped down and peered under the piazza; even in the dim light the long space was palpably empty. The head-boy spoke rapidly in Japanese and pointed toward the gate.

"He says he must have jumped down this side," explained Daunt, "and run out to the street. He is nowhere in the garden, at any rate. We can see every inch. How surprising!" He spoke to the boy in the vernacular. "He will have the gates closed at once and telephone a warning to the police station."

Bersonin had sat down on the edge of the piazza. He was crouched far over; his big frame was shaken with violent shudders. Suddenly his head went back and he began to laugh—a jarring, grating, weird man-hysteria that seemed to burst suddenly beyond his control.

The Ambassador went to him hurriedly, but Bersonin shook off the hand on his shoulder and rising, still emitting his dreadful laughter, staggered across the lawn and out of the gate.

The appalling mirth reechoed from the quiet road.

CHAPTER IX.
The Web of the Spider.
Bersonin walked on, fighting desperately with his ghastly spasm of merriment.

It was a nervous affection which had haunted him for years. It dated from a time when, in South America, in an acute crisis of desperate personal hazard, he had laughed the first peal of that strange laughter of which he was to be ever after afraid.

Before long the paroxysms ceased and he grew calmer. The quiet road had merged into a busier thoroughfare. He walked on slowly till his command was regained. West of the outer moat of the Imperial Grounds, he turned up a pleasant lane-like street and presently entered his own gate. The house, into which he let himself with a latch key, was a rambling, modern, two-story structure of yellow stucco. The lower floor was practically unused, since its tenant lived alone and did not entertain. The upper floor, besides the hall, contained a small bedroom, a bath and dressing-room, and a large, barely-furnished laboratory. The latter was lined on two sides with glass-covered shelves which gave glimpses of rows of books, of steel shells, metal and crystal retorts and crucibles, the delicate paraphernalia of organic chemistry and complicated instruments whose use no one knew save himself—a fit setting for the great student, the peer of Offenbach in Munich and of Bayer in Vienna. Against the wall leaned a drafting board on which, pinned down by thumb tacks, was a sketch-plan of a revolving turret. From a bracket in a corner—the single airy touch of delicacy in a chamber almost sordid in its appointments—swung a bamboo cage with a brown hiwa, or Japanese finch, a downy puff of feathers with its head under its wing.

In the upper hall Bersonin's Japanese head-boy had been sitting at a small desk writing. Bersonin entered the laboratory, opened a safe let into a wall, and put into it something he took from his pocket. Then he donned a dressing gown the boy brought, and threw himself into a huge leather chair.

"Make me some coffee, Ishida," he said. The servant did so silently and deftly, using a small brass samovar which occupied a table of its own. With the coffee he brought his master a box of brown Havana cigars.

For an hour Bersonin sat smoking in the silent room—one cigar after another, deep in thought, his yellow eyes

staring at nothing. Into his countenance deep lines had etched themselves giving to his coldly repellent look an expression of malignant force and intention.

All at once there came a chirp from the cage in the corner and its tiny occupant, waked by the electric light, burst into song as clear and joyous as though before its free wing lay all the meads of Eden. A look more human, soft and almost companionable, came into its master's massive face. Bersonin rose and, whistling, opened the cage door and held out an enormous forefinger. The little creature stepped on it, and, held to his cheek, it rubbed its feathered head against it. For a moment he crooned and whistled to it, then held his finger to the cage and it obediently resumed its perch and its melody. The expert took a dark cloth from a hook and threw it over the cage and the song ceased.

Bersonin went to the door of the room and fastened it, then unlocked a desk and spread some papers on the table. One was a chart, drawn to the minutest scale, of the harbor of Yokohama. On it had been marked a group of projectile-shaped spots suggesting a flotilla of vessels at anchor. For a long time he worked absordedly, setting down figures, measuring with infinite pains, computing angles—always with reference to a small square in the map's inner margin, marked in red. He covered many sheets of paper with his calculations. Finally he took another paper from the safe and compared the two. He lifted his head with a look of satisfaction.

Just then he thought he heard a slight noise from the hall. Swiftly and noiselessly as a great cat he crossed to the door and opened it.

Ishida sat in his place scratching laboriously with a foreign pen.

Bersonin's glance of suspicion altered. "What are you working at so industriously, Ishida?" he asked.

It was an ode to the coming squadron. Bersonin read it: "Welcome, foreign men-of-war! Young and age, Man and woman, None but you welcome! And how our reaches know you but to satisfy, Nor the Babylon nor the Parisian you to treat, Be it ever so humble, Yet a tidbit with our heart! What may not be accomplishment Rising-Sun?"

"By H. Ishida, with best compliment." Bersonin laid it down with a word of approbation. "Well done," he said. "You will be a famous English scholar before long." He went into the dressing room, but an instant later recollected the papers on the table. The servant was in the laboratory when his master hastily reentered; he was methodically removing the coffee tray.

Alone once more, Ishida resealed himself at his small desk. He tore the poem carefully to small bits and put them into the waste-paper basket. Then, rubbing the cake of India-ink on its stone tablet, he drew a mass of Japanese writing toward him and, with brush held vertically between thumb and forefinger, began to trace long, delicate characters at the top of the first sheet. In the Japanese phrase this might literally have been translated as follows: Cross-Current of Laying Water Thunder on, Work Effect Left Hand Respectfully Which in conventional English is to say: A Study of Cross-Currents in Their Effect on Submarine Mines Submitted with Deference

This finished, he sealed it in an envelope, took a book from the breast of his kimono and began to read. Its cover bore the words: "Second English Primer in words of Two Syllables." Its inner pages, however, belied the legend. It was Mahan's "Influence of Sea Power on History."

Yet Lieutenant Ishida of the Japanese Imperial Navy, one time student in Monterey, California, now in Special Secret Service, read abstractedly. He was wondering why Doctor Bersonin should have in his possession a technical naval chart and what was the meaning of certain curious markings he had made on it.

CHAPTER X.
In a Garden of Dreams.

In the garden the moon's faint light glimmered on the broad, satiny leaves of the camellias and the delicate traceries of red maple foliage. At its farther side, amid flowering bushes which cast long indigo shadows stood a small pagoda, brought many years before from Korea, and toward this Daunt and the girl whom he had held for a breathless moment in his arms, strolled slowly along a winding, pebbled path tremulant with the flickering shadows of little leaves. The structure had a small platform, and here on a bench they sat down, the fragrant garden spread out before them.

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