

BERGEN WORTH

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Bergen Worth by Wallace Lloyd

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WALLACE LLOYD

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BY

WALLACE LLOYD

Author of "Houses of Glass"

"Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto
him that fell among the thieves?"

TORONTO
LANGTON & HALL

1901

Dedicated

IN LOVING KINDNESS TO MY FRIEND

W. E. RANEY

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CHAPTER I

THE RED FLAG

THE great railway strike of 1894 was going on at Chicago; the Pullman car riots were at their height. Apostles of discontent had aroused the masses. Loud-voiced agitators had unchained the tiger of irresponsibility and goaded to madness the wolf of want. The flag of anarchy was unfurled and 'down with everything that's up' became the watchword of the hour.

The effect was felt throughout the civilised world, and little wonder. The heart of the great West—the world's giant food distributor—was paralysed, its arteries of commerce ceased to throb, and the bountiful streams from ranch and cornfield ceased to flow. The great steel highways were deserted. No longer did they thunder with the harvests of a hemisphere or tremble with the tread of a continent.

Chicago was having a reign of terror. The rioters were carrying everything before them, burning cars, tearing up rails, destroying tracks, demolishing buildings, making merchandise food for flames, and—when resistance was offered—shedding human blood.

Fortunately for the City, and for the country at large, there was yet another means of transportation

available during this painful crisis. If there was war on land there was peace at sea. Lake Michigan glistened as peacefully in the sunlight as it did at creation, and the little white caps chased each other as joyously over its surface as when America was a howling wilderness, before man, with his boasted civilisation, had polluted its shores.

The steamboat *employés*, though more or less in sympathy with the strikers, had no particular grievance. They were not 'on strike,' and as a consequence every available craft was brought into use in reaping an unusually rich harvest. Passengers and precious freights were brought by stage to lake-port towns and forwarded by boat to Chicago. This service was not sufficient to affect, to any appreciable extent, the blockade in the carrying trade, but it did something to relieve the feeling of tension that existed in the city.

One day, when the riots were at their height, the steamer *Northcote* was ploughing its way down Lake Michigan with all the speed its engines could muster and its overloaded decks allow. The passengers, eager to reach their destination, were crowding the forward part of the upper deck, anxiously speculating on what might have taken place since last they heard from the suffering city. Away in the distance the troubled metropolis lay beneath its usual cloud of smoke, the spires shone in the sunlight and the towering masses of brick and mortar loomed up against the sky; but even with the aid of powerful glasses nothing could be seen to indicate the upheaval at present going on.

Prominent among the passengers was a tall, clerical-looking man of fifty or more, with coal-black hair, piercing eyes, Roman nose and pointed chin. He wore a silk hat of antiquated pattern, encircled with crape, and a long black ulster which reached nearly to

his heels. He held in one hand a silk umbrella, and in the other a mahogany box shod with brass corner-plates. If his face, dress or manner had not made him conspicuous, his box would have done so at a time when bombs and infernal machines were running in the public mind.

From the manner in which his fellow-passengers fought shy of him, it was quite evident that they suspected both him and his suspicious-looking baggage. But the general estimate of the gentleman in black was considerably modified when it became known that he was the very individual for whom the boat, during the night, had run out of its course, called at a rickety wharf not on the timetable, and waited fully an hour.

Whatever might be the calling of the interesting stranger it seemed reasonably certain that he must carry something better than dynamite to induce the hurrying steamer to vary its time and course. Perhaps, after all, the box had very desirable contents.

The fact that he was responsible for the boat's being two hours late did not increase his popularity. Spiteful remarks, loud enough to be heard, were freely indulged in, but he appeared to be totally indifferent to those around him, and beating his umbrella impatiently on the deck he stood in the bow of the boat looking steadily citywards.

He was muttering to himself and repeatedly consulting his watch. 'If the riots only hold out for a day or two longer there ought to be six figures in it. Stocks will shrink to half price. Everybody will be frightened. Their confidence will be gone. Nine out of every ten are fools. I hope Dorenwein isn't too miserly to keep the leaders supplied with funds. His policy is generally too narrow. Curses on the fate which drove me into exile. I *could* and *would* have been king here.'