"JOHN DOE"

Synopsis—Chapter I.

An injured, unknown man, speaking a strange foreign tongue is brought to Bellevue Hospital and is nicknamed John Doe by the doctor and nurse.

CHAPTER II.

Scarred Visitors.

Breakfast-time and the morning paper brought the undentified patient to my mind, for on an inside page of the peridical I found an item which ran:

WATER-FRONT HOLD-UP

Unidentified Foreigner Picked Up Seriously Wounded. Speaks Strange Language.

Stabbed in the back, his left arm and three ribs broken, his pockets emptied and turned inside out, and unconscious foreigner was found lying abrest of Pier 18, North River, shortly after dusk last evening.

Taken to Bellevue Hospital, the injured man was revived, but none of the interpreters were able to converse with him. The surgeons are of the opinion that the man was stabbed, robbed, and then thrown out of a rapidly moving vehicle.

Little hope is expressed for the recovery of the victim. The police profess to have no clue to the identity of the assailants.

"He's a funny guy," said the day attendant when I reported for duty that evening.

He jerked a thumb in the direction of Cot 12, and continued:

"When I was about to wheel him into the X-ray room this morning to get a picture of his ribs he hung onto the cot with that good right wing of his. Wouldn't leave till he fished around under the bed-clothes and dragged out his wooden foot. I Strapped it on for him, and then he was happy. He's in bad shape."

"Find anybody that can talk with him?" I asked.

"Ngh-ngh!" grunted the day man negatively as he struggled into his overcoat. "Old Moses was up here this afternoon. He tried him with all the languages he speaks. Nothing doing. Moses says he thinks it some dialect of Slavish. Well—we've transferred all our convalescents to the Metropolitan and cleaned away the 'springs.' You'll have an easy night. So-long!"

Thankfully I eyed the clear center of the long ward and then went about my duties.

As I took my temperatures I noticed that John Doe had considerable fever. But he seemed to be resting easier than he had been the night before, and he flashed me a grateful look as I took his pulse.

"What do you make of those scars, doctor?" I asked the ward surgeon, a little later, as he halted before Cot 12 after attending to an urgent summons from another part of the ward.

"Couldn't say exactly, Mac," pronounced the interne as he stroked his neat Vandyke and glanced at the chart hooked at the foot of the cot.

Then he bent over the wounded man and turned his attention to the recently healed cicatrices.

"Looks like the work of poisonous thorns," he murmured as he ran his trained fingers over the pitted and lumpy skin of John Doe's forearm. "Probably we'll never learn definitely," he added as he shurgged his his shoulders and turned away.

It was nine o'clock, or a little after, when the telephone-bell brought me out of Gray's chapter on the connective tissues. The "Gate" was speaking:

"Three guys comin' up to identify your John Doe. The 'sistant super's office says to let 'em look him over. If they reco'nize him you're to fill out his history sheet."

To Miss Julia I repeated the message from the man at the entrance gates of the big institution.

"Hope they're friends of his, and that they cheer him up," said the black-haired night nurse as she slipped into "Surgical 14" on a still hunt for reserve hot-water bottles. For three empty cots in No. 13 yawned for post-operatives still up in the amphitheater.

The fireproof door swung open a few minutes later, and following hard upon the heels of a messenger, three dark-complexioned strangers entered the ward .

They were rough-looking customers. The man in the lead was a hairy-faced ruffian, bearded to the top of his cheekbones. Slouching behind him was an oily skinned rascal whose shoe-botton eyes roved restlessly over the cots along the walls. The third man of the ugly trio lagged behind, eyeing each cot he passed as if he were actually fearful of recognizing its occupant.

As I caught a full-faced glimpse of the laggard, I noticed that he had but one serviceable eye. The other organ, atrophied and shrunken in its socket, lent an expression to the cruel face once seen never to be forgotten.

One's antipathies are a hard thing to explain, particularly when they apply to strange persons with whom one has never exchanged a word. I conceived a dislike for these visitors as soon as I laid eyes upon them.

Ugly in person as was the man in Cot 12, there was some spark in his doglike brown eyes that kindled a responsive flame. Countrymen of John Doe or not, my sixth sense told me that their presence in Surgical 13 was not to the advantage of the wounded man.

Miss Prendergast led the way to the corner cot of our unidentified patient, and I was about to follow, when once more the ward door swung open to admit a white-swathed post-operative from the amphitheatre above.

It was a case which kept me busy for fully ten minutes. When I turned again to Cot 12, it was to see Miss Julia remonstrating with the bearded visitor.

"Mac!" she called, as she caught my eye.

Instantly I sprang across the ward in time to see the man with the withered eye withdraw his hand from beneath John Doe's pillow. And the man with the beady eyes and saffron skin was actually sitting upon the cot of the sufferer.

"They're annoying this poor man," complained Miss Julia, her eyes snapping. "Make them get out, or send for a policeman from the prisioners' ward."

A glance at John Doe corroborated the nurse's statement, as his face plainly showed annoyance.

Fear, coupled with defiance, was written plainly on the sunken face. A trembling index-finger was pointed accusingly at the bearded visitor; and from the lips of the sufferer poured forth a volley of words in the unknown language.

Stronger and clearer grew his voice until the deep tones rang through the ward, disturbing and arousing the other patients.

"Put 'em out!" yelled a bandage-swathed truckman from his cot across the ward.

I was about to twist my hand into the collar of the nearest of the tormentors, when a combination of conditions caused me to suspend action for the time being.

Firstly, I noted with surprise that all three of the visitors were, so far as I could see, scarred as was John Doe. Their soft shirts and rolling collars displayed tawny throats scored to the chins.

In the case of the bearded man, his neck where visible bore the same distictive cicatrices. Alike, the hands and wrists of the unsavory trio were marked and pitted with the same varicolored phenomena.

Likewise, they were sun-bitten and gaunt, as if for years tropical suns and fevers had been gnawing at their brains and vitals.

But most surprising of all the bearded man spoke a language that the man in Cot 12 could understand; for, as the voice of the latter weakened and died away, Blackbeard began to speak in low tones.

And the wounded man understood; for as the purring, wheedling bass tones came to his ears he waved the other way, and what I judged to be a negative came explosively from the parched lips.

"Here," said I, putting my hand on the whiskered man's shoulder, "you'll have to stop that and get out of here mighty quick."

He drew back. The man sitting on the cot rose to his feet, and the man with the shrunken eye turned his useful organ full upon me.

"Go on!" I urged. "Get out. All of you!"

An ugly look swept over the face of the man I had my hand on. He shook off my grasp and muttered something to his two companions.

Then and there it occurred to me that these rascals might be responsible for the plight of the sorely wounded man.

I drew back a step or two. I had no idea of facing unarmed three such rough-looking characters. Then, behind me, I heard the soft click of the telephone, followed by the even voice of Miss Julia as she asked switchboard for the prisoners' ward.

"Who is this man?" I demanded, sparring for time, with an idea of detraining the suspects that they might be apprehended. I pointed at the exhausted John Doe and addressed myself to Blackbeard.

"We do not know thees ol' fellow," was the snearing reply.

With his eyes he seemed to be measuring the distance between us. Then they leaped suspiciously to the white-robed woman at the telephone whom he had just noticed.

"What language does the sick man speak?" I went on, edging simultaneously toward an instrument cupboard which I knew to contain surgical implements that might be used as weapons of defense should the emergency arise.

An insulting laugh was my sole reply. Then, at a word from their leader they made a hasty retreat.

With an idea of securing their detention I sprang to the telephone and called up the Gate; but before I was connected several minutes had elapsed, and the watchman on duty reported that the three men had just entered a waiting hack and had been driven rapidly away.

And when a pair of blue coats burst into the ward there was nothing left to do but for me to inform them of my suspicions and to describe the actions and personal appearances of the unwelcome visitors.

Perfunctorily, with obvious yawns, the policemen drew out their memorandum-books and jotted down brief notes. Then they returned to their posts on the ground floor—in the gloomy ward with the barred door, and windows.

Later, in the lonesome watches of the early morning, Miss Julia and I, seated upon opposite sides of the big, flat-topped ward desk, conversed in low tones of the unusual events of the night.

That a mystery, seemingly unsolvable, shrouded the identity and history of the man in Cot 12 the buxom "up State" girl and I were agreed.

CHAPTER III.

John Doe as a Penman

"Look!" said Kelly, the day attendant, as I was relieving him the next evening. He was pointing at the corner cot—Cot 12.

I looked as directed and saw John Doe partly propped up by doubled pillows. Close beside his cot the white enameled stand was drawn up and the patient was busily engaged in writing.

Slowly and painfully, moving his free arm a fraction of an inch at a time, the wounded man moved his pen over a paper tablet.

"He made motions this morning he wanted to write," Kelly went on to explain. "The ward surgeon said to give him pen and ink and let him go ahead. He's been at it for hours now—only stopping long enough to rest and take a little broth."

As dusk came on, forcing us to turn on the lights, John Doe could no longer see plainly enough to write.

By signs and motions he made me understand that he wanted an extension light placed at his stand; but I was unwilling to make it easy for him to still further weaken and excite himself.

I put the matter up to the house surgeon on his "good-night" round.

"Let him have a light," was the gruff spoken yet kindly decision. "Dr. Rawlins gives him not more than forty-eight hours to live. He's bleeding internally—heart too weak to take ether. He's probably leaving a message for some one; and if he doesn't finish it to-night he may grieve himself to death."

"And pray who'll read the message;" I asked myself as I uncoiled the insulated wire and adjusted the shade over the glowing bulb.

John thanked me with one of his pats upon my arm and then began his fourth sheet. For a few moments I stood watching him as he slowly traced strange characters upon the pad.

It was curious-looking writing; not pothooks and curves, as in shorthand; nor yet the pictorial ideographs such as the Chinese and Japanese used. Never had I seen such writing.

But, somewhere and somehow, I felt this message written by a man with but a few hours to live was destined to be read.

"Professor Rawlins visited the ward to-day. He gives John Doe not more than forty-eight hours to live."

Miss Prendergast looked up from her requisition-blank. Thoughtfuliy she bit her penholder and looked over at the hooded light at the head of Cot 12.

"There's not a smarter surgeon ever set foot in this ward," she declared. "He's a professor of clinical surgery up at the college; and yet, when it comes to measuring the space of human life, I've known the best of them to go wrong."

The night nurse bent over her work. From its top shelf in the medicine cabinet I took the precious volume which would one day help qualify me to have the right to use the magic letters "M. D."

The night was young. Vacant cots, a dearth of "serious" cases, promised me hours of profitable leisure.

Buried in one of the chapters on the connective tissues, too deeply occupied in my studies to more than raise my head as the door at the far end of the ward opened and closed to the gostly visits of supervising nurses and the sturdy tramp of the blue-shirted night watchman, it must have been about two in the morning when Miss Julia brought me out of my anatomy back to the realities of Surgical 13.

"John wants you," she said, placing a white hand over the paragraph I was digesting.

For the moment I couldn't for the life of me grasp her meaning. Then the bony right arm and beseeching eyes of the man of mystery made me know that he sought my company.

It seemed that he finished his writing. Five sheets of paper lay atop the writing tablet, each sheet covered with the unusual characters.

The man with the scars greeted me with a haggard smile. His weak and trembling fingers made ineffectual efforts to fold the material into smaller compass. I helped him.

Once across the middle, I folded the letter-sized sheets, and then twice the other way. Then I fetched a Bellevue envelope, enclosed the writing, and laid the envelope face-up upon the stand, supposing that he would make some effort to address it. To my surprise, he threw the pen upon the floor.

His forefinger touched the document, his lips moved, his eyes sought mine; then he pointed directly at me, immediately thereafter extending his fingers and waving his hand around the ward, as much as if to say:

"There is my message. You can't read it. Take it and find somebody who can."

In pantomime, I told John Doe that I accepted his trust. I stuck up seven fingers and pointed at the clock, trying to convey the hint to him that at seven in the morning I would be free to devote my time to the finding of an interpreter.

And the scarred sufferer must have understood me—had confidence in me—for not only did he make no objection when I removed his extension light; he immediately fell asleep as soundly as if he were a tired lad abed in his father's house.

Morning found the man of mystery still sleeping off his exhaustion, his grizzled head pillowed on his unbandaged arm. I stole a look at him as I went off duty, then hastened to my bacon and eggs.

Nine o'clock found me in the assistant superintendent's office. I'd made up my mind to get along without my day's sleep, if necessary, in order that the five-page letter might be translated.

"It's all Greek to me," chuckeled the bald, good-natured second in command at Bellevue after I'd told my story and produced the message.

He fumbled with the pages of the document, eyed the curious characters, then scowling looked out upon the insane pavilion, across the way. Respectfully I awaited his wishes..

"Here!" he called finally. He rolled his after-breakfast cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other and looked up at me with a quizzical grin. "Have you got any detective ability?"

I replied that I didn't know—that I doubted it.

"Well, then, I designate you as a committee of one. You're to get that document read. If we turn it over to the police they'll probably stick it in a pigeonhole, and we'll never know who stabbed and robbed that fellow."

Teh assistant chief refolded the puzzle and tossed it over to me. I pocketed it and turned to go.

And, by the way"—I halted at the words—"if you run across anything interesting I'd like to have yo ureport to me. And should your investigation keep you ou tafter seven in the evening, you're excused from night duty. Good morning."

The big man turned back to his pile of vochers, when I hunted up "Old Moses," the venerable head of Bellevue's staff of interpreters.

Moses looked up from the writing, shifted his double-lensed spectacles to the end of his nose, and studied me for fully a minute.

"Well?" I ventured.

With the air of a grand duke of all the Rusians, the wrinkled son of Isreal lit one of his slim cigarettes, inhaled a mouthful of the arcid smoke, and then waved the paper tube at John Doe's message.

"It eesn't R-r-russian," he purred; "yet the letters are of the R-r-russian. It eesn't Poleesh, nor Lithuanian, nor Slovak. For twenty dollars a friend of mine who ees intrepter in the Municeepal Courts weel r-render a perfect transla—"

But I picked up the letter and fled, leaving Moses to his cigarettes and memories of pogroms. I had no money to invest in the solving of the mystery, and felt confident that somewher in the big city I could find a person willing and able to read the message and give me the gist of its contents.

At the office of the Russian consul-general an obliging underling condescended to look at the writing.

"I recognize the language," said he at length.

Perceptibly my heart beat faster.

"It is written," went on the clerk, "in the Dalmatian dialect of the Serbo-Croatian language by a man possessing very fair education. I cannot read it myself. One word out of five I might decipher."

"Tell me, please, who can read it?" I begged, my heart once more pumping at normal speed.

The consular clerk examined his manicured nails, frowning the meanwhile.

"It's very hard to know just wher to direct you," he answered after some moments. "I happen to know that it will not do you any good to visit the offices of the Austro-Hungarian consul-general, for we once had an occasion to have translated a letter written in the Dalmatian dialect, and they couldn't help us. Over three they can translate only German, Hungarian, Polish and Bohemian. The man wha translated the letter for us is no longer in the city. He—

"Who are these Dalmatians?" I interrupted. "Where can I find one of them in New York?"

"They come from a kingdom—a part of Austria bordering on theh Adriatic Sea," the Americanized Russian was good enough to answer. "Most Dalmatians are of Slavish descent. A few of them speak the Venetian dialect of Italian. They are mostly sailors and farmers by occupation. Like the Montenegrins who live near them, they are nearly all tall in stature and very dark cemplexioned. Very few of them come to America.

My informant looked up from his nails, to gaze upon the gloomy facade of a building across dingy Stone Street. He shurgged his shoulders as he concluded:

"Maybe—in some sailors' or immigrants' boarding-house on West Street—possibly Greenwich Street — you might be able to find a person who can make the translation."

I thanked the clerk for his trouble and pains, and made my way across-town to the North River.

It was the keeper- of a Polish immigrants' boarding-house who finally put me on the right track. In a room lined with frowzy-looking servant-girls and booted form laborers awaiting employment, the red-nosed proprietor informed me that one, Szabo Roth, keeper of a saloon, could read Dalmatian and "all other Slavish dialects."

Four steps down from the street, in a low-ceilinged room reeking with the fumes of stale beer and cheap spirits, I found Szabo Roth.

He was a rheumy-eyed, piggish-looking man of a great weight and flabby flesh. Toug-looking characters draped the greasy bar and rubbed shoulders against the blued plaster wall. Sailors clad in sweaters emblazoned with the onec-white initials of various transatlantic steamship companies, foreign-looking fellows with hugh mustashes curled truculently upward, ox-eyed Slavish immigrants spat and swore and scuffled their heavy foot-gear on the saw-dust-covered floor.

"I am Szabo," admitted the mass of flesh behind the end of the bar. It was the end nearest the entrance.

The red-rimmed eyes of the speaker eyed me suspiciously. Doubtless, decently-clad, shaven and brushed citizens were all too infrequent visitors at the Greenwich Street dive.

"Can you read Dalmatian writing?" I asked bluntly, coming directly to the point.

"Can I eat my breakfast?" mocked Szabo, with a leer to the nearest of his customers.

There was a drunken guffaw from at least two of them who understood English.

"For dree years I run a boarding-house in Brazza," supplemented the fat man hastily, as he noted my flusb of annoyance. "I can handle der Dalmatinatz like a native," he added.

"I've got a letter for you to translate," I said, simultaneously feeling in my pocket for the envelope which held the strange writing.

"Are you from der police?" inquired the keeper of the dive, as he took John Doe's message in his spatulate fingers, and eyed me with an increasing degree of respect.

My stature—five plus eleven—and my night-attendant "air of authority" may have had something to do with his inquiry.

"For the space of possibly three minutes, all was silent within the grogery, save for the shuffling of uneasy feet, and the tick-tock of the cheap clock which hung below a gaudily framed lithograph of a once-famous Purple Star seven-day liner.

(To be Continued

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