

THE BLUE BOMB

BY J. V. GIESY

"A Story Of Humor, Mystery, Romance, and Adventure"

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Captain Spry, of the Nantucket, sat on the edge of his berth as the second officer and the other man came in. Out of deference to his rank he had put on his cap, beneath which his ruddy face rose from the jacket of a suit of pajamas.

He eyed his unceremonious visitor with frank interest as he came in. His keen gray eyes widened somewhat when the coolie drew himself up to attention and gave him a correct military salute.

"Well, well," grumbled the captain. "Who are you, my man?"

"Captain," replied the newcomer. "I am Lieutenant Edward Gafford—some time of the U. S. Engineers."

"Gafford!" The captain started and stammered. "Old Dan Gafford's son Ned?"

"The same, sir."

Spry's face grew a more ruddy color. "You've got a crust to come aboard a government vessel, I must say, Gafford," he burst out gruffly. "I heard you'd come this side, but I never looked for you."

Gafford felt the blood rush into his own cheeks at the words, but he controlled himself by an effort.

"I don't wish to speak of the past, but of the present, captain," he said coldly. "I came out here for only one purpose. It was to tell you that Miss McRae was kidnapped tonight from the Hotel Nippon by the Japanese."

"Kidnaped? Miss Shiela?" Spry repeated dryly. "What sort of a fair story is that?"

"It's the truth, sir, and I think I can prove what I say. I happen to know that her father left her at the Nippon while he went secretly to Tokyo. I also know that he has not returned, yet tonight Miss McRae received what purported to be a letter from him, asking her to leave the hotel and come to him aboard the yacht. She—"

"Hold on!" interrupted Spry. "How did you get hold of those facts? Where did such a letter come from?"

"From this ship."

"That's a lie—a damnable lie!" howled the captain. "What are you up to, Gafford? That is, if you are Gafford. Are you acting as a Japanese spy? You sold your country once. Are you—"

"Stop!" Gafford leaped forward with clenched hands and bared teeth. "Captain Spry, if it wasn't that I can't afford to quarrel with you, because our country needs us both, acting in concert, at this minute, I would make you eat that cowardly remark. What if I can prove that that letter came from the Nantucket—was written aboard her and used to lure Miss McRae to her fate?"

"I'll apologize and believe you a wronged man from first to last," flared Spry, with total confidence.

"Good! I'll remember that promise," accepted Gafford. "Now tell me, have you a Jap steward aboard?"

"Yes."

"Where did you get him?"

"Where did you get him? Why, good Lord, we picked him up before we cleared! He's been with us all the way across."

"Does he read and write English?"

"Guess he does," admitted the captain. "He turns in his lists and requisitions in that."

"Write a good hand?"

"Fair."

"Is he aboard now—tonight?"

"I believe so. Why?"

"Suppose you call a couple of men and we go see," suggested Gafford. "It would be interesting to know."

Spry shot him a glance and shook his head. "No need of starting talk," he decided. "I'll send Mathison to call him." He glanced at the second officer, who turned and left the room.

"I presume," he resumed after the steward wrote this decoy note."

"Not only that," said Gafford, "but I believe that he forged Secretary McRae's handwriting, so that Miss McRae had no reason to doubt the authenticity of the note."

"But how do you know it worked? Maybe she did doubt it," queried Spry.

Shiela McRae is no fool, young man."

Gafford shook his head. "It worked, Captain Spry. A man named Oshitu, a member of the war party and an officer in their army, went to the Nippon tonight and represented himself as an escort sent to take her to the yacht. She left. I know, for I have been to the Nippon. They brought her to the water front, took a sampan, and carried her to an island just below us. I followed, and I was just too late to stop their getting away in a launch."

Captain Spry swore in amazement. "You mean to say—" he began and paused. A sound of running footsteps came from the outer alley, and Mathison burst in. The salute he gave was perfunctory in the extreme, and he began speaking even as he raised his hand. "The steward is not in quarters, captain. I took the liberty of looking around a bit. Apparently he's left the ship—cleared out."

Captain Bill Spry came out of his in a bound. "By Heaven!" he was turning to Gafford. "It looks as if you knew more about this than I do."

"Come along, both of you, that yellow sneak's about waiting even to get into your slippers, he'd turned forward toward the cabin."

Mathison followed, ok his head. "Don't let it," he remarked to be around at ten o'clock."

His personal stuff to on a life-belt, slid and swam. These thison, and he could nd, join Oshitu in

the launch, and make a clean getaway."

The steward's cabin was empty. Spry, Mathison and Gafford stood and stared around. The place was neat as a pin. The bunks, neatly made, had not been disturbed. A small steamer trunk peeped from beneath the berth. Spry stooped and dragged it out. It was locked.

"No trace," growled the captain. "Well, anyway, Mr. Gafford, I guess this proves your case—on the face of it, at least."

"Wait a bit," said Gafford. With a quick stride he crossed to the folding desk in the bulkhead upon which the absent steward had kept his accounts. Its key was sticking in its lock. Gafford turned it and let the leaf drop outward and down. In the neat compartments were tied bundles and pad of paper and a small leather-bound book. It was the latter which Gafford drew out and laid on the table.

He opened it and saw that it was the steward's record of stores and supplies. Leafing its pages rapidly, he came to the final entry and stopped appalled, scarcely believing his eyes.

Pasted to the leaf of the book was a single sheet of paper, embossed with the name of the yacht. His eyes swept over the written lines it contained, and he drew a short breath. Success beyond his wildest dreams had come to him in the last moment. The tale of the geisha to Kate stood verified. With a pounding pulse he finished the written proof.

On Board the Yacht.

Shiela—I've come back from the capitol quite unexpectedly this evening. I am on the yacht now, in conference with Prince Ito, and as soon as we have finished it will be necessary to get away. As time presses, the prince has been so good as to ask Captain Hashimoto of his staff to act as your escort from the hotel. Pack your bags and come with him at once. I enclose enough to settle with the hotel. In haste,

Dad.

Below this, with the methodical impassivity of his race, the man had written: "Account balanced and closed."

It seemed to Gafford that now indeed his fate had stepped in and taken a directing hand, which had led him to the book. The steward had purposely arranged for the discovery of his work, but had not expected it to be so soon. Yet he had meant that it should be discovered, and had deliberately flaunted his treachery in the faces of those he had deceived. Gafford could imagine him grinning as he wrote, "Account balanced and closed," before putting the book on its shelf.

A choking oath at his elbow roused him and told him that Spry had also read the lying screed, which had served to dupe the girl. His ruddy face was purple as he took the book from Gafford and thrust it under his arm.

"It's a deliberate challenge," he growled hoarsely. "A thought out admission that was all planned before hand, just as you said. 'Account balanced and closed!' Like hell it is; it's just opened! That settles it. I'm with you. What do you want me to do?"

"Take me to Kobe," Gafford told him. "I happen to know Oshitu will make for there first. Can you do it at once?"

Spry nodded and swung upon the gaping Mathison. "Tell Mr. Gough to meet me at once in my cabin," he directed. "After you've done that, rouse the chief and tell him to get his engine ready for instant sailing. Turn out your relief at once and order away the launch. Tell the boat-swain to wait for Mr. Gough and take orders from him. That's all, Gough."

The "second" saluted and set off at a run. Spry motioned Gafford to follow and returned to his own cabin. There he seated himself at a desk and began to write. When he had finished he passed what he had written to Gafford, who read:

On Board the Nantucket, Nagasaki, C. M. Ayer, U. S. Embassy, Tokyo.

Information received that Miss Shiela has been abducted from the hotel by representatives of war party. Have party on board who believes he knows point of abductors' destination. No doubt of his dependability. Am sailing for Kobe at once. Advise at U. S. Consulate there.

Gafford smiled as he handed back the message to Shiela's father. The vouching for his own integrity of motive fired his purpose. With a thrill he heard footfalls approaching, and a rap fell on the door.

"Come," called Spry.

The door opened to admit a stalwart individual in the uniform of first officer. He came in quickly and brought his hand smartly to salute. Spry handed the message to him.

"Wake up Mr. Keyes of the wireless," he ordered, "and have him code that. I've called away the launch for you. Go ashore with the code and get it off at once. Return here as quickly as you can. We sail immediately."

"Shall I arrange the clearance?" inquired Gough.

"Confound the clearance—read that message!" snapped Spry. "No-oody's going to tie me up with red tape while I've got a boat like the Nantucket under my feet."

Gough glanced at the lines on the paper and his face blanched. "Yes, sir," he gasped and ran from the room.

"And now," said Captain William Spry to Gafford, "I'll redeem my promise to you, sir. I apologize as one man to another, and here's my hand."

Gafford took it and wrung it. For a moment the lights of the cabin dimmed before his eyes.

"I'm going to do what you wish," said the captain. "We'll get out as soon as Gough returns. Now, tell me every darned thing you know. Have a cigar."

For an hour the two men talked. Then there came to Gafford's ears the creak of the falls as the launch was hoisted home. Gough came in and reported the message filed. The three men left the room. Presently the winches began their clacking, as they lifted the Nantucket's anchors from their hold on the harbor floor. A tremor shook the yacht from stem to stern. On the bridge her master touched a lever. A bell clanged far below. The yacht heeled like a circling seagull and began to slip forward. Silently, like a wreath of the mist, she slid over the fog-clouded waters of the bay.

CHAPTER VIII.

On the Trail.

A chain of mountains lies back of Kobe. They rise from the lowlands back of the seacoast, their flanks covered with a varying vegetation. First come the rice paddies, lying at the foot of the elevation.

From there one comes to a more rugged land where forests of bamboo shoot upward, making a twilight through which winds the trail. Delicious trees next take up the task of clothing the naked shoulders of the heights; and as one goes on, now and then a fir appears, jostled into partial obscurity by its crowding brothers of arboreal life.

Gradually the first come to predominate the landscape, winning their living where the less hardy forms no longer press upon them, and they hold the stage until the last.

Now and then, as one presses forward, the hut of a peasant appears—frail things of easy construction, as things are apt to be in a land where the earth lies uneasy, and quickly wrecks the labor of men's hands when it quivers and shakes.

They are thatched, as a rule, with rice straw. Their walls are mere frameworks into which sliding screens can be fitted during bad weather and at night. Of furniture there is practically none, for the peasant of Nippon still squats on his haunches, as he has done for uncounted generations, and feeds himself from a communal bowl.

What cooking he does is over an open-air furnace, and when he sleeps it is on a mat laid on the floor back of the sliding screen, with a wooden headrest for a pillow.

Travelers along the road may see the peasant at his daily toil, naked-legged under the wide hat; he wades in the ditches of the rice paddies with bent back. Rising, he stares dumbly at one as he passes and bends again to his work with much the same observation that a dumb brute expresses when it eyes one and drops its head.

Cutters and dressers of bamboo poles gaze out from their little clearings and turn back to their stalks. Their women work with them or sit cross-legged beside the huts, engaged in their housewife tasks or tending infants with beady black eyes.

Higher up one comes across the charcoal burners, and at night the kilns glow redly in the dark. Their smoke marks their location by day. And there, too, are the goatherds—brown, wiry, agile as their charges—before a hut, well up where the fir-trees dominate the forest, a young girl sat weaving a mat. Her face was in complete absorption of her task. Her little fingers darted back and forth.

She did not see the toiling figure of a bare-legged coolie which struggled up a hill in the road. Had she done so it is doubtful if she had given much attention, save that she might have known him for a stranger.

Aside from that there was nothing to arrest her interest. He wore the peasant garb of the country and a wide hat; gains the heat of the sun. It was the shuffle of his approaching feet which finally lifted her eyes.

The stranger came to a halt and bowed with extended hands before her. "Greeting, flowerlike one of Nippon!" he said.

She smiled with a twitch of red lips. "I am Shiela, daughter of Shikoku, the charcoal burner," she made answer. "What does the stranger require."

"Water, little Shiela—a drink of water for a thirsty road."

"Sit down, stranger," the girl requested, putting down her mat. She rose and disappeared into the hut, from which she returned with a cup of porcelain, and extended it to the other.

He drained it and gave it back. "Thanks, little Shiela," he said, smiling. "That was good—as good and sweet as thyself. And thy father—is he about?"

She placed the cup beside her and took up her work. "At present he is at the kilns," she replied. "When the sun touches the top of the mountain he will come."

The stranger nodded. From the body of his costume he drew out tobacco and paper and rolled a cigarette. He lit it, replaced the smoking materials, and settled himself stolidly to wait. Now and then he spoke to the girl. "Thou weavest excellent mats, little Shiela."

To this she replied with a smile.

"Can't she me, little Shiela, if it is true that beyond the mountain top is a new town where there is much

work for men?"

"I do not know. I have heard that such a place is there."

"Perhaps you know if it is true that they have built a steam road over the mountains to that place?"

"Of that, too, I have heard; but I do not know," said the girl.

The stranger made another cigarette and smoked, squatting on his haunches. The sun dropped slowly in the heavens. By and by its rim touched the top of the mountain and shot shafts of fire among the firs, flinging their shadows and that of the hut still farther down the mountainside. Shiela glanced up from her weaving, rose, picked up the cup, and went into the hut.

She came back presently, lugging a small iron pot, in which smoldered coals. She added some fuel and blew the dry sticks into a blaze, preparatory to getting the evening meal. The stranger watched her while he smoked.

From among the red-touched boles of the fir-trees a figure appeared. It was that of a man of some five feet three. He walked with a slight stoop, so that he looked not so tall. His arms were naked and smudged with black streaks and spots, as was his face. He wore a sparse, iron-gray beard.

The stranger rose and bowed at his approach. The newcomer paused and gravely returned the bow.

"You are Shikoku, the charcoal burner?" the stranger inquired.

"Thou sayest truly," returned the other. "And thou?"

"I am a wayfarer from Kobe, worthy Shikoku. Passing, I paused for a cup of water. Canst tell me if I am on the right road to the new town beyond the mountains?"

"Aye," said Shikoku. "There is such a place, and this road can lead you thither for some time. I have heard of the place, but I have not seen it."

"Is there not a railroad, over which they run steam-trains, to take men and things to town?"

Shikoku nodded. "That I have seen, and the steam-breathing things which draw the loads," he responded. "Many men have gone to that place and few returned."

"One, then, could follow the steam road?" said the stranger.

"Aye," agreed Shikoku. "Yonder road crosses the road of steam, beyond the top of the mountain. Thou goest there?"

"Aye," admitted the stranger.

"Thanks, worthy Shikoku. I must press on."

"Not so," objected the charcoal burner. "First thou shalt share our food. Thou art from Kobe thou sayest. It is not often that one comes to us from the outer places. Sit and talk."

"Thanks, hospitable burner of charcoal," the other accepted. He squatted down and produced his tobacco and papers. He began rolling several cigarettes.

Shikoku passed on to the hut and presently emerged, having washed his hands and face. The stranger offered him a cigarette. He took it and lighted it at the furnace. The two squatted down.

"Tell me," urged Shikoku, "what is this war-talk of which I have heard faintly of late? Thou has been in the cities and shouldst have heard more."

"It is war with the American nation," informed the other. "Our people do not like these whites. We do not like their discrimination against our people. We demand that they treat us as equals. It is a question of honor among us. If needs be we shall fight."

"All!" cried Shikoku; "that is foolish. For what should we fight? And this talk of discrimination? If our people like not the laws of the white man let them stay in Nippon. It is the restless ones who leave Nippon who would plunge her into war."

"We want also the Philippine islands," the stranger resumed, speaking. "If Nippon is to grow she must have room."

Shikoku nodded sagely. "I have heard them mentioned," he said slowly. "But why do we want them now? Did we want them before the Americans took them? Were they not there then—the same as now? It is not the people of Nippon who want war, believe me. It is the rich men who have money, who barter and sell to get more money. My father and my father's father lived on the mountain for years and burned the charcoal as have I."

"Did we want war? No! It is he who buys our charcoal for a small price and sells it for a greater who would profit. War means but added hardship for the common people—the loss of our sons to feed the red mouth of a dragon, the wasting of our crops, the grieving of our women, and after that a greater tax laid on our earnings to pay for it all. There is but one war which the people of Nippon would favor. If some other nation should threaten, then they would rise and strike back for Nippon—rise and strike and cry 'Banzai!' and perish that Nippon might live! To war for one's country is a man's duty. To war to put more gold into the pockets of already rich men is the trick of a fool."

"Thou art a philosopher, worthy Shikoku," said the stranger. "But if these whites will not treat us as equals shall we lie down like children dogs?"

"The ways of the East are the ways of the West's. They are different ways," said Shikoku. "Let the sons of the East stay where the gods have put them. A grain of rice in the mouth is good. In the windpipe it is a different thing, and can do harm."

"Thou sayest true," rejoined the stranger and lit another cigarette.

The little Shiela lifted the pot from the furnace and poured its contents into a bowl. This she carried to her father and placed on a small, flat stone. Going again to the hut, she returned with three small bowls. Shikoku tendered one to his guest and the other to himself. He waved his hand in invitation to the steaming mixture.

The stranger dipped his small bowl into the greater and sank back. Shikoku helped himself next. Across from them, Shiela filled her own Twilight had fallen with the sun behind the mountain, and the flame from the uncovered furnace lit up the little

glade. For a time they ate in silence, while the charcoal burner broke.

"Tell me," he questioned, "will there be a war?"

"It is undecided," said the stranger. "Nippon will not forever stand for the white's treatment of her people. Even now the Secretary of State of the Americans is on a mission to the government of Tokyo. I do not think that our government wants war."

"The trouble will be settled by the government if nothing happens to make trouble before it is settled. America's government is not unfriendly to us. It is only the people in sections who have done the things to which we object. But there are those among us who want to see trouble. They will try to make it."

(To be continued)

CO-OPERATING IN

SELLING PRODUCE

Among the topics given, more than usual attention at the annual meeting of the Michigan Horticultural Society in Kalamazoo this month was that of co-operation in the matter of marketing farm crops. This subject proved to be a live one because of the low prices that have been paid the past fall for apples and potatoes, besides many other farm crops. The difficulties of getting the farmers to hold together was illustrated by a bit of history concerning the Hudsonville Celery Growers' Association. The report of the discussion as made by Hugh Scott of Northport is in part as follows:

The fate of the Hudsonville Celery Growers Association should be a profitable and lasting lesson to every group of farmers in this country whether they produce celery, fruit, vegetables, grain or live stock. The association as organized under the finest constitution and by-laws ever given to any organization; every

shipper subscribed to a promise to use the association only in the selling of his produce and to sell nothing through the commission houses. Able managers and packers were employed and every box of celery packed in the great warehouse and graded into three or four grades marked upon each package. In that manner the retailer or jobber knew just what he was getting. The produce as sold f. o. b. at Hudsonville for cash had everything indicated success and large returns for the grower. But this condition of things did not please the commission men and several of the men, so it is said met in Chicago and made a pool of about six hundred dollars and set out to spend it, if necessary in breaking up the association. We imagine that they never dreamed of being as successful as they were, for within two weeks, or twenty of the subscribers in the association were shipping their goods to Chicago commission houses. In vain did the manager ask for celery to fill his orders. The few faithful ones could not produce it.

Like a flock of sheep, the greater part of the flock that comprised the association followed these deserting bell-wethers and in less than three months from the time of its beginning business in its spacious warehouse the doors were locked and all members of the association were consigning to the commission men again. I don't know just how long it took for the commission men to get back the money they spent in breaking up the association, but I imagine judging from the kicks that immediately began coming in that it was not over three days at the most.

The great warehouse of the Hudsonville Celery Growers Association still stand a sad monument to the celery growers' lack of confidence in themselves. It is empty and no business is transacted there. It is a wonderful commentary on the celery growers' lack of business ability. The commission man is still handling the celery and is likely to do so until that millennium for which we spoke makes its unmistakable appearance.

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