

A Remarkable Story of Service and Reward

THE GREAT SYMBOL

By Meville Davison Post. Illustrated by Will Crawford.

To Marion Dillard there was mockery in the symbolism of the night.

She was alone. On the table before her was an open telegram—the grating fitted into the last opening of the trap. She was a dark-haired, slender girl with that aspect of capacity and independence with which the great war endowed our women—the high courage that no assault of evil fortune could bludgeon into servility. She sat in her chair before the table, to the eye, unacquainted.

But it was to the eye only. In the magnificent about her the wreckage impending was incredible. The house fitted with every luxury, the library in which she sat, its rug the treasure of a temple, its walls paneled.

To Marion Dillard, in her chair before the table, with the telegram open before her, the whole setting was grotesque. All over the city, white with newly fallen snow, were the symbols of this majestic celebration of the birth of the Savior. They were not absent in this room. Holy wreaths hung in the windows and the strange ivory image, representing the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, which her father had always so proudly prized, had been brought out, after the usual custom of this night, and placed on the table. It sat on a black silk cloth embroidered with a white cross. As a work of art it was not conspicuously excellent, but her father prized it for the memory of a great adventure.

Marion Dillard leaned back in the chair, reviewing the events that had moved against her as though with some master design. Her father was dead. A cross of white marble stood on a hilltop in France to his memory. It had been erected by every people in the great war, for every idealism, too old for longer service in the American army, had taken his own fortune—and alas, the fortune which he held in trust for another—and with it maintained a hospital base on the western front for the benefit of every injured man, friend or enemy.

Marion Dillard reflected: Of what avail was it that her father had not realized that this trust money was going into his big conception? He had drawn on his resources in America until every item of his great fortune was pledged, and by some error this estate, in trust, had gone into the common fund. Appalled, when she came to examine the accounts, Marion had endeavored to cover the matter, hoping that the decision of the United States circuit court of appeals in a suit to recover a trust fund would be in her favor. She had decided in favor of her father's estate, and thus furnish the money to replace this trust. And so she had somehow managed to go on.

This telegram on the table was the end. "Reversed and dismissed" were the sinister words of it. On this night commemorating the birth of Christ, whose death she had followed, she had always so magnificently followed, she must decide what she would do.

The thing was sharp and clear before her. She must either wreck the majestic legend of her father, or grade herself. As she had a coat of arms, she had a coat of arms since her father's death, she could easily make it appear that she had, herself, embellished this trust fund. That would leave the memory of her father clean, but it clearly meant that she herself could not escape the criminal courts. The heirs of her father's fortune were insistent and hostile. They would have the pound of flesh, now that the fortune was gone.

For a time she sat motionless, her eyes vaguely on the carved ivory image on the table before her. Then, she got up, and with her hands clasped behind her back, stood looking down at the crucifix.

It was about 10 inches high, rude in the Chinese fashion out of the segment of an elephant's tusk four inches in diameter. The cross represented the trunk of a tree, the roots thrust out for the base. The figure, with arms extended, was nailed to the broken limbs of this tree-trunk, forming the cross. The whole top of the tree was the head of the figure, thrown back under a crown of thorns. And there in the quaint English letters cut around the base was the legend: "Inasmuch as you have turned your head to save us, may He turn his head to save you."

Well, the thing was an idle hope. There was no help in the world; either her own life or the memory of her father was on the way to dreadful wreckage!

Then desperation overcame her. She went out of the library through the great hall to the door. A maid helped her into her coat. She gave a direction that the servant's show should be dismissed for the night, no one should remain up, she would let herself in with her latchkey when she returned. She went out.

At the bronze gates as she passed into the street a man sauntering along the wall spoke to her. She knew him at once, he was a detective from the secret service. So they were already beginning to keep her under surveillance! The explanation of this detective did not mislead her. He was looking for a dangerous criminal, he said, who had come into the city and had made inquiries about this house.

Marion Dillard replied with some polite appreciation of the thoughtful-ness of the police for her security, and went on. At the end of the bronze fence, as she passed, she observed another figure crouched against the wall as though it also kept guard on her house; but it moved away as she approached, as though to conceal itself around the turn of the wall enclosing the spacious grounds. She smiled grimly. The watch kept by the police would be efficient; here was another. She went along the street to the great bridge.

She paused for a moment before the immense stone lions on their great pedestals at the bridge head. They looked old, haggard, changing into monsters under a draping of snow. Then she set out to walk across the bridge into the country beyond, past the cathedral on the hill, lighted, and from which the melody of vague and distant music descended. And the feeling in the girls as she moved



The viceroys was too ill to rise; he asked for protection to the monastery and a guard.

or Dillard with four more in his hand if you put it over. You brought him in, didn't you? Is there anything you wouldn't do for a \$100? Name it, Colonel, let me hear what it sounds like.

Swank paused as from the weariness of effort. "Von Waldereese was a big, purple-faced German, wearing a helmet with a black eagle on the top of it, and a white chin strap; and he always rode a black charger. The theatrical conceptions of the emperor must be carried out in detail. And the officious von Waldereese was overlooking no occasion. An orderly had just arrived from the German high command as I entered to interview Major Dillard, and as it happened the American general put the message that this orderly carried into his pocket as he came out with me."

How Bell cursed under his breath. "I know all about that," he said.

Undisturbed, unmoved and deliberate, Colonel Swank continued with his narrative. "We traveled for about three miles west to the monastery. We passed first under that queer thing which is to be found in a door at the rear of the shrine, and we were at once in an immense, low room."

"One was not able to see what decorations the walls had contained, as they were heaped on all sides to the ceiling with bales of silks, furs and embroideries; and about were chests and boxes piled in some confusion as though they had just been brought in. The whole chamber was a warehouse, and it was filled to the ceiling, except for a narrow passage through the middle. This we traversed, and coming to the end of it, passed through a yellow door into another chamber. We entered here a room of lesser dimensions; but it was fitted up after the usual idea of Chinese luxury—great mirrors around the walls; rich rugs on the floor; a variety of clocks, all going at a different hour; and many screens and tapestries."

"In the middle of the room, in a chair padded with silk cushions, sat the viceroys. He was an ancient man, evidently at the end of life. His face was like wrinkled parchment; but they could receive no compensation for this service; and that he would endeavor to protect the monastery."

"But he was disturbed about a guard. The American Expeditionary force was not large, and he was easily able to see the international complications that might arise if he left here an American guard to clash, perhaps, with the German division behind him."

Swank moved slightly in his position against the drum of the freighter. "At this moment," he said, "while Major Dillard was engaged with the difficult problem before him, an extraordinary event occurred. There was a clamor of voices outside. A Chinese guard hurried through the door and fell on the floor before the viceroys. There was a sound of heavy footsteps, the clang of sidreams, the echo of guttural voices, and a dozen German officers entered the room."

"They were young Prussian under-officers from the portion of the German company behind the American division. They stopped inside the door, lost for a moment in wonder at the very miracle of the thing they were seeing. Then they noticed Major Dillard, standing beside the viceroys' chair. They brought their heads together and made him a formal military salute; but it was clear they regarded him as of no particular importance—as merely a soldier from the American division to be accorded the usual amenities."

"There followed a brief, verbal passage at arms. Major Dillard explained that the monastery was under the protection of the American division; that it must not be disturbed, and requested the German officers to withdraw. They replied with a courtesy in which there was a high contempt that as the American division had passed on, and the German company arrived on the ground, the monastery was under the protection of the German expeditionary force, and they must insist on their right of control. It was evident that Major Dillard could not control them, and it was clear that their contention of their right of control over the Chinese territory adjacent to their division was in point of legal virtue superior to that of the American division that had passed on, and from which Major Dillard had just returned. He spoke with an exaggerated courtesy to the American; but they were clearly intending to seize the monastery, to ignore any claim of the Americans over it, and they made that intention insolently evident. The old Chinese viceroys understood it at once. Despair enveloped him. He put out his hands like one resigned to the inevitable. It was at this moment the dramatic sequel arrived."

Clay Colonel Swank paused; he made a slight gesture with the hand in which the long sharp blade of his knife moved on the soft wood. "I have mentioned," he said, "how in character were the acts of Willhelm II in this international affair, and now one of these theatrical gestures intervened with a shattering effect. Major Dillard offered no further argument. He took out of his pocket the message which he had received from von Waldereese as we were setting out and read it: It was an order of the high command putting a portion of a German company under the command of the viceroys, general whose division it followed. The viceroys were to remain and guard the monastery during the whole of the allied occupation; nothing should be disturbed; they would be held responsible for every life and

every article, and for the rigid preservation of order. It was a hard, clear, comprehensive direction: And they were to report to him in Pekin.

"The amazement of the young Prussian officers was beyond any word to express. They recognized the black eagle and the signature of the German high command. Von Waldereese's was an order of All Highest. They formed in a line before the American, clicked their heels and saluted. And he set them about the outside of the monastery as a guard; and went away in his chair."

Mr. Bow Bell threw himself forward with a great cackle of laughter. "Ho, ho!" he cried. "And they couldn't touch a girl or a cash piece. And what did you do, you fat old rook?"

Colonel Swank resumed his narrative as though there had been no interruption. "I remained," he said, "though not entirely at my own initiative. The old viceroys had drawn the conclusion from some remarks of Major Dillard that the white cross which the monks had put up before the gate of the monastery was a protecting symbol of the great Christian religion, and that in some manner its effect on Major Dillard had produced the result which followed. The viceroys began to inquire of me why the cross was a sacred symbol in our religion?"

"I explained it to him; that Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of the Christians, had been crucified on a tree, and that this cross was symbolical of that crucifixion—of that vicarious atonement for the sins of the world. He did not understand; but he understood its physical essentials; that the God of the Christians had been crucified on a tree, and that this concrete representation was, therefore, sacred, as the images of Buddha in his eternal calm, with the lotus flower in his hand; that the cross meant to all western religions what the image of Buddha meant to Asia. He understood crucifixion. It was a torture of death known to the Chinese, but reserved only for the lowest criminals. He interrogated me minutely upon the details of the crucifixion, and I gave him an accurate picture of it! But in the translation I made use always of the Chinese word for tree. A lack of precision in language which had presently a definite result."

"For a week I remained in the monastery as a guest of the viceroys. I was treated like a prince; and then I was given a present for Major Dillard, and sent on to the American division. I traveled in a chair like an envoy, parallel, but at some distance from the line of march, and I overtook him before he reached Pekin."

"And what was the present?" said Bow Bell. "Twelve asses laden with gold?"

"No," replied the colonel in his weary drawl. "It was not. It was a carving in ivory representing the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth as I had described it, wrapped in a piece of black silk, embroidered with a white cross, not worth a pound and six pence. The carving, a mediocre work of art, might have been worth a hundred dollars in America."

"You will recall that I used the word tree in my description to the viceroys, and this carving represented an ivory tree made of the whole segment of an elephant's tusk. It was about four inches in diameter, and 10 inches high. The base represented the roots of the tree spread out, so that the thing would stand in balance. Broken limbs represented the cross pieces to which the hands of the figure were nailed. The feet were spliced together on the trunk; the head thrown back, and encircled with a crown of thorns, made the entire top of the carving, that is, the top of the tree."

"Well, for heaven's sake," said Bow Bell. "A piece of carved elephant's tusk for a job like that! . . . Did you steal it?"

Colonel Swank went on. "And it was carved in my English letters around the base with a legend, not badly worded for a pagan imitation of the Scriptures: 'Inasmuch as you turned your head to save us, may He turn his head to save you.' . . . No, I didn't steal it. How could I steal it? There was a Chinese runner on each side of the chair. I was never out of sight of them, and they each had a knife. I delivered it to the major."

"Well, he didn't get much for his trouble," said Bow Bell. "It's no good to be good!" His voice descended into a confidential note; he leaned a little toward his companion. "Now, you said you had a notion about this thing at the beginning of your talk. What was that notion, colonel? You said you were going to America. You said you were going to find that crucifix. You said you had a notion about it. What is your notion?" For a moment Colonel Swank did not reply. His hands moved; the long, sharp blade of the knife peeling off ribbons of pine from the piece of soft wood. There was no one in sight on the rear of the deck of the freighter; but at the moment Swank began to speak one of the Chinese crew appeared. The colonel lowered his voice, and what he said passed in a whisper to his companion. Bow Bell looked quickly about the deck. The individual of the Chinese crew had passed behind the leoprous stack of the freighter. Mr. Bow Bell spoke softly and leaned over toward his companion. "You're going to get a lot of ash on your shirt, colonel," he said; and, taking hold of the hand in which his companion held the knife, he brought it up with a firm grasp, and drove the long blade into the man's chest just under the heart.

For a moment the huge body of the man did not move. Then, his eyes widened and his mouth extended in a sort of wonder. "Why, you dirty little beast!" he drawled. "You dirty little beast!" Then his head fell forward, the great, slack body quivered, shuddered and was motionless.

A little later Mr. Bow Bell lifted the apparently opium-drunk body of Colonel Swank to his feet and helped him to the rail of the ship. There the two stood for a moment close together as in confidential talk, until, as the gunnery turner away, the opium-drunk colonel, by some loss of balance, fell forward over the rail into the sea. With a cry Mr. Bow Bell ran forward to report the accident.

It was midnight when Marion Dillard returned to the silent house. The door to the library was open. She turned from the hall into the room; but on the threshold she stopped. The figure of a man leaned over the library table, a cap pulled over his eyes, a dark handkerchief tied around the lower part of his face. He held the massive, carved-ivory crucifix in his hands, and he was intent on some undertaking with it.

The girl took a step forward, and, at the sound, the figure turned, and a weapon flashed in his hand. Immediately the silence in the room was shattered by the explosion of a shot. Marion Dillard imagined that the burglar had fired at her; but, if so, why did the creature come to sway, to put out a convulsive hand, to drop his weapon clattering on the rug, and to crumple in a heap? The voice of the detective whom she had found on guard at the gate as she went out gave the explanation. The man came forward from behind the curtain of a window.

"Bad gunman," he said, "wanted all over the world. I had to kill him." And he indicated the crumpled body of Mr. Bow Bell.

"But what was he doing to that ivory crucifix. It looked like he was trying to twist it."

Marion Dillard went forward and took up the heavy piece of carved ivory. The head, crowned with thorns, had been twisted around until it faced backward. It was loose, and she lifted the head out of the carving. The whole interior of the ivory tree was hollow, and packed with rice powder. Hard pellets were embedded in the rice powder, and when she released them, great oriental pearls appeared—huge, magnificent, a double handful of them, matchless, priceless, worth the ransom of a province.

And at the moment, the clocks sounded above the city, commemorating the hour of the birth of the Savior of the world.

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A Scotch Trader.

This story was told by Lord Leverhulme at a recent dinner. A Scotch trader, who had been visiting around until it faced backward. It was loose, and she lifted the head out of the carving. The whole interior of the ivory tree was hollow, and packed with rice powder. Hard pellets were embedded in the rice powder, and when she released them, great oriental pearls appeared—huge, magnificent, a double handful of them, matchless, priceless, worth the ransom of a province.

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