

# **AN AFFAIR OF HONOR**

F. BRITTEN AUSTIN

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MAJOR BRUCE, G.S.O. (Intelligence), Headquarters Staff of the strategically important Far Eastern base of Menangpore, was suddenly jerked out of the blissful Nirvana of his afternoon siesta to resumption of his temporarily forgotten identity. The telephone bell was ringing. He slid off his couch, in shirt and breeches, and went to the instrument

"Hello! Yes?" He listened. "Oh, hello, Rolfe! What? General wants to see me? Right—o! I'll be along."

A minute or two later, girt once more in the official harness of Sam Browne over white tunic, his pith helmet large over his deep-tanned, efficient-looking features, he emerged from the shutter-darkened cool of his bungalow into the blinding glare of a 4 P.M. sun. He turned along the white road, inadequately shaded between its rows of stiff-fronded palms, which led, beyond the bungalows of the married officers, to Garrison Headquarters. A couple of native soldiers, solemnly stupid with a hose pipe, were getting gloriously wet as they changed its thick dust into mud that dried again behind them before they had moved on a dozen steps.

He frowned. But it was not at the two soldiers that he frowned. Beyond them, at the gate of one of the more distant palm-embosked bungalows, a rickshaw stood in readiness, was at that moment being entered by a lady clad in white from open parasol to shoe-tip. For an instant his pace slackened like that of a man instinctively impelled to turn back on his tracks, then he reaffirmed its briskness.

He and the rickshaw, now in movement, drew near to each other and, although he gazed determinedly in another direction, he had he knew not how a glimpse of her face above the bobbing head of the runner. Another moment, and she was abreast of him, the runner immobile at her prettily authoritative order.

"Frank!"

There was no help for it. Common courtesy exacted that he should stop, bring his hand up to his helmet in salute, school his voice to a polite ordinariness, conjure up some sort of smile.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Fanshaw." His eyes rested unwillingly on her face, its fresh young beauty yet unwilted by this tropic furnace. He felt, awkwardly that he ought to say something more. "Isn't it too early for you to be out?" He kicked himself for the instinctive assumption of authority in his tone. "Better an hour later, you know," he added, in attenuation.

"I'm going to tea with the Padre's wife," she said smiling at him, "and it's shade all the way. But I didn't stop you to explain that I'm not as mad as I look. I've already done that to Dick this afternoon. Frank!" her voice went serious, "come here! I want to talk to you."

He took a step nearer the rickshaw. "Well;"

"I've been waiting for a chance of a word alone with you for three months ever since we came out and you seem to be the one person I never meet except in a crowd."

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"Yes?" he said, with a false innocence. He had seen to it, with a grim thoroughness, that they never should meet except in a crowd. "I've been pretty busy, you know."

Her eyes such dear, honest eyes, they were! caught his for a moment, looked into them.

"Frank!" she said. "I want I've wanted all these three months to to ask you to forgive me. I treated you badly, very badly, I know." She hesitated in the embarrassment of this avowal.

"That's all right," he muttered, looking away from her. "The best man won, I suppose."

She flushed a little, stopped herself he could guess, as his glance came back to her from saying, on a naïve impulse, how much she and Dick were in love with each other. He did not need her to tell him. He had observed it from his distance on the edge of the crowd, with eyes that could translate, self-torturingly acute, every touch and gesture that passed between her and her husband.

She broke the awkwardness of the pause. "We had no idea Dick and I, when we married," she said, "that he would be sent to this station. He expected India."

"It's not your fault," he said, through his teeth. "It's just one of those little tricks that Fate plays upon people."

Her eyes went sympathetic.

"Perhaps Fate knows best," she said. "Frank we've been pals even since I was in short frocks won't you be friends still?"

"Of course," he managed to say, uncomfortably. "Of course."

"You won't bear a grudge? You'll still be the best pal I ever had? Shake hands on it?" Their eyes met, looked into each other's as she stretched out her hand to him. For one moment, as though he measured the gravity of what she asked of him, he looked into the candid beauty of her face, and then he reached up his hand to hers.

"I shake," he said, simply.

"And Dick?" she asked. "You'll be friends with him real friends?"

He nodded. "If he wants me to."

"No. Whether he wants you to or not. For my sake. I can't be happy if I feel that my one bit of home out here is hostile to him. You promise?" She was exercising her old authority over him, the old authority of her charm that two years ago . . . He succumbed.

"All right," he said. "I promise. For your sake."

The sudden radiance of her face was almost full compensation.

"Thank you, Frank. That's all I want. You never broke your word in your life. You've made me so happy."

"I'm glad," he said. "And now," he smiled, "you've kept the general waiting!"

"Explain to him that you've done your day's kind action, and he'll forgive you. He's the dearest old soul, really. But I release you. You've promised and you'll come and see us not in a crowd?"

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"I've promised," he said.

He saluted, and the coolie sped off along the white road with her. For one moment he stood looking after her parasol above the back of the rickshaw, and then he resumed his way. He took a deep chestful of the baking air with incomplete relief, found himself quivering oddly. That first meeting, tête-à-tête, which he had so long dreaded, was over.

He went along the road with his surroundings fading out of reality. He was back in the dusk of an English summer evening, he and she together within the clump of willows that dropped slim lungers to the trout stream up which they had fished all day. He was trembling with the audacity of that utterance which all day he had been trying to phrase to himself with sufficient delicacy of approach, so freshly innocent of even suspecting it she seemed in her boy-like comradeship that utterance which at last had burst from him, surprising him by its spontaneity, its almost brutal directness.

"By God, Nina I'm sorry if I offend you but I love you!"

And she had looked at him, and said nothing until after he had kissed her, caught tight in his arms. And then she had whispered.

Two years ago! He had left her behind pledged to be his wife, a miracle of newly perceived, almost awesome womanhood, intoxicating in her happy beauty, in her incredible reciprocation of his love, that he could scarcely identify with the little girl he had seen grow up in interval to interval of leave from foreign service. He had come back to Menangpore to count off the days, to live through the three years or it might be only two, if she came out to him which he must endure until their marriage, endure with every fibre of his body craving for her, with his whole mind soaked in the thought of her.

They wrote, of course, by every mail until that mail, eight months ago, which had brought the letter which had stunned him, so that since he had never felt himself really and fully alive. She had made a mistake it had been that he had always been such a dear, good old pal she had thought fondness was (she had knocked out that line without finishing it) anyway, it was Major Fanshaw, home on leave from India, whom she was marrying, almost at once. He had seen an account of the ceremony in the Times, a little later. And then, for a supreme and savage irony, the humorously minded gods who whisper in the ears of the clerks of the A.G.'s Department at the War Office had sent Major Richard Fanshaw to join the Headquarters Staff, Menangpore. The same gods, nudging one another, had vetoed Major Francis Bruce's immediate application for a transfer.

Quite apart from this humiliating supersession, he did not greatly like Dick Fanshaw. In fact, no one in the garrison greatly liked him. The newcomer had not the knack of sociability. He was a thin-faced, reserved sort of man, absorbed in his own thoughts, alleged to be studious, efficient at his job, but quite useless on the polo field. It was a mystery beyond Bruce's comprehension how he and Nina had ever become intimate enough for even a proposal of marriage. Yet there was the fact he had seen it with his own eyes they were desperately, absorbedly, in love with each other.

Bah! He put the thing out of his mind. He'd promised Nina to be friendly with Fanshaw, and he'd do his best to be decent to him. If Fanshaw ever wanted a pal, he'd be handy for Nina's sake.

He had arrived at the veranda of the white-painted Garrison Headquarters, and turned on the steps, for a glance at the view from this hilltop, to get another picture in his mind before attending to whatever business it was the general had for him.

Far below him, beyond the palms that framed the view, the deep blue sea stretched away to a heat-misted horizon. In the middle distance, a warship, tiny like a toy, was heading for the harbour. Close in, over the edge of

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the hill and abruptly diminished by the vertical distance, the stone arms of the new dockyard, untidy with cranes and scaffolding, were white upon the blue water. Native workmen swarmed over it like busy ants. He wondered how many spies were still among that horde. He had pulled out half a dozen of them already, for unadvertised and summary court martial gallant little officers, for all their coolie rags, who had smiled inscrutably at the firing party. One could not help admiring them.

Restored to a professional frame of mind, he turned and plunged into the comparative darkness of the building, went along the corridor to the door inscribed "G.O.C." tapped and entered. The general, pipe in mouth, was seated at his big desk, signing busily the papers which Rolfe, erect by his side, was presenting to him. Rolfe looked up at his appearance, nodded amicably, a discreet smile on his big pleasant face good chap, Rolfe, the antithesis of Fanshaw, with a cheery word for everybody, a man who worked hard and played hard, even went the pace a little, despite his weight the most brilliant polo forward in the Garrison but the general, attending to one thing at a time as was his wont, continued to dash off one signature after another without a glance at him. Only when he had finished the last of the papers which Rolfe now gathered into a sheaf and handed over to a waiting orderly did he lift his head, acknowledge Bruce's prompt salute.

"Don't go, Rolfe," he said, as that officer went toward the door with the orderly. "I want you both. Sit down, Bruce."

The orderly closed the door behind him and there was a moment or two of silence as the general leaned back in his chair and refilled his pipe. Bruce contemplated the strong-jawed face with the iron-gray moustache, whose eyes narrowed themselves in a pause of meditation in which he brought his thoughts to a focus while, deliberately, without hurry, he struck a match and surrounded himself with the smoke cloud of the first few preliminary puffs. It was a familiar enough face to him. In his three years of staff captain to General Sanderson's brigade in the old days in France, Bruce had learned to like as well as respect that grimly efficient personality which, though human enough off duty, would, when the occasion demanded, send men to certain death without a qualm yet never without a precisely achieved purpose that justified the sacrifice. Cunning as a fox he could be, too, as Fritz had more than once learned to his cost. The pause was at an end. The general's steel-gray eyes glanced comprehensively at his subordinates.

"Just see there's no one hanging round that door, Rolfe," he said, "and then sit down." His voice was serious.

Rolfe obeyed, went to the door, returned to take a chair at the side of the general's desk opposite to Bruce. They waited for his next words. They came with a quiet deliberation, between puffs at his pipe: "Can either of you imagine how any unauthorized person could have got at Plan C?"

The two men jumped in their chairs.

"Good Lord, sir you don't mean to say " began Rolfe.

Bruce said nothing. He just gasped in the shock. Plan C he had seen it, of course; the general had explained it to Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and him before locking it away Plan C contained the diagrams of the submarine-mine barrages which would protect this most important base in war-time, together with the combination of cross fire from the batteries now being erected. If the potential enemy had got hold of those plans ! Good God! And only Hathaway, Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself had been admitted to the secret of their existence. Hathaway was dead, carried off in half-a-dozen hours by fever. But where was Fanshaw? Surely Fanshaw ought to be here also?

These thoughts, which went through him in a flash, were interrupted by the general's grim, quiet voice.

"That's precisely what I do mean to say. Someone has got at Plan C and, of course, copied it."

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"But are you sure, sir?" said Rolfe, excited and incredulous.

For answer the general got up from his chair, went to the safe behind him, unlocked a heavy steel door with a key chained to his pocket, unlocked yet another door behind that, extracted from an inner drawer, locked by yet another key, a bulky envelope heavily sealed with red wax, brought it forward to them.

"This is a new envelope I sealed the other day," said the general. "Inside is the original." He tore it open, revealed another sealed envelope, ripped along one edge. "I cut it open myself when I found something was wrong. Now, gentlemen, our ingenious spy overlooked one little thing in his haste. Those seals are apparently quite all right. But when I put away that envelope, it had a fine hair tied round it, passing through the centre of the sealing wax. Is there any hair in that seal? There is not. Furthermore, the inner envelope was likewise tied round with a hair, and" he extracted it "you can see for yourselves that that hair has likewise disappeared. And for a final proof" he pulled out several sheets of thin, blue paper, marked with curved masses of little black crosses and long straight lines that radiated from various points along a charted-out coastline, held it up to the light. "Do you see?" Close up to the edge in each corner was a minute pinhole where the sheet had been fastened out flat, presumably to be photographed. "Each sheet has those same little pinholes. I think that is sufficient evidence." He put back the plans in their envelopes, locked them again in the safe, turned to Bruce.

"Well, what have you to say to that?" he asked, with a grim smile.

"It knocks me over, sir," replied Bruce, "and it makes me feel somehow it's my fault. It's up to me to prevent that kind of thing."

"Precisely," agreed the general. "That's why I sent for you. You can't suggest any possible person?"

"No, sir. No one has any key to that safe but you." The general nodded.

"Quite. But someone has got at my keys, somehow a whiff of a drug while I was asleep might have done it these native thieves can get in anywhere and taken an impression of them. There was that fellow you shot trying to break into your bedroom three or four nights ago, Rolfe, you remember?"

"The brute!" said Rolfe. "I just caught him skipping in through the window like a shadow."

"That's the kind of thing," said the general. "But observe! Only Plan C has been interfered with, and an ordinary native thief would certainly have helped himself to the considerable amount of cash which was much more in evidence than were the plans in the inner drawer. It is wildly improbable that any native could have distinguished one document from another, impossible that he should have picked on Plan C, copied it, and sealed it up again with the office seal. Whoever it was that got hold of my keys, he was only a subordinate agent, employed by someone who knew that Plan C was in that safe. And, apart from myself" the general's probing eyes rested on each of them successively "only four men were aware of that fact."

"It couldn't have been Hathaway," murmured Rolfe, screwing up his broad, honest face in cogitation of this problem.

"It could not," said the general. "Hathaway died six weeks ago. One of my little habits is to examine those envelopes every day. That envelope was interfered with just three weeks back."

"Three weeks!" exclaimed Bruce, in surprise.

"Three weeks," repeated the general. "I've been poaching on your preserves, Bruce trying to do a little intelligence work in the meantime."

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He had now seated himself again and relit his pipe, looking at them over the flame of the match. Bruce and Rolfe glanced at each other in uncomfortable embarrassment.

"Don't you think, sir," said Bruce, "that Fanshaw ought to be here too?"

"I did not invite Fanshaw," replied the general, ". . . purposely."

"Good God!" The exclamation broke from Bruce in spontaneous horror. "Surely, sir you don't think . . . ?"

"Why . . . it might just as likely be either of us!" said Rolfe.

The general carefully put down his match in the ash tray.

"It might," he said, "and I confess that I gave some thought to that possibility. I went so far as to subsidize a burglar myself for all three of you—a burglar that you didn't shoot, Rolfe." He smiled at him. "I was curious to know whether any of you had been doing any photography lately—and I took steps to find out within twenty-four hours of that envelope being tampered with. Your camera, Rolfe, I find, has a broken shutter and a thick layer of dust inside—you have evidently given up the hobby. Yours, Bruce, happened to be charged with a half-used spool. I developed those films and find they represent the Gymkhana which took place a couple of weeks before."

"That's where that spool went, then!" exclaimed Bruce, suddenly illuminated.

The general went on quietly: "Fanshaw's camera, on the other hand, a very excellent half-plate Zeiss, had no films in it. But it happened to have its focus adjustment left at three feet and closed up in the folds of the bellows was a certain amount of gray dust which, having once done a little photography myself, I recognized as magnesium ash."

"Good Lord!" said Bruce.

"I kept the camera and the ash as circumstantial evidence, if necessary," continued the general, "and, funnily enough, Fanshaw thought fit to complain to me next day that someone had pinched his apparatus. Only he put the date of its disappearance as the day prior to that on which Plan C was tampered with. Since, however, my very excellent burglar found the camera in his room forty hours after Fanshaw alleged that he had missed it, I'm afraid the alibi won't wash."

"But surely, sir," objected Rolfe, "all this—even if it does look fishy—is very flimsy evidence!"

"Very," agreed the general, imperturbably. "But it happens to be reinforced. How much do you think Plan C is worth to—we won't specify the country?"

"They'd pay anything for it," said Bruce. "Twenty thousand pounds or more."

"Precisely. Or more. Now, Fanshaw was a poor man? I happen to know that he got into debt in India. I cannot discover that he has since come into any inheritance. Would his wife have had any money, Bruce?"

"Sir!"

"This is no time for fine feelings!" The old man crushed him with his sudden, formidable severity. "I know perfectly well that you were engaged to the lady. Did she have any money?"



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"No, sir."

"Very well. I have been doing a good deal of private cipher work over the cables these last three weeks and three days ago the sum of thirty-five thousand pounds was paid in London by bankers' draft from the Asiatic Bank to the London and North-Western Bank for the credit of a new account opened in favour of a certain John Smith by telegraphic instruction from Menangpore."

"Phew!" ejaculated Rolfe, mopping his brow. "Looks ugly!"

"But, sir," said Bruce, "how do you know that this John Smith is No, I can't say I like him, but I can't imagine Fanshaw doing it!"

For answer, the general unlocked the drawer at which he sat, produced a telegraph form.

"This is the original, handed in at the cable company's office four days back," he said.

"London North-Western Bank London please open account with draft Asiatic Bank thirty-five thousand letter follows John Smith Menangpore."

"This was handed in by a native who has not yet been traced. But note! the message is typewritten and gummed on to the telegraph form and it is written on a Yöst machine. There is only one Yöst machine in this garrison, and that happens to be in Fanshaw's office the one he reserves for his own use. It is true, there are probably other Yösts in Menangpore, but no two machines, even of the same make, write precisely alike. I have personally copied this message again on Fanshaw's machine here it is." He laid a typewritten slip of paper side by side with the cablegram before them; one looked like a carbon copy of the other. "You see they are identical, the same weak n and p, the same worn c, the same f out of alignment."

"There is no doubt about it," said Bruce, handing them back after careful scrutiny, "but, sir this is awful!"

"And the letter that follows," inquired Rolfe, "have you got that, sir?"

"That was stopped in the post last night," replied the general, taking another sheet of paper from his drawer. "Here it is. It doesn't tell us much. It merely confirms the cablegram, gives the specimen of the signature 'John Smith,' and orders the money to be held on deposit pending further instructions. It is typed on the same machine and addressed from the European Club."

"That doesn't mean much," said Bruce. "Everyone goes there. I was there myself yesterday."

"So was I," said Rolfe.

"So was Fanshaw," added the general. He leaned back in his chair, contemplated them grimly. "Well?"

"I don't know what to say, sir," said Bruce. "It is too terrible!"

Rolfe mopped his broad, honest face in evident distress.

"I suppose it means a court martial, sir?" he said.

The general smiled with the faintest twist of his lips.

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"My dear Rolfe," he said, "you are sometimes an amazingly simple person. There is no doubt at all that our friend the possible enemy is already in possession of Plan C. Whatever happens, he mustn't be allowed to guess that we know he knows it. Plan C is actually already ipso facto obsolete. He must think it is still our real war plan and we in blissful ignorance of his stolen knowledge. A court martial would give him the hint you can't keep secrecy over things like that. No. A court martial is out of the question."

"Then nothing is to be done, sir?" queried Rolfe.

"Oh, yes," said the general, quietly. "We're certainly going to do something. We can't let people play games of this sort with impunity."

"What do you propose, then, sir?" asked Bruce.

The general kept them in suspense for a moment while he relit his pipe. Then he leaned forward, the match alight between his fingers.

"You and Rolfe are going to pay a little friendly call on Fanshaw this afternoon," he said, significantly. He held up the match before them, caught their eyes, blew out the flame. "Traitors sometimes commit suicide in a fit of remorse and leave a signed confession," he added, in grim elucidation.

Bruce jumped to his feet, found himself trembling violently.

"Sir I can't do it!"

The general turned on him that gaze which he knew how to make suddenly terrible.

"What do you mean?" he asked, sternly.

Bruce felt himself like an audacious schoolboy under those insupportable eyes. But he nerved himself to confront them.

"Sir I beg of you choose someone else! It puts me in an impossible a terrible position!"

The general's voice came at him like a clap of thunder.

"Major Bruce! Since when have you learned to disobey my orders?"

It was the same voice, the same inexorably hard face, aflame with eyes whose sudden blaze of authority annihilated opposition, with which Bruce found it recalled to him by an odd trick of memory at Devil's Wood he had ordered forward the remnant of his brigade to certain death over corpses already three deep. When General Sanderson commanded, men obeyed without question. Bruce had obeyed then, forgetting the shrinking of his flesh in the storm of shells. He surrendered now, wretchedly, long habit of discipline asserting itself.

Wordlessly, eyes fixed on his, the general accepted his submission. He turned to Rolfe.

"Have you any objection to make, Major Rolfe?" he asked, harshly.

Rolfe stood twisting his handkerchief in his hands, his broad, honest face deathly white, perspiration pearly on his brow.

"No no, sir," he stammered.

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The general's face cleared to an expression that was more kindly. He turned to Bruce.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you, Bruce, but it can't be helped. In the first place, it's your job as Intelligence Officer. In the second, only you, Rolfe, and Fanshaw know anything of this business. We can't admit any more to it. Also, you understand, this is unofficial—an affair of honour, between officers and gentlemen. I send Major Fanshaw two of his own rank. I shall expect your report in half an hour. And, remember, a written and signed confession."

Bruce heard him as though he were in a dream. His mind held only one clearly definite thought: Nina! Nina! It hammered in him with every beat of the blood through his suddenly fevered brain. What would Nina think—Nina whom he had just promised—Nina whose happiness he was going brutally to annihilate? Nina! It made him feel sick. He could almost have wished that it were he himself guilty of this unspeakably loathly crime rather than that it should be Nina's husband. Nina's husband! Nina's husband! God! Nina's husband whom she adored!

It was automatically, as in a dream, that he saluted the general and, with Rolfe, went out of the office; in an unreal dream that he found himself walking across the parade ground, in the blinding glare of the sun, toward Fanshaw's bungalow. Nina! Nina's husband! He would rather have walked to execution than to the mission on which he was bound.

"Ruddy business, isn't it?" said Rolfe, thickly.

Bruce glanced at his comrade. The broad, normally cheery face was deathly white, beaded with damp. Good old Rolfe! He hated it, too. He was suddenly grateful for his companionship. Rolfe's thorough and well-known decency somehow sanctioned their errand. In his straightforward sense of duty, he had not jibbed at the general's order. It was true that Nina—Nina meant nothing to him, of course.

They were within a dozen yards of Fanshaw's bungalow when Rolfe turned to him.

"Oughtn't we to get our revolvers first?" he suggested.

"No." He could not trust his voice to more than curtness. "Unnecessary."

On the step of the veranda Rolfe clutched his arm, spoke again.

"You—you do the talking," he said. "It's your job. I'll back you up."

He nodded in mute acquiescence, summed all his will to steady the thumping of his heart, to find a voice to talk with.

Bruce pushed aside a mat curtain, saw Fanshaw busy writing at his table. He glanced up at them with his lantern-jawed, tight-lipped, worried-looking face as they came within the threshold.

"Hello, you fellows!" he said, rather ungraciously. "Paying visits? My wife's out—but you'll find the siphon over there." He jerked his pen toward the sideboard while his eyes went down again to the letter he was writing. "Help yourselves."

To Bruce's surprise, he found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw—"

Fanshaw looked up again irritably from the half-written word.

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"Yes?" And then he saw the ghastliness of their faces. "Why what's wrong?" His tone changed sharply to startled concern. "What in the world's the matter? You look perfectly awful, both of you."

Again Bruce found that he could speak.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we've come to talk to you? Rolfe and I. D'you mind if we sit down?" He felt that he must sit or fall.

Fanshaw stared at them.

"You'll find chairs there," he said, shortly. "What is it?"

They seated themselves, confronting him over his writing table. Bruce glanced up to the wall behind Fanshaw where a revolver holster was hanging from a peg.

"D'you mind " he asked, awkwardly, "d'you mind letting me have your revolver, Fanshaw?"

Fanshaw stared at them, puzzled, and then rose, took the revolver holster from the wall, threw it upon the table rather peevishly. Bruce picked it up.

"Now, then, what's the trouble?" queried Fanshaw as he sat down again. "What do you want my revolver for? I can see by your faces that something is wrong."

Bruce dandled the heavy holster.

"Fanshaw," he said, "we Rolfe and I have come on a pretty rotten job. Plan C has been got at and copied."

Fanshaw frowned at him in incredulity. "Plan C?" he echoed. "Good God!"

"Pretty loathsome, isn't it?" said Bruce, between his teeth. He was beginning to hate that thin-faced traitor in front of him a quite unsuspected fount of deep-drawn instinctive hatred surged up in him he would dare to try and bluff them, would he? If only he weren't Nina's husband! "Pretty loathsome, Fanshaw," he repeated with grim directness.

Fanshaw put up an amazingly good show of bewilderment almost impressive, had it not been for the general's coldly logical, step-by-step demonstration.

"Good God! But the general slept with the keys fastened round his neck he told me so himself!"

Bruce looked him in the eyes, tried to look into the soul of him.

"We don't want to go into that," he said. "We know all about it. The general has sent us, Rolfe and me, to settle the matter without a public scandal."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Fanshaw looked from one to the other of them, his face a study in lack of comprehension.

"You know perfectly well!" said Bruce. "The game's up, Fanshaw. There's no use bluffing. You're caught out. We've got the evidence."

Fanshaw stared at them.

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"You've got the evidence?" he said, slowly, in a tone that seemed to try to make it real to himself. "What evidence?"

"More than enough for a court martial to shoot you half-a-dozen times over," replied Bruce, succinctly. "Fanshaw, this is a rotten business. It makes me sick to have to do it. But for the honour of the army for the sake of your own family we don't want a scandal. We give you an easy way out. We want a written and signed confession. I give you my word that no one shall see it but the general no one shall know anything about it and then" he drew the revolver from the holster, laid it upon the table, pushed it toward Fanshaw "we'll leave you with this. You can pretend to have been cleaning it."

Fanshaw stared at the revolver, shrank back from it, looked up again at the two of them, a sudden horror in his eyes.

"You mean ?" he began.

Bruce pushed the weapon a little nearer to him.

"Precisely what I say, Fanshaw," he said, his words distinct despite the dryness of his mouth. "And no one not even Nina shall ever guess." He had used her Christian name unconsciously. "The episode will be buried with you."

Fanshaw knocked away the revolver, jumped to his feet.

"You must be mad both of you!" he cried. "Utterly mad! I'm going to see the general at once!" He took a step toward the door.

Bruce placed himself in front of him.

"I'm sorry, Fanshaw. But it can't be allowed. The general sent us to you. He gave us half an hour in which to bring back your written confession." He glanced at his wrist watch. "Ten minutes of it have gone. You've made a bad break, Fanshaw but own up, and play out the only decent game open to you. You ought to be grateful for the chance." With a strong arm he thrust him back toward the table.

Fanshaw stood looking at them, trembling suddenly, his face as white as theirs.

"Either you are both mad!" he cried, "or this is an infernal conspiracy to murder me!" He looked into Bruce's eyes with an insulting suspicion. "I can imagine that one of you has a motive," he said, deliberately, "though I should not have thought it of you."

Bruce winced as though he had been slashed across the face.

"Leave that out, Fanshaw," he said. "For just that reason I'd rather be dead than here. I'm obeying orders don't make it harder for me. Will you write out that confession?"

"Of course not! I know nothing about it. If any one has any charges to bring against me, let them be brought forward in a proper manner and I'll deal with them." He wrapped himself in his dignity as an officer, spoke with curt contempt.

Rolfe intervened for the first time in this colloquy.

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"Fanshaw," he said, thickly. "You know that means a court martial and I wouldn't give tuppence for your chance."

Fanshaw swung round on him.

"Look here, I've had enough of this! Clear out both of you! And I'll trouble you, both of you, to meet me in front of the general!"

Rolfe shrugged his big shoulders, looked at Bruce.

"Well," he said, "I suppose if Fanshaw insists on a court martial, we're helpless. We can't compel him to write a confession. The only thing is to report it. We've done our best and, for my part, Fanshaw, I'm glad of an excuse to be out of a very unpleasant business. Come along, Bruce!"

He took a step toward the door, was checked by Bruce's restraining arm.

"No," said Bruce, his teeth clenched. "We're going to stay here until we've done our job and there's not going to be any public scandal in this business. Fanshaw!" he looked him in the eyes "for the sake of all that was ever sacred to you in the world for the sake of your old school the army for your wife's sake! play the man and own up decently. You haven't the ghost of a chance before a court martial, and, though they might not shoot you, the disgrace would be worse than death for you and" his voice choked "for Nina."

Fanshaw's look at him was an insult.

"Major Bruce," he said, "I shall be obliged if you will refer to my wife as Mrs. Fanshaw."

The three men jumped at a bright, girlish voice from the other side of the mat curtain. "Dick darling! I'm back! I've escaped!" There was a happy little laugh as the mat curtain was pulled back and Nina stood on the threshold. Her fresh young face lit up in pleasant surprise as she saw Bruce. "Why, Frank! how nice of you to come so soon!" she exclaimed, coming toward him and stretching out her hand.

Bruce had one glance at her, and something seemed to smite him sharply, viciously, inside him. He turned away his head, omitted to notice her proffered hand. He got his voice somehow.

"Fanshaw," he said, "will you please ask your wife to leave us? This this is an official matter."

She came nearer, perceived Rolfe, who had turned to stare at a print upon the wall, and now nodded awkwardly to her. Her eyes went round the three men.

"Why what is wrong?" she cried. "What has happened? You look ghastly, all of you!"

There was a silence.

"Frank! What is the matter? What have you and Major Rolfe come about?" He did not reply, avoided her eyes. "Dick!" She clutched his arm. "Tell me!"

Fanshaw shrugged his shoulders, smiled unpleasantly at Bruce.

"My dear," he replied, "apparently some important secret plans have been stolen, and it seems that in some way or other it has been made to look as though I had done it. Consequently, Major Bruce and Major Rolfe have come here with the amiable proposal that I write out a confession and then commit suicide." Bruce set his teeth, stifling

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a groan. The cad! Not to keep it from Nina! Fanshaw went on: "Alternatively, I shall be condemned by a court martial."

She swung round upon Bruce in a flame of indignation.

"Oh!" she cried. "And you can believe this? You could come here to to " She made a gesture of horror. "You of all people !"

He met her eyes and wished that he were dead.

"I couldn't help myself," he managed to say. "I tried not to have to do it. It was an order from the general to both of us."

"But you believed it! You believed this of Dick! You you who promised me to be his friend you did not tell the general that it was utterly impossible you did not stand up for him you you believed it!" Her contemptuous indignation scorched him.

"I'd have given all I know not to not to have had to believe it," he said, desperately, "but but "

"But what?"

"If I must the evidence is too convincing!" He cursed himself for saying so much, even as the words were uttered.

"And what is this evidence?"

Bruce turned from her to Fanshaw.

"For God's sake, Fanshaw I can't stand any more of this either ask you wife to withdraw or" he gestured abandonment to disaster "we must let matters take their official course."

Fanshaw was the least perturbed person in the room.

"I should like to hear your precious evidence myself," he said, with an unpleasant curtness of tone. "Tell her!"

Bruce looked again at the woman whose happiness was the one thing in the world that mattered to him.

"I insist!" she said. "And I have a right to insist!"

He surrendered to the look of proud authority in her pale face. "I'd infinitely rather not," he said, "but since so much has been said already " He flashed a glance of scorn at Fanshaw. His face haggard with the long-continued strain, but with a succinct clarity, he told her of the tampering with the secret plan, known to Fanshaw, Rolfe, and himself alone; of the finding of Fanshaw's camera, with the focus set to three feet and flashlight ash still upon the bellows, within twenty-four hours after the plan had been copied and forty hours after Fanshaw had said he had lost it.

"But someone might have stolen Dick's camera, used it and put it back!" she exclaimed.

"They might," he agreed, "but that's not all." He went on to tell her of the banker's draft for thirty-five thousand pounds paid by the Asiatic Bank to the credit of a new account opened in an assumed name by cable from Menangpore and confirmed by letter. "And," he concluded, through his set teeth, "both cablegram and letter were

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typed on your husband's Yöst machine which he uses personally."

"Good God!" ejaculated Fanshaw, mopping his face with his handkerchief.

She had listened intently. "And is that all your evidence?" she asked.

"It's damnably convincing, Mrs. Fanshaw though I hate to say it. The man who got at that plan must have been either your husband, Rolfe, or myself. You can't imagine us coming on a job like this if either of us did it. And all the evidence piles up against " He broke off abruptly, with a gesture toward Fanshaw. "The whole thing's too ghastly," he finished.

Fanshaw was about to say something when his wife checked him. Her brow was wrinkled with a sudden thought.

"Wait a moment," she said. "What was the name of the bank in London and what name was on the cablegram?"

"The cable was sent by someone signing himself John Smith to the London and North-Western Bank."

"John Smith?" She gave a little cry of triumph. "And who handed in that cablegram?"

"A native who has not yet been traced."

"Then perhaps I can throw some light on it. Four days ago, after dark, when I was sitting on the veranda, a native came wandering up the road and asked me, in broken English, if I had seen a certain officer. I could not understand him very well at first, and as he had a piece of paper in his hand I made him show it to me thinking that it would give the name. That piece of paper was the receipt from the cable company for a cablegram sent to the London and North-Western Bank by John Smith. I didn't know the name, and I asked him if he was sure it was 'Smith' he wanted. He said: 'No no Major Sahib Roff Major Sahib Roff!' And I sent him along to Major Rolfe's bungalow!"

"That's a lie!" Rolfe burst out, furiously, "A stupid lie!"

"Steady, Rolfe!" said Bruce. "You forget you are speaking to a lady."

"She'd tell any yarn, of course, to save her husband and it is a lie!" Rolfe reiterated.

"That same evening," she went on, coldly ignoring the interruption, "we heard that Major Rolfe had shot a native who was trying to burgle his house."

"That's true enough," exclaimed Rolfe. "I just caught the brute as he was clambering through the window. But the other is sheer imagination. Look here, Bruce, I'm not going to stay here while Mrs. Fanshaw invents red herrings to draw across the trail. She can tell that story to the court martial. I'm going back to the general to report that Fanshaw refuses to sign a confession. Come along!" He took a step toward the door.

"No!" cried Mrs. Fanshaw. She stepped in front of him with a quick movement, blocking the doorway. "You will please wait a little, Major Rolfe!" she said, and then turned to Bruce. "Frank! Supposing I only ask you to suppose that Major Rolfe was the one of you three who sent that cablegram, and that he still has the receipt in his pocket is it safe to let him go out of here and perhaps destroy it? It might be the one piece of evidence that could save Dick."

"Nonsense!" said Rolfe, angrily. "It is a monstrous suggestion! Please let me pass, Mrs. Fanshaw!"



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She ignored him, looked at Bruce.

"Frank! I want you to search Major Rolfe before he leaves this room."

Fanshaw interposed.

"My dear, whatever you think one can't do things like that. You can't expect Bruce to insult a brother officer on your mere supposition. But" he glanced sharply at Rolfe "in view of what you have said, we will all accompany him to the general."

She turned to her husband.

"Dick," she said, "you are under suspicion, and anything you say or do may harm you. Leave this to me." She looked again at Bruce. "Frank! Please do as I say!"

Bruce hesitated, glanced at Rolfe who was red with indignation, his hands working irritably, as he stood unable to pass Mrs. Fanshaw without sheer violence to her. It was impossible fantastic! No man could have come on such an errand if he were himself guilty. He despised himself for even momentarily admitting the suspicion.

"But, Mrs. Fanshaw, what you ask of me is outrageous. Rolfe and I have been friends for years. It is unthinkable that he should have done it. You must have been mistaken about that native."

"I am not mistaken," she replied, doggedly. "Frank things have been made to look black for Dick. He needs a pal badly. To-day you gave me your word. Are you going to break it?" Her eyes challenged all he had ever felt for her.

He took a long breath, looked at Rolfe cheery, thoroughly decent Rolfe, who now stood outraged by this diabolical supposition. All the long years of their intimacy rose up in protest. Insult him for that man he had no doubt was guilty, that man he had to keep himself from hating Nina's husband? Nina's husband! Yes just because of that! There was just one faint, improbable chance. He had to have it. He turned to Fanshaw.

"Fanshaw, before I insult Rolfe, I ask you before God whether you sold that plan?"

"Before God," replied Fanshaw, with sober emphasis, "I did not."

Bruce twisted himself round to Rolfe.

"Rolfe," he said, "I hate to even seem to suspect you of such a horrible thing, but I must ask you to let me go through your pockets."

"Certainly not!" said Rolfe, indignantly. "I have just as much right to search you! Mrs. Fanshaw can make her absurd accusation before the court martial and the court will decide whether Major Fanshaw is guilty or not. But I'm certainly not going to submit to the indignity of letting you go through my private papers without any authorization whatever!" His broad face was livid with anger.

Bruce placed himself in front of Mrs. Fanshaw, blocking the doorway. For the first time, a real suspicion shot up in him.

"Rolfe," he said, steadily, "I am certainly going to search you even if I knock you down for it."

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"You'd better try!" replied Rolfe, in furious scorn. "I'm going straight to the general and I advise you to stand away from that door!"

Bruce smiled. The next moment Rolfe had rushed at him, and, rushing, met a straight left from the shoulder. He went with a crash to the floor.

Before he could stir, Bruce was on top of him, one hand on his throat, the other going through the pockets of his tunic. He extracted a letter wallet, held it out to Mrs. Fanshaw. She took it, went to the window, examined it, uttered a sharp little cry.

"Here it is!"

Bruce got to his feet, reached for the revolver on the table, held Rolfe covered.

"What is it?" he asked. "Here, Fanshaw, take the gun and see he doesn't rush."

He went to the window, took the two pieces of paper Mrs. Fanshaw handed to him. One was the receipt from the cable company; the other was covered with evidently practice signatures of "John Smith." He turned to Rolfe, who had also scrambled to his feet and stood sullenly scared and silent under the menace of Fanshaw's weapon.

"Have you got anything to say?"

An ugly word was the only answer.

Bruce addressed himself to Mrs. Fanshaw.

"Mrs. Fanshaw," he said, with a quietly grim politeness, "will you now please leave us. You have played your part. Dick and I will do the rest."

She went straight out of the room. The three men, left alone, stood looking at one another in a pause of silence. It was Bruce who broke it.

"Rolfe," he said, curtly, "I once had the honour of serving under your father. He was a gallant gentleman. For his sake, I give you the chance the general sent us to give Fanshaw." He pointed to the table. "Sit down and write! And afterward Fanshaw and I will see you as far as your bungalow."

Rolfe stood staring at him, a little foam upon the lips of his broad white face. For a moment he looked into Bruce's eyes, measured the inexorability of that decision, and then, slowly, unsteadily, he walked toward the writing table.

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The general was still at his desk, leaning back in his chair, blowing meditative smoke rings toward the ceiling, when Bruce entered, saluted.

"And Rolfe?" he asked, as his eyes came down to Bruce's solitary figure.

Bruce stepped forward, handed him a written sheet of notepaper, pointed shakily to the signature at the bottom.

"Here, sir," he said, in a voice that lacked steadiness for all his effort at self-command.

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The general contemplated it, shifted his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, bit upon the stem.

"H'm!" he said. "And afterwards?" He looked up at him.

Bruce blew out an imaginary match.

The general nodded. Methodically, he folded up the paper, put it in an envelope, sealed it, and locked it up in his drawer. Then he smiled grimly.

"A bad hat," he said. "I was pretty sure he was the man, but everything pointed to Fanshaw. Rolfe's frontal defense was as good as impregnable. And we learnt in France, I think, not to make frontal attacks on impregnable defenses. There's nearly always a way round."

Bruce stared at him. "Then you guessed, sir?"

The general shrugged his shoulders. "It was one of the two. I knew Fanshaw wouldn't sign if he were innocent, and I sent you to see fair play. The art of war, my dear Bruce, is the art of producing sudden crises and taking measures to profit by them. You can never foresee exactly how you'll do it, but you nearly always get what you want if you put the right man on the job. In the very special circumstances" he smiled significantly "I knew you were the right man."