

# THE AMBASSADOR'S SECRET

By ROBERT NAUGHTON.

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HE smoking, idling, late afternoon crowd of politicians in the New Willard contained little of interest for us. Rand was bored and I was uneasy. We stood by the window looking out on the expanse of Washington, typified by the amplitude of Pennsylvania avenue. For four days we had been on a tame, unsatisfactory hunt for some lost papers in a West Virginia salt-mining deal, and were now merely loitering on our return to New York, little dreaming of the drama on which the curtain was about to rise.

A negro bell-boy turned away from the call-desk just then, and his musical voice, rolling through the sea of chatter, was summoning:

"Mito Lawrence Ra-and."

"Confound him!" said Rand. "Get him quick."

That name, all too well-known, had sounded once only, but a score of eyes followed me with interest as I took from the boy the message that Rand was wanted on the telephone, and returned to him.

As Rand rejoined me, when he emerged from the booth in a few minutes, he said succinctly:

"Count von Bela-Moukna has heard we are in town, and, as something has just happened at his wife's reception, he wants us to come instantly to the embassy."

"In top hats and all that?" I asked, as we hurried toward the elevator.

"I suppose we must," said Rand, with a slight lifting of the corners of his thin lips.

In fifteen minutes we were dressed, were downstairs, and rolling along the asphalt on our way to the handsome old residence in F street, which his government had purchased for its distinguished diplomatic representative.

The air of a function and the inevitable awning and carpet from the door to the curb marked out the house. We were met by an extremely tall, elderly servant, very widespread as to the elbows and very tight as to the maroon breeches, but with a shrewd twinkle in his guarded eyes, nevertheless. He showed us hastily into a side room, and back through others that were en suite with it, instead of taking us through the hall, where we might have been seen by the guests, until we reached the rear of the house, where an important wing projected. The difference in furnishings made it apparent that this was the ambassador's own ground.

We were ushered into a large room on the second floor, half-library, half-trophy room, and the ambassador rose stately from behind a big, fat desk, at which he had been sitting, smoking fiercely. He was a short, sturdy man of forty, with a blond face and an imposing head of iron-gray hair. His eyes gleamed under heavy black brows, and a large mouth was shielded by the moustache, which one often sees on men who have walked in the shadow of Bismarck.

His courtesies were a trifle exaggerated, it seemed to me, and Rand cut them short by a somewhat abrupt inquiry as to what we could do for him.

"You can tell me who took front that square, teak cabinet there in the corner a thin package of papers, the contents of which were known only to me, and which, if disclosed, will turn Europe into a seething hell of war in three months. I put them in that cabinet with my own hands at three o'clock this afternoon. They were gone at four o'clock. It is not five o'clock, and in this hour, other than telephoning you, I have done nothing else than puzzle over the most profound mystery that I have ever encountered in my diplomatic career. Other than the door by which you came, there are no entrances to this room but the windows. They are locked, and have not been opened. The only approaches to the door behind you are always under the eyes of servants who have been brought from my own rich estates, and have the fidelity of centuries behind them. No one has been seen to enter this room since three o'clock, and the only persons in the house meanwhile have been my family and domestic staff, and our two hundred guests. There was absolutely no clue in the room, in which, by the way, nothing has been disturbed except this antique bracelet, which was lying on the top of the cabinet. I must have those papers back again, and I must have them before they can be copied, which, such as their nature and length, would take two hours. I must not tell you what they contain, but in order that you may be able to identify them if you happen on the one chance of a hundred and do recover them, I show you this packet, which is identical in appearance."

He held out a small manuscript bundle, half an inch thick, formed of thin, diplomatic correspondence paper, and covered in pale blue, with veined cross lines of darker blue. I noticed at this juncture that the elderly servant had not retired, but had taken his stand behind us.

Rand disregarded the packet and bracelet, and passed rapidly around the room, his eyes surveying the interior and fittings in every detail. He studied the heavily napped carpet intently, then resumed his seat and took up the bracelet. It was made of nineteen capsule-shaped chased gold bars, joined each by three hand links. It was an inch wide and in the center was an oval ring two inches long, supporting two golden leaves and a coral apple. It was an antique ornament of great value. Rand turned his pocket lenses on it, and said almost instantly:

"Your servant who announced this afternoon has the guest-list of course, and if I questioned him could his memory be depended upon?"

"Absolutely, sir. He is my major-domo, and is really wonderful in that regard, as well as others."

"Will you call him, please?"

"He is here, Rudolf, answer anything the gentleman may ask you."

The stiff and towering fellow came forward to the end of his master's desk.

"Rudolf, take your guest list and check off the large, plump woman."

He drew out the sheet, ran down the names, and, as he came to the last, Rand asked:

"Now, how many?"

"Eighteen, sir."

"How many of those eighteen are blond women turning gray?"

Rudolf considered a moment.

"Three, sir."

"How many of the guests have left the house? Any of the three?"

"Nearly all of the guests are attending upon the vaudeville program, including these three ladies, sir."

Rand held up the bracelet.

"Now, Rudolf, with of the three wore this bracelet?"

Rudolf's eyes questioningly sought his master's face, which remained downcast and unchanged.

"Madame Julie—"

"Stop, you fool. Not another word!"

roared the ambassador, with a sudden change of manner, leaping to his feet and clapping his hand over the startled servant's mouth.

Rand was leaning forward, the pupils of his eyes reduced to pin points, and shining brightly.

Then Count Bela-Moukna, realizing the undignified and unfortunate appearance of his outburst, drew back and sank down in his chair, rubbing his face fiercely with his hands, till his moustache and hair, disarranged, gave him a wild, animalistic look that could have been achieved in no other way. Slowly he recovered himself, rose, and said coldly and with all the dignity he could summon:

"Gentlemen, this investigation has reached a point where you must drop it. Mr. Rand, your incisiveness is more than marvelous. You will receive my check for five thousand by messenger in an hour. I regret to be under the necessity of bidding you good afternoon."

Rand, with a slight, sardonic smile, bowed deeply and responded with equal hauteur. We were retiring, when the ambassador clapped his hands to his temples, then smote his palms together, and began to laugh.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, one moment! Forgive my abruptness. I have made a mistake. Pray resume your seats."

He had become most gracious in an instant, and hastened to say:

"Mr. Rand, I am sorely absent-minded. The lady whose name I prevented your hearing in full was here with me clandestinely this afternoon, and wore that bracelet for the first time. Only at the mention of her did I remember seeing it. I must confess to having had a small affair with her, one breath of which would ruin me. I had the papers after she left. She cannot be responsible for their disappearance. We had a rather dramatic interview, as she wished it to be our last, and I paid little attention to that bracelet, though, as I look at it, I feel sure there was a tiny oval locket pendant from it, which is almost certain to have contained my picture. Also, I am now positive that she, toying with the bracelet, dropped it here on my desk. I found it there on the cabinet thirty feet away."

Rand, at this fact, leaped from his seat and strode to the cabinet. He turned his lens over the top, then on the mantel behind it, and caught up a polished silver topographer's tracer with a broad, flat handle. As he held it to the light, I saw his little smile of triumph. As usual, it vanished instantly, and he returned to his seat.

"Your papers were taken within the last two hours, my dear sir, probably by the same person who stole the locket from the bracelet with this tracer. See the little scratch and the trace of the soft gold." He held it up carefully between his two index fingers.

"Also the person we seek seems to be blackmailer as well as spy."

"Pray tell me, Mr. Rand," said the ambassador, "how you made the marvelous selection of the owner of the bracelet?"

"Very simply. It is a large bracelet, yet the end links between each of the fence work bars are so worn by wearing well down on the wrist, with consequent strain on the end links, that its wearer must have been a large, plump woman. Then, on the inside of a naturally blond hair, with signs of approaching loss of color. It was merely a process of elimination."

"And now this—"

"We must wait and see. May I have a bit of drawing paper and a fine pen—a crow's foot, if you have them?"

The ambassador had both, and Rand, getting all the light possible, carefully laid the tracer on the desk, drew forth his pocket case of instruments, and, measuring with dividers, began copying from the polished silver faces of the handle, the faint, oily lines of imprint a hand had left upon them. Twisted and distorted as they were by the hand having been closed around the instrument, Rand reconstructed them with a wonderful accuracy of imagination, and with such rapidity, that in not more than twenty minutes he had before him a line drawing of the hand that had held the bracelet. It was the left hand, long, and with distinguished lines.

I should say at this point that before he had been at work more than a few seconds he had asked:

"Is it possible for you to inform the Countess Bela-Moukna that you have by chance secured a noted fortune teller, say, Mr. Marcon, of Paris, and insist that she give me immediately a special place on her program?"

"Pardon me, I don't understand,"

said the diplomat, seemingly unable to follow Rand's plan of rapid action.

"I am about to reproduce the hand of the woman who has your papers and the locket that can ruin your career."

"Pardon me again, sir, that is all very wonderful, but what does it signify?"

Rand bit his lip, and his fingers holding the little brass dividers were white with the pressure they exerted.

"A fortune teller who uses palmistry as one means of divination may have an opportunity to see that woman's hand," said he, with a chilling suavity.

"Ah, really. Yes—yes—marvelous. Um—ah. Yes—yes, of course," answered the ambassador, in a bewildered sort of way.

He started to give the necessary message to Rudolf.

"Would you be so good as to write that message and send it by another servant?" said Rand.

Rudolf's eyes snapped with some suppressed feeling.

When the messenger was gone and the hand nearing completion, our employer again interposed his inquiries.

"Of course, Mr. Rand, finding this woman is one step, but what then? How can you possibly recover the papers and the locket without arresting one of my wife's guests? Do you realize that any action of a sort that would provoke the slightest scene either in this house or outside of it, where it was traceable to this woman's presence here, will lead to disclosures that, no matter how small, will be followed by greater ones, all of which mean, notwithstanding your cleverness, entire and complete failure, sir?"

he could read in the facial characteristics of his subjects.

"Of course," continued he, "it is obviously impossible for me to give more than a few of the ladies before me anything like a thorough reading this afternoon in my brief half-hour with you, but I will select a number at random for a few statements each. So I am going to ask you to hold up your left hands as long as I hold up mine, if you please. Will you oblige?"

Up went two hundred left hands as he raised his.

He surveyed them rapidly, and said aside to me after they were lowered:

"Our woman is either the black velvet Elizabeth to your right, the tall eagle in the center, the chianti flask in salmon in the rear, or the lovely Lady Gainsborough on the left, second row. None of them seems to be of a professional stamp, though. We may be too late."

The outlook seemed rather hopeless, I must say, as I covertly surveyed each of the four, while he picked out several others, and brought them forward alternately, starting the company with his insight into their characters.

Once he came close up to me and said: "When I put this drawing on the table, pick it up and fix on your memory the deep lines across the palm and the crooked third finger."

I did as he bade me, and when satisfied that I had the mental picture, I caught his eye. A moment later, when he had finished with a dour senator's wife, he said:

"Now, ladies, I hope that I have won your confidence; I have a feeling that there is some one here this afternoon for whom I may be able to do a

study, drew slowly nearer, with Rudolf at his heels.

"My dear madame," Rand began, so low that I alone could hear his words, "there seem to be things here which I feel sure you do not wish known."

She started visibly.

"Much of what I say I will address directly to you, but when I begin to talk of your intimate woman friend, that also will be meant for you. Pray stop me if I go too far."

Her eyes were lighting and darkening, and her breast was heaving with suppressed excitement. Slowly, and watching her narrowly, Rand told her points of her character which were plainly written on her face, such as her determination and high spirit, signified by the angles of the chin and mouth; her romantic, adventurous nature, indicated in the size and openness of the eyes and the low, arched brows, and her love of this world's goods, shown in the thinness of her lips and the unusual shape of the point of the nose. He passed from phase to phase, "bowing true to the line," as I could see by her expression.

"But you have chosen your path," he went on. "I can but warn you of pitfalls. There is one pitfall yawning just before you, and, while your danger is great, there is greater danger confronting a friend—a woman not unlike yourself, but, although you do not know it, she is bent on some desperate and dangerous practices, that are drawing near a terrible climax."

All of the faint color left her face, and I could see the fluttering of the arteries in her neck.



WE LOWERED HER INTO A CHAIR.

Rand gave me a look that besought my sympathy. Though I was as greatly daunted by the obvious difficulties as was the Count Bela-Moukna, I had a faith in Rand that allowed me to smile. Rand did not answer at once, and when he did, he used the tone adopted with a questioning child, and did not raise his eyes from his work.

"One hill must be climbed at a time, my dear sir. I have a slight hope of being successful."

I must admit, as I realized that when he had finished his present project, he would have no more than a moral certainty that the woman whom he had picked out was possessed of the papers and locket, I was consumed with curiosity as to what possible means he could take to prove possession and effect recovery. Never for one moment did I doubt but that this was all clearly formed in his incomparable brain.

When the drawing was complete, we were accompanied by the ambassador through the curtained entrance to the large drawing rooms, and found ourselves at the back of the clustered audience, listening to a woman noted as a reader of child's poems. She was at that moment responding to her final encore. The courteous, a courtly woman with high, Teutonic color, moved toward us, and the ambassador presented Rand as Mr. Marcon, and Rand, with the mildly unctuous air of the society favorite, immediately introduced me, to my utter amazement, as "my assistant, Mr. St. John Coulter."

"Merciful heavens! I never read a palm in all my life," I whispered to him, as we moved toward the dais where the entertainers took their station.

Before I had recovered my composure we were announced, and Rand plunged into his role with a verve that, even though I had seen him play parts ranging from the priest at Doctor Karsch's house to the Swedish engineer at Marengo, nevertheless completely amazed me.

He consumed a moment or two in a little lecture on palmistry, and all that he avowed as being discernible from the lines of the hand I knew full well

great good, and, while I am lining just a few more destinies by the chance method of selection I have been pursuing, Mr. St. John Coulter will pass among you seeking that particular palm in which are the signs of the star of the day and hour. I have a feeling that there is some one here over whom fate hangs today. If this lady, whoever she may be, will come forward, I will endeavor to draw back that mysterious veil that shuts the future from our eyes and bare the secrets that lie beyond."

There was a melancholy, depressing tone in his voice that was lamentable.

"Go down there and find our woman," he said to me, and with a light jump in my throat that seemed to choke me more and more as I progressed, I began moving in and out among the chairs of the guests searching for the hand that matched the picture in my mind. Rand was brilliantly diverting all the others save those I was encountering at the moment. I was astounded at the vast difference in the hands extended as I passed, and was even able to exchange polite handshakes with two or three ladies who sought me to give them the grand opportunity of the afternoon. The first two of the four Rand had selected had hands shaped similarly to the drawing, but the lines were in no way alike. The third woman had a larger hand and no crooked third finger.

The fourth was the woman I sought! She was pale and nervous, with her lips closely set, and when I told her that it was she whose palm bore the signs of the day and hour, she shrank back as if from an accusation. But she thrust her pretty chin forward a trifle, and, when Rand had finished the reading then in progress, she rose to her full, stately height, pressed her trembling fingers to her masses of hair, then smoothed out the folds of her rich gown with a rapid, unfaltering gesture, and led the way, unfalteringly, to the dais.

Rand took her hand with a marked gentleness, and his face was grave and kindly, although the steel-point glint in his eyes belied his whole manner.

There was a moment of silence, with tense interest among the spectators. The ambassador, his face a

grave as set foot where there are graver dangers than death, and has laid hand to tasks that are to be extremely bitter in their recompense. One task she has just accomplished. I can see her eyes light with triumph. I can see her pass among her fellow human beings with the stealth of a tiger, holding to her guilty heart the secret of her deeds. Little she knows what is before her. Over her shoulder there lifts an extended hand—the hand of retribution. Even now—this very moment it falls. She is caught and disgraced before the whole world. She is—"

With a heavy sigh and a soft rustle of garments she sank backward. I caught her as she fell, and we lowered her into a chair.

"Another room, immediately," said Rand to the ambassador, who had rushed to the dais at this climax of the tense scene. Just behind him was the venerable Rudolf.

In a moment we were in a little side chamber, leaving the company in great commotion. The countess was jeffly opening the unconscious woman's gown at the neck. I saw a corner of blue paper with darker veins. Rand quietly drew forth the packet without attracting the attention of the countess by any haste, and passed it behind him to the trembling Count Bela-Moukna.

"Merciful heavens!" he gasped in my ear. "This woman is the daughter of the French secretary. Ten thousand more if you get that locket."

Rand was deftly assisting the countess and the maid. Gown somewhere about the person of the unconscious woman, a little golden thing rolled out, wheeled down the folds of her gown, and across the floor beneath the eyes of the countess, till it struck the toe of the towering Rudolf, drawn up stiffly by the door.

With a hasty word of explanation, Rand instantly turned to the drawing-room, to get control of the scene there and continue the program. The ambassador stood with his bulging eyes fastened on the locket. With the impassive air of an Indian chief, Rudolf shifted one foot slightly, until his heel was on the triquet, then turned and ground it into bits.

## The American Home

WILLIAM A. RADFORD  
Editor

Mr. William A. Radford will answer questions and give advice FREE OF COST on all subjects pertaining to the subject of building, for the readers of this paper. On account of his wide experience as Editor, Author and Manufacturer, he is, without doubt, the highest authority on all these subjects. Address all inquiries to William A. Radford, No. 118 West Jackson boulevard, Chicago, Ill., and only enclose two-cent stamp for reply.

Deep down in the heart of every normal man and woman is the ambition some day to own a home. This may be half formed—a vague discontent and unrest concerning conditions which every renter so well knows—or, it may have reached the state of active determination to make any or all sacrifices necessary to escape the renter's life and live in a real home. The ambition is there, more or less definitely formed in the heart of every man and woman, waiting only for the needed stimulus to develop to the point of action.

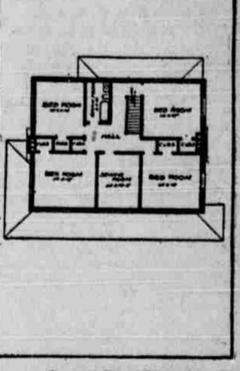
It is natural to live in one's own home. It is unnatural to live in a rented house or apartment. The family that lives in its own house, no matter how humble it may be, feels the sense of independence that does not come to the family in a rented house. Every renter feels, even if he does not say it, that every month's rent that he turns over to his landlord is money practically thrown away. That is, he knows that it is too much to pay for the merely temporary comforts it brings—and these often pretty doubtful comforts, too.

When one stops to think of the amount of money that is put away in rent during twenty or twenty-five years, one is amazed and dumfounded. It is enough to buy a fine home, all free from incumbrances. Yet what has the renter to show for his money expended, except a bundle of rent receipts? The same money spent a little more judiciously in monthly payments for a house and lot would go to secure a desirable home and make a fine investment and saving.

There are various ways for the rent-

before the work is started, and so they are the more willing to cooperate with the prospective owner, since the element of speculation in the deal for them is very much reduced.

If renters who are interested in this proposition will go out and talk with their local real estate men and decide where they want to build, they will be



Second Floor Plan.

surprised at how easily the whole matter can be arranged. The design illustrated herewith is a good large-sized house of dignified home-like appearance, well suited for the home of a family of substantial worth and reputation. It is a house that would be a credit to any street, and would take its place among the best houses in the town.

Yet considering its size and construction this is a very inexpensive house to build. The design has been carried out complete for \$4,500 or for



er to go about it to acquire a home. He may undertake to purchase a house that has already been lived in, an old house, perhaps, at any rate a second-hand house; or he may go to the suburbs where the large real estate operators are putting up many houses on speculation, relying on selling them after they are completed.

Both of these methods are at fault to the extent that such a house is not made to meet the special requirements of those who are to live in it.

The requirements of no two families are exactly alike, and when a matter so vitally important as the requiring of a home, a dwelling that has to be occupied throughout life, it seems that the house ought to be built especially to meet the needs of the owner.

So there is the third way of acquiring a home, and it is probably the best. It is not to buy a ready-made

\$5,000, using brick veneer construction. This makes a very warm and substantial appearing house and all things considered is to be highly recommended.

The design is slightly colonial in its dealing; yet more important than that, it has the air of home-like hospitality that is so much to be desired. A broad veranda, extending clear across the front and on one side, is a feature that is much appreciated.

The floor plans show the interior of this house to be laid out to provide plenty of room for a good-sized family. The large living room occupies the entire left portion of the first floor, being 15x32 feet in size. This is strictly in accordance with the very latest ideas in house planning and those who have lived in a dwelling laid out in this way recommend it very highly.

The dining room and kitchen are to the right of the central hallway and are arranged for convenience in doing the housework.

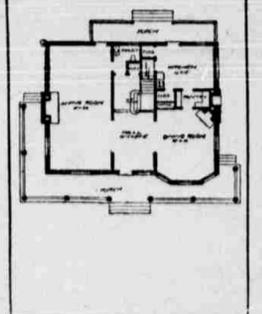
On the second floor there are four good large bedrooms besides a sewing room. The bathroom is conveniently located. An ample supply of clothes closets is provided.

This design has been selected from a great number as most completely meeting the needs of the prospective home builder for a residence of this kind.

**The Fiery Red Star.**  
In the south, these nights, about 9 o'clock, one will see a fiery red star, known as Antares. It is the heart of the Scorpion, the plainest constellation in the skies. Anybody can see the Scorpion up there—can tell it by its widespread claws and its long tail. There is a story told of Antares that one will remember, doubtless, when he sees the star.

Away back in ancient times when the gods of mythology were running things, Phaeton, the son of old Sol, got leave to drive the chariot of the sun on its day's course around the skies. Now it happened that Antares is close to the track on which the chariot is driven, and so, when the courses neared that great fiery object, they became frightened, and then Phaeton lashed them furiously, and they reared and plunged so that the chariot upset and came near spilling the sun out upon the earth, but then Sol appeared, calmed the steeds, cuffed Phaeton a little, and got the courses on the right track, which they have kept ever since.—Ohio State Journal.

**No Sympathy.**  
Tramp—Madam, will you let me tell you of my heavy burdens—  
Lady of the House—You needn't. I can see at a glance you're loaded.



First Floor Plan.

house, either new or second-hand, but to have a new house built in just the location and of just the size and character desired.

And with home-building conditions as they are in most localities, this is an easy thing for the man of average means to do. For a very modest sum the services of skilled architects who make a specialty of designing dwelling houses may be secured. A design can be selected that is just what suits the special needs of the family; a house complete in every detail and conveniently arranged for the work of the house. Then on a very modest payment down the real estate operators are very glad to put up the house following these plans and specifications. The house is contracted for