

**IN THE MIDST OF
ALARMS**

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In the midst of alarms by Robert Barr

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ROBERT BARR

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ALARMS**

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Midst of Alarms

BY ROBERT BARR

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IN THE MIDST OF ALARMS.

CHAPTER I.

IN the marble-floored vestibule of the Metropolitan Grand Hotel in Buffalo, Professor Stillson Renmark stood and looked about him with the anxious manner of a person unused to the gaudy splendor of the modern American house of entertainment. The professor had paused halfway between the door and the marble counter, because he began to fear that he had arrived at an inopportune time, that something unusual was going on. The hurry and bustle bewildered him.

An omnibus, partly filled with passengers, was standing at the door, its steps backed over the curbstone, and beside it was a broad, flat van, on which stalwart porters were heaving great square, iron-bound trunks belonging to commercial travelers, and the more fragile, but not less bulky, saratogas, doubtless the property of the ladies who sat patiently in the omnibus. Another vehicle which had just arrived was backing up to the curb, and the irate driver used language suitable to the occasion; for the two restive horses were not behaving exactly in the way he liked.

A man with a stentorian, but monotonous and mournful, voice was filling the air with the information that a train was about to depart

for Albany, Saratoga, Troy, Boston, New York, and the East. When he came to the words "the East," his voice dropped to a sad minor key, as if the man despaired of the fate of those who took their departure in that direction. Every now and then a brazen gong sounded sharply; and one of the negroes who sat in a row on a bench along the marble-paneled wall sprang forward to the counter, took somebody's handbag, and disappeared in the direction of the elevator with the newly arrived guest following him. Groups of men stood here and there conversing, heedless of the rush of arrival and departure around them.

Before the broad and lofty plate-glass windows sat a row of men, some talking, some reading, and some gazing outside, but all with their feet on the brass rail which had been apparently put there for that purpose. Nearly everybody was smoking a cigar. A lady of dignified mien came down the hall to the front of the counter, and spoke quietly to the clerk, who bent his well-groomed head deferentially on one side as he listened to what she had to say. The men instantly made way for her. She passed along among them as composedly as if she were in her own drawing room, inclining her head slightly to one or other of her acquaintances, which salutation was gravely acknowledged by the raising of the hat and the temporary removal of the cigar from the lips.

All this was very strange to the professor, and he felt himself in a new world, with whose customs he was not familiar. Nobody paid the slightest attention to him as he stood there among it all with his satchel in his hand. As he timidly edged up to the counter, and tried to accumulate courage enough to address the clerk, a young man came forward, flung his handbag on the polished top of the counter,

metaphorically brushed the professor aside, pulled the bulky register toward him, and inscribed his name on the page with a rapidity equaled only by the illegibility of the result.

"Hello, Sam!" he said to the clerk. "How's things? Get my telegram?"

"Yes," answered the clerk; "but I can't give you 27. It's been taken for a week. I reserved 85 for you, and had to hold on with my teeth to do that."

The reply of the young man was merely a brief mention of the place of torment.

"It *is* hot," said the clerk blandly. "In from Cleveland?"

"Yes. Any letters for me?"

"Couple of telegrams. You'll find them up in 85."

"Oh, you were cocksure I'd take that room?"

"I was cocksure you'd have to. It is either that or the fifth floor. We're full. Couldn't give a better room to the President if he came."

"Oh, well, what's good enough for the President I can put up with for a couple of days."

The hand of the clerk descended on the bell. The negro sprang forward and took the "grip."

"Eighty-five," said the clerk; and the drummer and the negro disappeared.

"Is there any place where I could leave my bag for a while?" the professor at last said timidly to the clerk.

"Your bag?"

The professor held it up in view.

"Oh, your grip. Certainly. Have a room, sir?" And the clerk's hand hovered over the bell.

"No. At least, not just yet. You see, I'm——"

"All right. The baggage man there to the left will check it for you."

"Any letters for Bond?" said a man, push-

ing himself in front of the professor. The clerk pulled out a fat bunch of letters from the compartment marked "B," and handed the whole lot to the inquirer, who went rapidly over them, selected two that appeared to be addressed to him, and gave the letters a push toward the clerk, who placed them where they were before.

The professor paused a moment, then, realizing that the clerk had forgotten him, sought the baggage man, whom he found in a room filled with trunks and valises. The room communicated with the great hall by means of a square opening whose lower ledge was breast high. The professor stood before it, and handed the valise to the man behind this opening, who rapidly attached one brass check to the handle with a leather thong, and flung the other piece of brass to the professor. The latter was not sure but there was something to pay, still he quite correctly assumed that if there had been the somewhat brusque man would have had no hesitation in mentioning the fact; in which surmise his natural common sense proved a sure guide among strange surroundings. There was no false delicacy about the baggage man.

Although the professor was to a certain extent bewildered by the condition of things, there was still in his nature a certain dogged persistence that had before now stood him in good stead, and which had enabled him to distance, in the long run, much more brilliant men. He was not at all satisfied with his brief interview with the clerk. He resolved to approach that busy individual again, if he could arrest his attention. It was some time before he caught the speaker's eye, as it were, but when he did so, he said:

"I was about to say to you that I am waiting for a friend from New York who may not