

***EARL DERR
BIGGERS***



***THE CHINESE
PARROT***

Earl Derr Biggers

The Chinese Parrot

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE PHILLIMORE PEARLS

CHAPTER II

THE DETECTIVE FROM HAWAII

CHAPTER III

AT CHAN KEE LIM'S

CHAPTER IV

THE OASIS SPECIAL

Will Holley.

CHAPTER V

MADDEN'S RANCH

CHAPTER VI

TONY'S HAPPY NEW YEAR

CHAPTER VII

THE POSTMAN SETS OUT

CHAPTER VIII

A FRIENDLY LITTLE GAME

CHAPTER IX

A RIDE IN THE DARK

CHAPTER X

BLISS OF THE HOMICIDE SQUAD

CHAPTER XI

THORN GOES ON A MISSION

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAM-CAR IN THE DESERT

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT MR CHERRY SAW

CHAPTER XIV

THE THIRD MAN

CHAPTER XV

WILL HOLLEY'S THEORY

CHAPTER XVI

THE MOVIES ARE IN TOWN

CHAPTER XVII

IN MADDEN'S FOOTSTEPS

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BARSTOW TRAIN

CHAPTER XIX

THE VOICE ON THE AIR

CHAPTER XX

PETTICOAT MINE

CHAPTER XXI

END OF THE POSTMAN'S JOURNEY

CHAPTER XXII

THE ROAD TO ELDORADO

CHAPTER I

[Table of Contents](#)

THE PHILLIMORE PEARLS

[Table of Contents](#)

ALEXANDER EDEN stepped from the misty street into the great marble-pillared room where the firm of Meek and Eden offered its wares. Immediately, behind showcases gorgeous with precious stones or bright with silver, platinum, and gold, forty resplendent clerks stood at attention. Their morning coats were impeccable, lacking the slightest suspicion of a wrinkle, and in the left lapel of each was a pink carnation, as fresh and perfect as though it had grown there.

Eden nodded affably to right and left and went on his way, his heels clicking cheerily on the spotless tile floor. He was a small man, grey-haired and immaculate, with a quick, keen eye and the imperious manner that so well became his position. For the clan of Meek, having duly inherited the earth, had relinquished that inheritance and passed to the great beyond, leaving Alexander Eden the sole owner of the best-known jewellery store west of the Rockies.

Arriving at the rear of the shop, he ascended a brief stairway to the luxurious suite of offices on the mezzanine floor where he spent his days. In the anteroom of the suite he encountered his secretary.

“Ah, good morning, Miss Chase,” he said.

The girl answered with a smile. Eden’s eye for beauty, developed by long experience in the jewel trade, had not

failed him when he picked Miss Chase. She was an ash blonde with violet eyes; her manners were exquisite; so was her gown. Bob Eden, reluctant heir to the business, had been heard to remark that entering his father's office was like arriving for tea in a very exclusive drawing-room.

Alexander Eden glanced at his watch. "In about ten minutes," he announced, "I expect a caller—an old friend of mine—Madame Jordan, of Honolulu. When she arrives show her in at once."

"Yes, Mr Eden," replied the girl.

He passed on into his own room, where he hung up his hat, coat, and stick. On his broad, gleaming desk lay the morning mail; he glanced at it idly, but his mind was elsewhere. In a moment he strolled to one of the windows and stood there gazing at the *façade* of the building across the way.

The day was not far advanced, and the fog that had blanketed San Francisco the night before still lingered in the streets. Staring into that dull grey mist, Eden saw a picture, a picture that was incongruously all colour and light and life. His thoughts had travelled back down the long corridor of the years, and in that imagined scene outside the window he himself moved, a slim, dark boy of seventeen.

Forty years ago—a night in Honolulu, the gay, happy Honolulu of the monarchy. Behind a bank of ferns in one corner of the great Phillimore living-room Berger's band was playing, and over the polished floor young Alec Eden and Sally Phillimore danced together. The boy stumbled now and then, for the dance was a newfangled one called the two-step, lately introduced into Hawaii by a young ensign from

the *Nipsic*. But perhaps it was not entirely his unfamiliarity with the two-step that muddled him, for he knew that in his arms he held the darling of the islands.

Some few are favoured by fortune out of all reason, and Sally Phillimore was one of these. Above and beyond her beauty, which would have been sufficient in itself, she seemed, in that simple Honolulu society, the heiress of all the ages. The Phillimore fortunes were at their peak, Phillimore ships sailed the seven seas, on thousands of Phillimore acres the sugar-cane ripened toward a sweet, golden harvest. Looking down, Alec Eden saw hanging about the girl's white throat, a symbol of her place and wealth, the famous pearl necklace Marc Phillimore had brought home from London, and for which he had paid a price that made all Honolulu gasp.

Eden, of Meek and Eden, continued to stare into the fog. It was pleasant to relive that night in Hawaii, a night filled with magic and the scent of exotic blossoms, to hear again the giddy laughter, the distant murmur of the surf, the soft croon of island music. Dimly he recalled Sally's blue eyes shining up at him. More vividly—for he was nearly sixty now, and a business man—he saw again the big lustrous pearls that lay on her breast, reflecting the light with a warm glow....

Oh, well—he shrugged his shoulders. All that was forty years ago, and much had happened since. Sally's marriage to Fred Jordan, for example, and then, a few years later, the birth of her only child, Victor. Eden smiled grimly. How ill-advised she had been when she named that foolish, wayward boy!

He went over to his desk and sat down. No doubt it was some escapade of Victor, he reflected, that was responsible for the scene shortly to be enacted here in this office in Post Street. Yes, of course, that was it. Victor, lurking in the wings, was about to ring down the final curtain on the drama of the Phillimore pearls.

He was deep in his mail when, a few moments later, his secretary opened the door and announced: "Madame Jordan is calling."

Eden rose. Sally Jordan was coming toward him over the Chinese rug. Gay and sprightly as ever—how valiantly she had battled with the years! "Alec—my dear old friend—"

He took both her fragile hands in his. "Sally! I'm mighty glad to see you. Here." He drew a big leather chair close to his desk. "The post of honour for you. Always."

Smiling, she sat down. Eden went to his accustomed place behind his desk. He took up a paper-knife and balanced it; for a man of his poise he appeared rather ill at ease. "Ah—er—how long have you been in town?"

"Two weeks—I think—yes, two weeks last Monday."

"You're not living up to your promise, Sally. You didn't let me know."

"But I've had such a gay round," she protested. "Victor is always so good to me."

"Ah, yes—Victor—he's well, I hope." Eden looked away, out the window. "Fog's lifting, isn't it? A fine day, after all —"

"Dear old Alec." She shook her head. "No good beating round the bush. Never did believe in it. Get down to business—that's my motto. It's as I told you the other day

over the telephone. I've made up my mind to sell the Phillimore pearls."

He nodded. "And why not? What good are they, anyhow?"

"No, no," she objected. "It's perfectly true—they're no good to me. I'm a great believer in what's fitting—and those gorgeous pearls were meant for youth. However, that's not the reason I'm selling. I'd hang on to them if I could. But I can't. I—I'm broke, Alec."

He looked out the window again.

"Sounds absurd, doesn't it?" she went on. "All the Phillimore ships—the Phillimore acres—vanished into thin air. The big house on the beach—mortgaged to the hilt. You see—Victor—he's made some unfortunate investments——"

"I see," said Eden softly.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, Alec. Victor's a bad, bad boy. Foolish and careless and—worse, perhaps. But he's all I've got, since Fred went. And I'm sticking by him."

"Like the good sport you are," he smiled. "No, I wasn't thinking unkindly of Victor, Sally. I—I have a son myself."

"Forgive me," she said. "I should have asked before. How's Bob?"

"Why, he's all right, I guess. He may come in before you leave—if he happens to have had an early breakfast."

"Is he with you in the business?"

Eden shrugged. "Not precisely. Bob's been out of college three years now. One of those years was spent in the South Seas, another in Europe, and the third—from what I can gather—in the card-room of his club. However, his career does seem to be worrying him a bit. The last I heard he was

thinking of the newspaper game. He has friends on the papers.” The jeweller waved his hand about the office. “This sort of thing, Sally—this thing I’ve given my life to—it’s a great bore to Bob.”

“Poor Alec,” said Sally Jordan softly. “The new generation is so hard to understand. But—it’s my own troubles I came to talk about. Broke, as I told you. Those pearls are all I have in the world.”

“Well—they’re a good deal,” Eden told her.

“Enough to help Victor out of the hole he’s in. Enough for the few years left me, perhaps. Father paid ninety thousand for them. It was a fortune at that time—but to-day——”

“To-day,” Eden repeated. “You don’t seem to realize, Sally. Like everything else, pearls have greatly appreciated since the eighties. To-day that string is worth three hundred thousand if it’s worth a cent.”

She gasped. “Why, it can’t be. Are you sure? You’ve never seen the necklace——”

“Ah—I was wondering if you’d remember,” he chided. “I see you don’t. Just before you came in I was thinking back—back to a night forty years ago, when I was visiting my uncle in the Islands. Seventeen—that’s all I was—but I came to your dance, and you taught me the two-step. The pearls were about your throat. One of the memorable nights of my life.”

“And of mine,” she nodded. “I remember now. Father had just brought the necklace from London, and it was the first time I’d worn it. Forty years ago—ah, Alec, let’s hurry back to the present. Memories—sometimes they hurt.” She was silent for a moment. “Three hundred thousand, you say.”

"I don't guarantee I can get that much," he told her. "I said the necklace was worth it. But it isn't always easy to find a buyer who will meet your terms. The man I have in mind——"

"Oh—you've found some one——"

"Well—yes—I have. But he refuses to go above two hundred and twenty thousand. Of course, if you're in a hurry to sell——"

"I am," she answered. "Who is this Midas?"

"Madden," he said. "P. J. Madden."

"Not the big Wall Street man? The Plunger?"

"Yes. You know him?"

"Only through the newspapers. He's famous, of course, but I've never seen him."

Eden frowned. "That's curious," he said. "He appeared to know you. I had heard he was in town, and when you telephoned me the other day I went at once to his hotel. He admitted he was on the look-out for a string as a present for his daughter, but he was pretty cold at first. However, when I mentioned the Phillimore pearls he laughed. 'Sally Phillimore's pearls,' he said. 'I'll take them.' 'Three hundred thousand,' I said. 'Two hundred and twenty and not a penny more,' he answered. And looked at me with those eyes of his—as well try to bargain with this fellow here." He indicated a small bronze Buddha on his desk.

Sally Jordan seemed puzzled. "But Alec—he couldn't know me. I don't understand. However, he's offering a fortune, and I want it badly. Please hurry and close with him before he leaves town."

Again the door opened at the secretary's touch. "Mr Madden, of New York," said the girl.

"Yes," said Eden. "We'll see him at once." He turned to his old friend. "I asked him to come here this morning and meet you. Now take my advice and don't be too eager. We may be able to boost him a bit, though I doubt it. He's a hard man, Sally, a hard man. The newspaper stories about him are only too true."

He broke off suddenly, for the hard man he spoke of stood upon his rug. P. J. himself, the great Madden, the hero of a thousand Wall Street battles, six feet and over and looming like a tower of granite in the grey clothes he always affected. His cold blue eyes swept the room like an Arctic blast.

"Ah, Mr Madden, come in," said Eden, rising. Madden advanced farther into the room, and after him came a tall, languid girl in expensive furs and a lean, precise-looking man in a dark blue suit.

"Madame Jordan, this is Mr Madden, of whom we have just been speaking," Eden said.

"Madame Jordan," repeated Madden, bowing slightly. He had dealt so much in steel that it had got somehow into his voice. "I've brought along my daughter Evelyn, and my secretary, Martin Thorn."

"Charmed, I'm sure," Eden answered. He stood for a moment gazing at this interesting group that had invaded his quiet office—the famous financier, cool, competent, conscious of his power, the slender, haughty girl upon whom, it was reported, Madden lavished all the affection of his later years, the thin, intense secretary, subserviently in

the background, but for some reason not so negligible as he might have been. "Won't you all sit down, please?" the jeweller continued. He arranged chairs. Madden drew his close to the desk; the air seemed charged with his presence; he dwarfed them all.

"No need of any preamble," said the millionaire. "We've come to see those pearls."

Eden started. "My dear sir—I'm afraid I gave you the wrong impression. The pearls are not in San Francisco at present."

Madden stared at him. "But when you told me to come here and meet the owner——"

"I'm so sorry—I meant just that."

Sally Jordan helped him out. "You see, Mr Madden, I had no intention of selling the necklace when I came here from Honolulu. I was moved to that decision by events after I reached here. But I have sent for it——"

The girl spoke. She had thrown back the fur about her neck, and she was beautiful in her way, but cold and hard like her father—and just now, evidently, unutterably bored. "I thought, of course, the pearls were here," she said, "or I should not have come."

"Well, it isn't going to hurt you," her father snapped. "Mrs Jordan, you say you've sent for the necklace?"

"Yes. It will leave Honolulu to-night, if all goes well. It should be here in six days."

"No good," said Madden. "My daughter's starting to-night for Denver. I go South in the morning, and in a week I expect to join her in Eldorado and we'll travel East together. No good, you see."

“I will agree to deliver the necklace anywhere you say,” suggested Eden.

“Yes—I guess you will.” Madden considered. He turned to Madame Jordan. “This is the identical string of pearls you were wearing at the old Palace Hotel in 1889?” he asked.

She looked at him in surprise. “The same string,” she answered.

“And even more beautiful than it was then, I’ll wager,” Eden smiled. “You know, Mr Madden, there is an old superstition in the jewellery trade that pearls assume the personality of their wearer and become sombre or bright, according to the mood of the one they adorn. If that is true, this string has grown more lovely through the years.”

“Bunk,” said Madden rudely. “Oh, excuse me—I don’t mean that the lady isn’t charming. But I have no sympathy with the silly superstitions of your trade—or of any other trade. Well, I’m a busy man. I’ll take the string—at the price I named.”

Eden shook his head. “It’s worth at least three hundred thousand, as I told you.”

“Not to me. Two hundred and twenty—twenty now to bind it and the balance within thirty days after the delivery of the string. Take it or leave it.”

He rose and stared down at the jeweller. Eden was an adept at bargaining, but somehow all his cunning left him as he faced this Gibraltar of a man. He looked helplessly toward his old friend.

“It’s all right, Alec,” Madame Jordan said. “I accept.”

“Very good,” Eden sighed. “But you are getting a great bargain, Mr Madden.”

"I always get a great bargain," replied Madden. "Or I don't buy." He took out his cheque-book. "Twenty thousand now, as I agreed."

For the first time the secretary spoke; his voice was thin and cold and disturbingly polite. "You say the pearls will arrive in six days?"

"Six days or thereabouts," Madame Jordan answered.

"Ah, yes." An ingratiating note crept in. "They are coming by——"

"By a private messenger," said Eden sharply. He was taking a belated survey of Martin Thorn. A pale, high forehead, pale green eyes that now and then stared disconcertingly, long, pale, grasping hands. Not the jolliest sort of playmate to have around, he reflected. "A private messenger," he repeated firmly.

"Of course," said Thorn. Madden had written the cheque and laid it on the jeweller's desk. "I was thinking, chief—just a suggestion," Thorn went on. "If Miss Evelyn is to return and spend the balance of the winter in Pasadena she will want to wear the necklace there. We'll still be in that neighbourhood six days from now, and it seems to me——"

"Who's buying this necklace?" cut in Madden. "I'm not going to have the thing carried back and forth across the country. It's too risky in these days when every other man is a crook."

"But, Father," said the girl, "it's quite true that I'd like to wear it this winter——"

She stopped. P. J. Madden's crimson face had gone purple, and he was tossing his great head. It was a quaint habit he had when opposed, the newspapers said. "The

necklace will be delivered to me in New York," he remarked to Eden, ignoring his daughter and Thorn. "I'll be in the South for some time—got a place in Pasadena and a ranch on the desert, four miles from Eldorado. Haven't been down there for quite a while, and unless you look in on these caretakers occasionally they get slack. As soon as I'm back in New York I'll wire you, and you can deliver the necklace at my office. You'll have my cheque for the balance within thirty days."

"That's perfectly agreeable to me," Eden said. "If you'll wait just a moment I'll have a bill of sale drawn, outlining the terms. Business is business—as you of all men understand."

"Of course," nodded Madden. The jeweller went out.

Evelyn Madden rose. "I'll meet you downstairs, Father. I want to look over their stock of jade." She turned to Madame Jordan. "You know, one finds better jade in San Francisco than anywhere else."

"Yes, indeed," smiled the older woman. She rose and took the girl's hands. "Such a lovely throat, my dear—I was saying just before you came—the Phillimore pearls need youth. Well, they're to have it at last. I hope you will wear them through many happy years."

"Why—why, thank you," said the girl, and went.

Madden glanced at his secretary. "Wait for me in the car," he ordered. Alone with Madame Jordan, he looked at her grimly. "You never saw me before, did you?" he inquired.

"I'm so sorry. Have I?"

"No—I suppose not. But I saw you. Oh, we're well along in years now, and it does no harm to speak of these things. I

want you to know it will be a great satisfaction to me to own that necklace. A deep wound and an old one is healed this morning.”

She stared at him. “I don’t understand.”

“No, of course you don’t. But in the eighties you used to come from the Islands with your family and stop at the Palace Hotel. And I—I was a bell-hop at that same hotel. I often saw you there—I saw you once when you were wearing that famous necklace. I thought you were the most beautiful girl in the world—oh, why not—we’re both—er——”

“We’re both old now,” she said softly.

“Yes—that’s what I mean. I worshipped you, but I—I was a bell-hop—you looked through me—you never saw me. A bit of furniture, that’s all I was to you. Oh, I tell you, it hurt my pride—a deep wound, as I said. I swore I’d get on—I knew it, even then. I’d marry you. We can both smile at that now. It didn’t work out—even some of *my* schemes never worked out. But to-day I own your pearls—they’ll hang about my daughter’s neck. It’s the next best thing. I’ve bought you out. A deep wound in my pride, but healed at last.”

She looked at him, and shook her head. Once she might have resented this, but not now. “You’re a strange man,” she said.

“I am what I am,” he answered. “I had to tell you. Otherwise the triumph would not have been complete.”

Eden came in. “Here you are, Mr Madden. If you’ll sign this—thank you.”

“You’ll get a wire,” said Madden. “In New York, remember, and nowhere else. Good day.” He turned to

Madame Jordan and held out his hand.

She took it, smiling. "Good-bye. I'm not looking through you now. I see you at last."

"And what do you see?"

"A terribly vain man. But a likable one."

"Thank you. I'll remember that. Good-bye."

He left them. Eden sank wearily into a chair. "Well, that's that. He rather wears one out. I wanted to stick for a higher figure, but it looked hopeless. Somehow I knew he always wins."

"Yes," said Madame Jordan, "he always wins."

"By the way, Sally, I didn't want you to tell that secretary who was bringing the pearls. But you'd better tell me."

"Why, of course. Charlie's bringing them."

"Charlie?"

"Detective-Sergeant Chan, of the Honolulu police. Long ago, in the big house on the beach, he was our number one boy."

"Chan. A Chinese?"

"Yes. Charlie left us to join the police force, and he's made a fine record there. He's always wanted to come to the mainland, so I've had it all arranged—his leave of absence, his status as a citizen, everything. And he's coming with the pearls. Where could I have found a better messenger? Why—I'd trust Charlie with my life—no, that isn't very precious any more. I'd trust him with the life of the one I loved dearest in the world."

"He's leaving to-night, you said."

"Yes—on the *President Pierce*. It's due late next Thursday afternoon."

The door opened, and a good-looking young man stood on the threshold. His face was lean and tanned, his manner poised and confident, and his smile had just left Miss Chase daydreaming in the outer office. "Oh, I'm sorry, Dad—if you're busy. Why—look who's here!"

"Bob," cried Madame Jordan. "You rascal—I was hoping to see you. How are you?"

"Just waking into glorious life," he told her. "How are you, and all the other young folks out your way?"

"Fine, thanks. By the way, you dawdled too long over breakfast. Just missed meeting a very pretty girl."

"No, I didn't. Not if you mean Evelyn Madden. Saw her downstairs as I came in—she was talking to one of those exiled Grand Dukes we employ to wait on the customers. I didn't linger—she's an old story now. Been seeing her everywhere I went for the past week."

"I thought her very charming," Madame Jordan said.

"But an iceberg," objected the boy. "B-r-r—how the wintry winds do blow in her vicinity! However, I guess she comes by it honestly. I passed the great P. J. himself on the stairs."

"Nonsense. Have you ever tried that smile of yours on her?"

"In a way. Nothing special—just the old trade smile. But look here—I'm on to you. You want to interest me in the obsolete institution of marriage."

"It's what you need. It's what all young men need."

"What for?"

"As an incentive. Something to spur you on to get the most out of life."

Bob Eden laughed. "Listen, my dear. When the fog begins to drift in through the Gate, and the lights begin to twinkle on O'Farrell Street—well, I don't want to be hampered by no incentive, lady. Besides, the girls aren't what they were when you were breaking hearts."

"Rot," she answered. "They're very much nicer. The young men are growing silly. Alec, I'll go along."

"I'll get in touch with you next Thursday," the elder Eden said. "By the way—I'm sorry it wasn't more, for your sake."

"It was an amazing lot," she replied. "I'm very happy." Her eyes filled. "Dear Dad—he's taking care of me still," she added, and went quickly out.

Eden turned to his son. "I judge you haven't taken a newspaper job yet?"

"Not yet." The boy lighted a cigarette. "Of course, the editors are all after me. But I've been fighting them off."

"Well, fight them off a little longer. I want you to be free for the next two or three weeks. I've a little job for you myself."

"Why, of course, Dad." He tossed a match into a priceless K'ang-Hsi vase. "What sort of job? What do I do?"

"First of all, you meet the *President Pierce* late next Thursday afternoon."

"Sounds promising. I presume a young woman, heavily veiled, comes ashore——"

"No. A Chinese comes ashore."

"A what?"

"A Chinese detective from Honolulu, carrying in his pocket a pearl necklace worth over a quarter of a million dollars."

Bob Eden nodded. "Yes. And after that——"

"After that," said Alexander Eden thoughtfully, "who can say! That may be only the beginning."

CHAPTER II

[Table of Contents](#)

THE DETECTIVE FROM HAWAII

[Table of Contents](#)

AT six o'clock on the following Thursday evening Alexander Eden drove to the Stewart Hotel. All day a February rain had spattered over the town, bringing an early dusk. For a moment Eden stood in the doorway of the hotel, staring at the parade of bobbing umbrellas and at the lights along Geary Street, glowing a dim yellow in the dripping mist. In San Francisco age does not matter—much, and he felt like a boy again as he rode up in the elevator to Sally Jordan's suite.

She was waiting for him in the doorway of her sitting-room, lovely as a girl in a soft, clinging dinner-gown of grey. Caste tells, particularly when one has reached the sixties, Eden thought as he took her hand.

"Ah, Alec," she smiled. "Come in. You remember Victor?"

Victor stepped forward eagerly, and Eden looked at him with interest. He had not seen Sally Jordan's son for some years, and he noted that, at thirty-five, Victor began to show the strain of his giddy career as man about town. His brown eyes were tired, as though they had looked at the bright lights too long, his face a little puffy, his waistline far too generous. But his attire was perfection; evidently his tailor had yet to hear of the failing Phillimore fortunes.

“Come in, come in,” said Victor gaily. His heart was light, for he saw important money in the offing. “As I understand it, to-night’s the night.”

“And I’m glad it is,” Sally Jordan added. “I shall be happy to get that necklace off my mind. Too great a burden at my age.”

Eden sat down. “Bob’s gone to the dock to meet the *President Pierce*” he remarked. “I told him to come here at once with your Chinese friend.”

“Ah, yes,” said Sally Jordan.

“Have a cocktail,” suggested Victor.

“No, thanks,” Eden replied. Abruptly he rose and strode about the room.

Mrs Jordan regarded him with concern. “Has anything happened?” she inquired.

The jeweller returned to his chair. “Well, yes—something has happened,” he admitted. “Something—well, something rather odd.”

“About the necklace, you mean?” asked Victor, with interest.

“Yes,” said Eden. He turned to Sally Jordan. “You remember what Madden told us, Sally? Almost his last words. ‘New York, and nowhere else.’ ”

“Why, yes—I remember,” she replied.

“Well, he’s changed his mind,” frowned the jeweller. “Somehow, it doesn’t seem like Madden. He called me up this morning from his ranch down on the desert, and he wants the necklace delivered there.”

“On the desert?” she repeated, amazed.

“Precisely. Naturally, I was surprised. But his instructions were emphatic, and you know the sort of man he is. One doesn’t argue with him. I listened to what he had to say, and agreed. But after he had rung off I got to thinking. What he had said that morning at my office, you know. I asked myself—was it really Madden talking? The voice had an authentic ring—but even so—well, I determined to take no chances.”

“Quite right, too,” nodded Sally Jordan.

“So I called him back. I had a devil of a time finding his number, but I finally got it from a business associate of his here in town. Eldorado seven six. I asked for P. J. Madden and I got him. Oh, it was Madden right enough.”

“And what did he say?”

“He commended me for my caution, but his orders were even more emphatic than before. He said he had heard certain things that made him think it risky to take the necklace to New York at this time. He didn’t explain what he meant by that. But he added that he’d come to the conclusion that the desert was an ideal place for a transaction of this sort. The last place in the world anyone would come looking for a chance to steal a quarter of a million dollar necklace. Of course, he didn’t say all that over the wire, but that was what I gathered.”

“He’s absolutely right, too,” said Victor.

“Well, yes—in a way, he is. I’ve spent a lot of time on the desert myself. In spite of the story-writers, it’s the most law-abiding place in America to-day. Nobody ever locks a door, or so much as thinks of thieves. Ask the average rancher about police protection, and he’ll look surprised and murmur

something about a sheriff several hundred miles away. But for all that——”

Eden got up again and walked anxiously about the room. “For all that—or rather, for those very reasons, I don’t like the idea at all. Suppose somebody did want to play a crooked game—what a setting for it! Away out there on that ocean of sand, with only the Joshua-trees for neighbours. Suppose I send Bob down there with your necklace, and he walks into a trap. Madden may not be at that lonely ranch. He may have gone East. He may even, by the time Bob gets there, have gone West—as they said in the War. Lying out on the desert, with a bullet in him——”

Victor laughed derisively. “Look here, your imagination is running away with you,” he cried.

Eden smiled. “Maybe it is,” he admitted. “Begins to look as though I were growing old, eh, Sally?” He took out his watch. “But where’s Bob? Ought to be here by now. If you don’t mind, I’ll use your telephone.”

He called the dock, and came away from the ‘phone with a still more worried look. “The *President Pierce* got in a full forty-five minutes ago,” he announced. “Half an hour should bring them here.”

“Traffic’s rather thick at this hour,” Victor reminded him.

“Yes—that’s right too,” Eden agreed. “Well, Sally, I’ve told you the situation. What do you think?”

“What should she think?” Victor cut in. “Madden’s bought the necklace and wants it delivered on the desert. It isn’t up to us to question his orders. If we do he may get annoyed and call the whole deal off. No, our job is to deliver the

pearls, get his receipt, and wait for his cheque." His puffy white hands twitched eagerly.

Eden turned to his old friend. "Is that your opinion, Sally?"

"Why, yes, Alec," she said. "I fancy Victor is right." She looked at her son proudly. Eden also looked at him, but with a vastly different expression.

"Very good," he answered. "Then there is no time to be lost. Madden is in a great hurry, as he wants to start for New York very soon. I shall send Bob with the necklace at eleven o'clock to-night—but I absolutely refuse to send him alone."

"I'll go along," Victor offered.

Eden shook his head. "No," he objected, "I prefer a policeman, even though he does belong to a force as far away as Honolulu. This Charlie Chan—do you think, Sally, that you could persuade him to go with Bob?"

She nodded. "I'm sure of it. Charlie would do anything for me."

"All right—that's settled. But where the devil are they? I tell you, I'm worried——"

The telephone interrupted him, and Madame Jordan went to answer it. "Oh—hello, Charlie," she said. "Come right up. We're on the fourth floor—number four nine two. Yes. Are you alone?" She hung up the receiver and turned back into the room. "He says he is alone," she announced.

"Alone," repeated Eden. "Why—I don't understand that ——" He sank weakly into a chair.

A moment later he looked up with interest at the chubby little man his hostess and her son were greeting warmly at the door. The detective from Honolulu stepped farther into

the room, an undistinguished figure in his Western clothes. He had round fat cheeks, an ivory skin, but the thing about him that caught Eden's attention was the expression in his eyes, a look of keen brightness that made the pupils gleam like black buttons in the yellow light.

"Alec," said Sally Jordan, "this is my old friend Charlie Chan. Charlie—Mr Eden."

Chan bowed low. "Honours crowd close on this mainland," he said. "First I am Miss Sally's old friend, and now I meet Mr Eden."

Eden rose. "How do you do?" he said.

"Have a good crossing, Charlie?" Victor asked.

Chan shrugged. "All time big Pacific Ocean suffer sharp pain down below, and toss about to prove it. Maybe from sympathy, I am in same fix."

Eden came forward. "Pardon me if I'm a little abrupt—but my son—he was to meet your ship——"

"So sorry," Chan said, regarding him gravely. "The fault must indubitably be mine. Kindly overlook my stupidity, but there was no meeting at dock."

"I can't understand it," Eden complained again.

"For some few minutes I linger round gang-board," Chan continued. "No one ventures to approach out of rainy night. Therefore I engage taxi and hurry to this spot."

"You've got the necklace?" Victor demanded.

"Beyond any question," Chan replied. "Already I have procured room in this hotel, partly disrobing to remove same from money-belt about waist." He tossed an innocent-looking string of beads down upon the table. "Regard the Phillimore pearls at journey's end," he grinned. "And now a

great burden drops from my shoulders with a most delectable thud.”

Eden, the jeweller, stepped forward and lifted the string in his hands. “Beautiful,” he murmured, “beautiful. Sally, we should never have let Madden have them at the price. They’re perfectly matched—I don’t know that I ever saw —” He stared for a moment into the rosy glow of the pearls, then laid them again on the table. “But Bob—where is Bob?”

“Oh, he’ll be along,” remarked Victor, taking up the necklace. “Just a case of missing each other.”

“I am the faulty one,” insisted Chan. “Shamed by my blunder——”

“Maybe,” said Eden. “But—now that you have the pearls, Sally, I’ll tell you something else. I didn’t want to worry you before. This afternoon at four o’clock some one called me—Madden again, he said. But something in his voice—anyhow, I was wary. Pearls were coming on the *President Pierce*, were they? Yes. And the name of the messenger? Why should I tell him that, I inquired. Well, he had just got hold of some inside facts that made him feel the string was in danger, and he didn’t want anything to happen. He was in a position to help in the matter. He insisted, so I finally said: ‘Very good, Mr Madden. Hang up your receiver and I’ll call you back in ten minutes with the information you want.’ There was a pause, then I heard him hang up. But I didn’t ‘phone the desert. Instead I had that call traced, and I found it came from a pay-station in a cigar-store at the corner of Sutter and Kearny Streets.”

Eden paused. He saw Charlie Chan regarding him with deep interest.

“Can you wonder I’m worried about Bob?” the jeweller continued. “There’s some funny business going on, and I tell you I don’t like it——”

A knock sounded on the door, and Eden himself opened it. His son stepped into the room, debonair and smiling. At sight of him, as so often happens in such a situation, the anxious father’s worry gave way to a deep rage.

“You’re a hell of a business man,” he cried.

“Now, Father—no compliments,” laughed Bob Eden. “And me wandering all over San Francisco in your service.”

“I suppose so. That’s about what you would be doing, when it was your job to meet Mr Chan at the dock.”

“Just a moment, Dad.” Bob Eden removed a glistening raincoat. “Hello, Victor. Madame Jordan. And this, I imagine, is Mr Chan.”

“So sorry to miss meeting at dock,” murmured Chan. “All my fault, I am sure——”

“Nonsense,” cried the jeweller. “His fault, as usual. When, in heaven’s name, are you going to show a sense of responsibility?”

“Now, Dad. And a sense of responsibility just what I’ve only this minute stopped showing nothing else but.”

“Good Lord—what language is that? You didn’t meet Mr Chan, did you?”

“Well, in a way I didn’t——”

“In a way? In a way!”

“Precisely. It’s a long story, and I’ll tell it if you’ll stop interrupting with these unwarranted attacks on my

character. I'll sit down, if I may. I've been about a bit, and I'm tired."

He lighted a cigarette. "When I came out of the club about five to go to the dock there was nothing in sight but a battered old taxi that had seen better days. I jumped in. When I got down on the Embarcadero I noticed that the driver was a pretty disreputable lad with a scar on one cheek and a cauliflower ear. He said he'd wait for me, and he said it with a lot of enthusiasm. I went into the pier-shed. There was the *President Pierce* out in the harbour, fumbling round trying to dock. In a few minutes I noticed a man standing near me—a thin, chilly-looking lad with an overcoat, the collar up about his ears, and a pair of black spectacles. I guess I'm psychic—he didn't look good to me. I couldn't tell, but somehow he seemed to be looking at me behind those smoked windows. I moved to the other side of the shed. So did he. I went to the street. He followed. Well, I drifted back to the gang-plank, and old Chilly Bill came along."

Bob Eden paused, smiling genially about him. "Right then and there I came to a quick decision. I'm remarkable that way. I didn't have the pearls, but Mr Chan did. Why tip off the world to Mr Chan? So I just stood there staring hopefully at the crowd landing from the old *P. P.* Presently I saw the man I took to be Mr Chan come down the plank, but I never stirred. I watched him while he looked about, then I saw him go out to the street. Still the mysterious gent behind the windows stuck closer than a bill-collector. After everybody was ashore, I went back to my taxi and paid off the driver. 'Was you expecting somebody on the ship?' he asked. 'Yes,'