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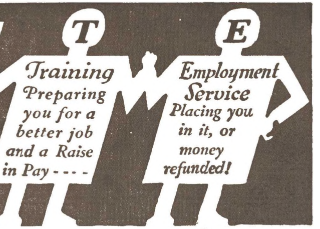
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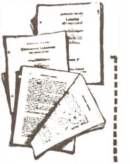

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Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR
Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

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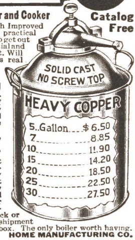

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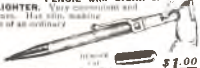

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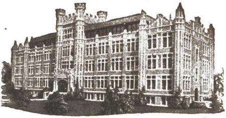

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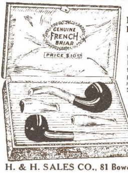

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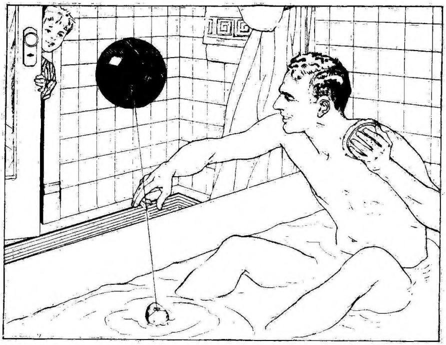

To balloon-stealing fathers

James the Aged had been a sinker-soap sufferer for years. He had wasted incalculable hours hop-frogging around the tub-bottom after jeering, rainbow-tinted soap that sank like a lead bullet. Young Jimmy had had *his* troubles, too.

On the evening after the circus young Jimmy was struggling with his sinker-cake. It shied here and it hid there. It *laughed* at him ha-ha. Then *he* invented the balloon-levitation act. (Principle of Physics: balloon plus sinker-soap counteracts gravity.)

It was a good act. It was so good that James the Aged adopted it the very next day, as you see. But complications are about to ensue. James the Young wants that balloon back—*now!*

What to do. What to do!

"Jimmy," cajoles the Aged Parent, suddenly inspired, "tell your mother I'll give you back your balloon if she will dig me up a cake of Ivory Soap."

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Detective Fiction

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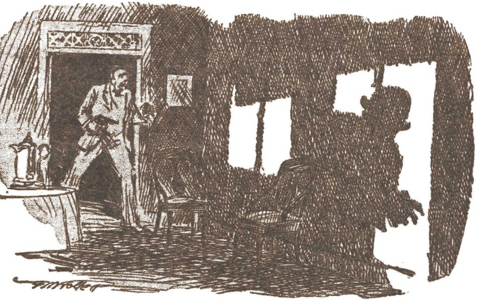


Distinct in one of the patches was the dark, moving figure of a man

WITH INTENT TO KILL

By Mansfield Scott

IN WHICH THE POPULAR MALCOME STEELE BUMPS HIS NOSE AGAINST THE RARE PREDICAMENT NOT OF TOO FEW BUT OF TOO MANY CLEWS

CHAPTER I

WHEN THE DOORBELL RANG

AS he stared through the window at the soft swirl of snow, Roscoe Stewart's face was not a pleasant sight. Its usual ruddy color had receded, leaving it sagging and pastelike.

It seemed almost a dead countenance, that of a man mortally stricken by terror. Yet even when gripped and blanched by fear, Stewart's features betrayed the slyness, the avarice, the total disregard for others, which had dominated his life.

For a half minute he crouched in his chair, his gaze rigid. Then, slowly, stealthily, he began groping behind him toward the wall, toward the electric light switch. His cold fingers found it. He plunged the study into darkness.

Distinct now was the gentle flutter of snowflakes against the glass. Through the window Stewart could discern a section of his lawn, already white. He leaped up from his desk. In the security of the dark, he ran hastily from window to window, on each side of the room, drawing the shades to the bottom.

He groped his way back to his desk, and sat there for an instant, limp and shaken, his face covered with clammy perspiration, the study pitch-black.

He listened. The snow swished against the east windows.

Stewart was a plump man of fifty—a sly and calculating attorney, whose wits had brought him wealth. His wealth, in turn, had brought him many of the advantages which he regarded as indispensable to happiness: political influence, social prominence, women. The more terrible, therefore, was the glimpse which he had just obtained through the window.

He rose and crossed the floor again, cautiously pulling aside the nearer shade which fronted the eastern end of his grounds. He could see nothing but the soft, cold snow, hard-driven by the wind.

Stewart returned to his desk, with the room still dark, and snatched up the telephone.

" Police headquarters!" he demanded, in a voice which crackled harshly. " Police headquarters, emergency!"

" Police headquarters—thank you—"

" Police headquarters. Lieutenant Nelson speaking—"

" I want to talk to the commissioner—quickly, please—"

" The commissioner is not here at present, sir."

" Come, come—this is Roscoe Stewart of 88 Arborway. I want to speak with the commissioner—"

" I'm very sorry, sir, but he has left the building."

" Give me the superintendent, then, please!"

" The superintendent has gone, too, Mr. Stewart. Captain Needham is here. One moment, sir—"

" Hello. Captain Needham speaking."

Stewart's hand shook as he held the receiver to his ear.

" Captain—this is Roscoe Stewart of 88 Arborway—"

" Oh, yes, Mr. Stewart!"

" Can you send several of your best men right out here?"

" Why, certainly, Mr. Stewart. But what's the trouble?"

" My life is in danger!"

" Good heavens, sir! What do you mean? From what source?"

" I—can't explain that over the phone—please send your men right out. Rush them!"

The captain promised. He declared that he would call the local station instantly, and also dispatch an inspector from headquarters. All of the police knew Stewart, and nearly all of them endeavored to please him whenever it was possible. They knew that he had political influence, also that he was a friend of the commissioner.

Hanging up the receiver, the attorney again sat motionless in the dark, listening, fearful of what he might hear in the large, lonely house, and equally fearful lest he might not hear it quickly enough.

The only sounds were the swish of snowflakes, the whine of the east wind, the rattle of a shutter upstairs.

It was true that this danger which had so suddenly confronted him, had been in the background for years. Ever since he had come East it had been there, remote, yet definite, despite his efforts to deny its existence.

The worst of it had been the realization that the law, the profession which he practiced to such advantage, could be of little help to him. Stewart knew every legal trick and twist. He knew how to do what other attorneys could not do, or would not do.

He himself had never overstepped the law. Always he had been just within its bounds. He had capitalized the failure of others to comprehend how wide its bounds were.

He had made his money through all these

years by his superior knowledge, enabling him to take stands which, although often morally contemptible, were legally sound.

But in his heart Stewart knew now that the law might not be sufficient to protect him from the peril which had peered in through the window.

God grant that the police would hurry!

Rising nervously once more, he crossed the heavy rug to the nearer window at the east. He pulled back an inch of the shade and pressed his face to the glass.

Away down at the end of his grounds, where his fence flanked the Arborway, a single, small red light twinkled through the storm. A tail lamp—an automobile, undoubtedly. Why was it standing there near his residence, in the darkness of the Arborway?

Could it be the police already? Impossible. Besides, the officers would have brought their machine up the drive.

Stewart cursed and went back to the telephone.

He knew that he was in need of more help than the police could give him. More confidential help. There were certain aspects of the case which he really could not tell the officials.

What was the name of that first-class private detective concern which had worked for Hickey once? The National Detective Agency—that was it. Stewart would not put on the light to look for the number. He demanded it of the information operator.

He tried the wrong exchange. Guessing again, he obtained the number.

A man named Clapp promised to have two competent operatives at the house within an hour.

An hour! When an hour might mean so much!

"Get them out here in a hurry!" he flung over the wire.

Then, telephone in hand, he hesitated. A new thought had come to him.

Should he call Fraim?

No! Damn Fraim! To the devil with Fraim! He was a blackguard!

A certain fascination mixed with fear drew Stewart again to the east window. He caught his breath in relief. The car which had been standing outside his fence was gone.

At least—the tail-lamp of the automobile no longer showed.

Again he listened, and heard only the moaning of the wind and the rattling of a shutter in the storm.

Yet his fear was growing, was gripping him closer with each minute. It was an unexplained fear now. He realized that he was afraid even to leave the darkened security of his study. Every window and door in the house was locked—he was certain of that. They always were when he was at home alone. But windows could be forced—

He cursed the combination of circumstances which had left him alone here at this time. His servant, Johnson—the sudden illness in his family, the telegram. The appointment to meet a prospective client at sevent thirty—a man whom he had never seen. The fact that it was Thursday evening and the other servants' night out. The fact that Grimes, his chauffeur, always went home to supper between seven and eight unless instructed otherwise.

Stewart shivered.

And what should he do when the police arrived? They would ring the doorbell. The bell must be answered if they were to be admitted. If they received no answer they might go back to the station! What should he do when the bell rang?

Whose ring would it be? It might be the police from station eighteen. It might be the inspector from headquarters. Or the operatives from the private agency. Or the prospective client, Fothergill, whose appointment was for seven thirty. Or—or it might be—

The lawyer shivered again. He felt his way across the room and locked both doors.

He was safe here, at least. But what should he do when the doorbell rang, he questioned himself.

His hand, weak and moist, felt for the telephone again. Damn it, why didn't the police hurry?

"Police headquarters — emergency! Operator! Operator!" He clattered the hook. As he did so an overwhelming terror crept into his heart.

There was no response to his efforts. The wire was dead.

CHAPTER II

THE SHADOW ON THE GLASS

THE truth, the full peril of his position, struck to Stewart's brain like a knife. His assailant—this fiend, murder-bent, who had crept upon him out of the night—had silenced the telephone, cutting him off from all aid. If only the other didn't guess that help had been summoned already!

Breathless, rigid with fright, Stewart listened. Listened for the slightest sound of an attempt to force entrance to the house. But as before, there was only the sob of the wind and the rattling of the shutter.

The attorney felt a certain desperate courage. From his desk he took a service revolver of forty-five caliber which he kept always loaded in a drawer. He laid it carefully within reach of his hand. The touch of the metal reassured him. He could defend himself successfully here in the study!

And perhaps—just perhaps—Grimes, the chauffeur, had returned early from supper. Stewart pressed a button—three long, urgent rings, then three more. He waited, listening to the snowflakes. But five long minutes passed, and there was no response.

Then, suddenly, its sound so loud in the house that it startled him, the front doorbell pealed.

Stewart held his breath, hesitating, wondering. Was it the police? It couldn't possibly be the inspector from headquarters—not yet! It might be the officers from station eighteen.

His windows did not afford him a view of the west side of the house, where the driveway was situated. He had not heard the police machine arrive; but the east wind, rattling the blind above, might have prevented his hearing. In order to see the driveway he must leave the study. He must unlock one of the doors—

The bell rang again—a longer ring.

His hands shaking again, Stewart groped for the revolver, picked it up, and moved cautiously forward. It was possible that his assailant had forced entrance to the house so quietly that he hadn't heard him—but it really wasn't likely.

Besides—if he had—if he *were* lurking somewhere within, the doorbell would frighten him away. At all events, Stewart knew that he must ascertain whether the police automobile had come. He mustn't let the officers return to the station!

Quietly, with the utmost care, he turned the key in the door leading to the dining room. From the dining room, with its half circle of tall windows, he could command a view of the whole driveway, clear down to the entrance on Burton Street.

After all—the dining room, too, was dark.

Opening the door, Stewart slipped noiselessly through.

His first glance was toward the window facing the drive. His heart sank. There was no car there. However, from where he stood he could not see all the way down to the street. Perhaps the police had purposely left their machine outside the grounds. He must make sure.

He tiptoed across the dark room, his left hand extended to avoid striking the table, his right gripping the weapon. His foot struck something hard and heavy, and he exclaimed involuntarily. He had forgotten the pile of new bricks, left there by workmen who were building a fireplace which he had promised his daughter upon her return from Philadelphia.

The entire snow-swept driveway came into view—then the lamps of Burton Street below. There was no machine in sight.

Something on the wall of the dining room, at his left, caught Stewart's glance. He turned to look at it. And at that instant his whole body stiffened, his throat contracted as if in he grip of icy hands.

On the wall were three rectangular patches of light—dim light, which came through the northwest windows from a powerful arc-lamp at the intersection of Burton Street and the Arborway. Distinct in one of these patches was the dark, moving figure of a man.

Stewart dared not even turn his head to look at the other. Unwittingly he had walked into a position which might prove his death-trap. The shadow on the wall told him plainly what the man was doing. He was trying to force the window. Stewart heard plainly the creak of the wood as it strained against the heavy fastening.

In desperation the lawyer did the only thing that he could do. He flung himself to a crouching position in the shadow of the dining room table.

The doorbell pealed once more.

Stewart knew now that it was not the police who sought admittance. Surely this man would have heard their arrival, and would have fled. Surely the person at the front door could be only his accomplice, seeking to lure their intended victim out to his death!

Then all at once Stewart remembered the revolver in his hand.

A shot, aimed while the other was still working at the window, would be likely to bring help. And, if it was aimed well enough, it might rid him of this menace forever.

Carefully he looked at the man outside. His features were indistinct. But his form was familiar—terribly familiar. Only a few feet separated Stewart from his enemy —a few feet, and a pane of heavy glass.

He raised his weapon, then hesitated again. He was a miserable marksman. He well knew that he was. Even at this distance, he might miss—

And suppose that the other, guided by the flash of the gun, should return the fire? Stewart shivered as he recalled the man's swift, deadly skill.

Was he to be trapped, slain, here in his own house in the city, with hundreds of police who would willingly rush to his aid?

He crouched back farther behind the table. Keeping his head and shoulders well out of range from the window, he extended the revolver at arm's length, and aimed it, sidewise, at the figure outside the glass.

His hand wavered, and he strove to steady it. He pressed the trigger.

There was only a click from the weapon.

A wave of total horror and helplessness rushed over Stewart. He would have cried out in amazement and fear if his throat hadn't been powerless. A spasm of trembling shook his body. Had that blundering Johnson unloaded the revolver, after all, when he had told him a hundred times never to touch it?

The window-sash creaked sharply and ominously as the man outside worked on.

Desperately Stewart pulled the trigger again, then again.

CHAPTER III

WHAT THE POLICE FOUND

SERGEANT WHITE and two officers from station eighteen were on their way to Stewart's home in a police car.

The sergeant was a man who weighed two hundred, and who had florid features and a heavy, drawling voice. He was a rather astute policeman, as honest as the average, and remarkably fearless and cool in times of danger. His companions, Blake and Forrest, were young policemen.

As the intersection of Burton Street and the Arborway loomed through the blinding storm, Sergeant White barked an order, and Blake shut off his motor, parking the little car near the corner, in the darkness of the latter thoroughfare. The three men stumbled out.

"Listen!" commanded White, sharply. "Who the hell's that?"

From the interior of Roscoe Stewart's grounds, somewhere on a level higher than the street, came the shrill notes of a whistle.

"It ain't the route man, sarge," Forrest offered. "We passed him two blocks back."

The blasts were interrupted; and suddenly a man's voice was heard shouting:

"Police! Police! Help, here! Police!" Then more whistles.

The big sergeant led the way in a race to the driveway. "Come on—"

"S-sst! Take it easy, sarge! Look!"

Through the darkness and the snowflakes, Blake had caught a glimpse of a running form, just inside Stewart's fence, a few yards from the drive. He snatched out his flash light as the three paused.

A yellow-white beam pierced the night, and came to rest on a man who was crouching in the snow-swept shrubbery, apparently waiting a chance to scale the fence and drop to the Arborway.

The sergeant also produced a light. "Come on out of that!" he challenged.

Above, near the darkened house, the whistle was still being blown. At the command, the man in the shrubbery darted out and attempted to escape, but slipped in the snow, and was quickly seized by Blake and Forrest.

Sergeant White examined him with his light. He was a lean, pale individual of middle age, unkempt, and disreputably dressed, with no overcoat.

"Come clean, now! What was you doin' in here?"

The prisoner gasped, and swallowed hard. He was badly frightened. "N-nothin', mister officer—"

"Nothin', eh? Come clean, I said—"

"Police! Police!" called the voice near the house.

The sergeant turned. "Put him in, Blake. And you, Forrest, come on!"

"Aw, no, no, mister police!" begged the man, his voice coming with difficulty. "S-help me, sir, I was only up there askin' a bite of food! I ain't eat fer two days, honest! Please don't arrest me!"

But the sergeant and Forrest had disappeared up the driveway, and the prisoner, in the grasp of Blake, was hurried to the nearest box, there to be pushed in the wagon and held as an "s. p.," a suspicious person.

White and the other officer raced on up the drive.

They were not long in discovering the source of the whistles. A wild-eyed young man, fashionably attired, ran to meet them as they advanced toward the front door, playing their flash lights.

"Quickly, officers!" he called. "Something terrible has happened here, I'm afraid!"

His voice was cultured. White and Forrest stopped, surveyeing him.

"What's wrong, sir? Where's Mr. Stewart? Have you seen him?"

"He's—he's in the house! But—"

The sergeant hurried to the door.

"You can't get in there. It's locked, and no one answers the bell—"

"Who are you, sir?"

"My name's Duncan. I came a few minutes ago to see Mr. Stewart. No one answered the bell, and I was just about to go away—"

"But what's wrong here? Mr. Stewart telephoned—he must be here. What's happened?"

The young man seemed unnerved. "He's—in the house."

"Then, if he is, why doesn't he answer the bell?"

"W-well," replied Duncan, his voice shaken, "if you'll step around to the dining room windows you'll see why."

Something in his tone impressed the two men, and they complied hastily.

"Have you seen any one else about the premises?" White asked.

"Yes, I have! I started to tell you, sergeant. I was just about to go away, believing the house was empty, when I thought I heard a door slam inside.

"I walked around here, intending to try the bell at the side door, and I saw a man running away from that first dining room window."

"Yeah? Which way did he go?"

"Toward the garage—but here—just look in this window."

White and Forrest pressed their faces to the glass.

"Good—God!" protested the former.

"What is it, sarge?"

"Don't—don't you see it? Move your head over this side!"

The light from the arc-lamp down at the corner of Burton Street cast a single oblong patch across the floor. The patch fell near the dining room table. Sergeant White tugged vainly at the window. Raising his flash light, he added its bright rays to the rectangle of light on the floor.

Sprawled at full length near the table was Roscoe Stewart, the attorney, his extended arms limp, his face bathed in blood.

CHAPTER IV

HOW WAS IT DONE?

"WE must get into the house at once!" said Sergeant White.

The dining room windows were still secure. Marks where a jimmy had been used were plainly visible beneath the beams of the flash lights, but the intruder certainly had not completed his work—at least, not at this window.

Together with Duncan the policeman hurried to the side door. This also was locked. Returning to the front of the house, they forced entrance through a window which opened into the hall. Forrest found a switch and put on the light.

"Police officers!" proclaimed Sergeant White, but only silence answered.

"You stay here, Forrest," he ordered. "Don't let any one out, no matter who he says he is. The fellow that did this may be in the house right now."

He drew his gun, and, using his lights, picked his way through the library to the dining room. There he first located the switch on the opposite wall; then, taking care to avoid the ugly spreading pool by the table, crossed the room.

Just before he reached the switch he struck his foot against some object, sending it clattering forward in the dark. He put on the light.

A single glance at Stewart's form showed him that what he had feared was true: the benefactor of the big police "system" was beyond all aid. It was apparent that a bullet of large caliber had passed directly through the right eye to the brain.

White shook his head and drew a deep breath. It was a miserable sight.

A door behind him stood ajar. Turning swiftly, the sergeant swung his light into the adjoining room. He saw a telephone instrument on a desk, and strode across to it. The line, however, was dead.

"Wires cut outside," he muttered.

He hurried back to the front hall, where Forrest and the young man still waited. Their glances questioned him.

"Mr. Stewart's dead—murdered," he stated, shaking his head. "Forrest, go right down to that box and get a squad up here. Get every spare man in the house. We'll wait right here in the hall till you get back."

The officer obeyed.

"Now, sir," White questioned, "tell me just how long you was outside here ringing the bell."

"I rang three times," the young man stated. "I should say that I was there several minutes."

"Humph. You heard no shot, outside or in?"

"No, I didn't. Unless"—he caught his breath—"unless it was the noise that I thought was a door slamming inside."

"You thought you heard a door slam, eh?" asked the sergeant heavily.

"Yes; that's what convinced me there must be some one inside."

"What did you say your name was, sir?"

"Grafton L. Duncan, of Kneeland Street, West End."

"Was Mr. Stewart expecting you, do you know?"

"No, I'm quite sure he wasn't," the other replied with considerable emphasis.

The tone puzzled Sergeant White. He looked the young man over more narrowly.

"Friend of the family?" he ventured.

"W-well, I was; yes."

"Were, eh?"

"Yes. I came on a little matter of business to-night."

"I see. Mind telling me what kind of business, Mr. Duncan?"

"Private business," answered the young man simply.

After ten minutes a wagon load of police arrived, together with the detective sent from headquarters, who had joined them at the foot of the driveway. The detective was a young man who had made himself quite a name locally—Frank Reilly, who had begun as traffic officer and was now one of the most capable sleuths in the department.

A systematic search was begun immediately. The squad began in the cellar and went through the whole big house to the attic—without finding any trace of an intruder. But they made another discovery—a negative one which seemed amazing under the circumstances.

"Sergeant," Forrest declared, as he returned downstairs, his face puzzled, "do you know what? There isn't a window or a door been broke open in this place! No, sir. We tested the lock on every door and window. Even in the cellar. Every single one is closed and fastened except the one we broke in through, and they're all extra heavy fastenings. And all the doors is bolted besides being locked."

"Humph. Looks like Mr. Stewart was afraid of some one, eh?"

"Sure—but don't you see what I'm coming to, sarge? How did the murderer get at him to plug him? You seen yourself that he didn't finish forcing the window, and there was no bullet hole in the glass."

"Eh? Why, that's right! How *did* he? Here—let's make sure of that."

Several of the party followed him to the dining room, while he carefully examined each of the windows. A whistle of amazement escaped him.

"Upon my soul, Forrest's right!" he mused aloud. "How the devil did the fellow get at him?"

"Well, sir, now let's see," said Inspector Frank Reilly, peering around with his merry, bright blue eyes. "There's no doubt that the poor man was slain in his room, I guess?"

"Yeah—but *how* was he?" White demanded.

"Well, that's what I'll be tryin' to find out for you, sergeant. First of all, now, are we sure it was him that called headquarters, or was it maybe some one imitatin' him?"

"That don't answer the question how he was shot in a locked and bolted house."

"No," the detective admitted. He took off his hat and laid it on the table.

"You've sent for the medical examiner?" Sergeant White asked.

"McQueen is away," Forrest answered. "They're sending Porter over."

"There's a hole in the wall," Frank Reilly observed.

"Eh? Where?"

He pointed to the floor at one end of the room, where work had been begun opening a chimney for the purpose of building a fireplace.

The sergeant dropped to his hands and knees and muttered contemptuously.

"A hole, yeah—but a man could hardly put his arm through it, let alone coming in and out. Maybe he let himself down the chimney and fired through that hole, eh, Frank?"

The Irishman's face turned crimson at the gibe. "W-well—I was only thinkin'."

The doorbell interrupted them. Operatives Thompson and Somers, from the National Detective Agency, had arrived. Sergeant White did not like Somers.

"To see Mr. Stewart, eh? Sure—come on in and see him."

He himself went outdoors. It had occurred to him that he might find footprints in the snow, made by the man who had evidently tried to force the window.

But Sergeant White was too late for this. Although the snow had stopped, it had fallen heavily for thirty minutes since the crime had been discovered; and the only clew which White found was the jimmy, lying half covered not far from the window.

"Humph," said Sergeant White heavily, as he took possession of it.

CHAPTER V

WITH MOTIVE UNKNOWN

INSPECTOR HARRY GRAY was called into the case early Friday morning.

Gray was a short, wiry, energetic man of forty-five, the most experienced and most sagacious detective on the force—one who disdained "bullying" methods — a policeman of the old school, of a type fast disappearing.

At six o'clock, while a cold dawn was breaking, he was on his way to Stewart's residence in his coupé. No more snow had fallen since the flurry of the early evening; and the temperature had dropped twenty degrees during the night. These facts held a special significance for Gray, from which he hoped to obtain results at daybreak.

"Footprints and wheel tracks—" was the idea he had expressed upon setting out from headquarters.

He had driven about half of the distance to the Arborway when he observed a man standing at the curb, evidently waiting for the first street car. The man's form seemed familiar, although his face was nearly hidden by the turned-up collar of his ulster.

He was over six feet in height, with

broad, heavy shoulders and a slouch hat pulled down to protect his face from the intense cold. The inspector stopped, made sure of his identity, and laughed a greeting.

"Where in the world are you going so early, Steele?"

The other came forward to the window. "Good morning, Harry! Are you going out toward the Arborway?"

"The Arborway?" exclaimed Gray, looking at him in surprise and flinging open the door. "Sure—that's exactly where I'm going? What—are you on this Stewart case?"

"I believe we are, for a short time," the director of the private agency said. "You see, Stewart called our office last evening and had two of my men sent out. By the time that they arrived—"

"Oh, yes," declared the inspector, slipping his machine back into high gear, "I heard that two private dicks came last night, but I didn't know they were yours. Mind telling me what Stewart wanted of them?"

"He said that he was in danger."

"M-mm. The same thing he told us. Your men didn't stay last night, did they?"

Steele shook his head. "They decided there was nothing they could do. But I think we owe Stewart eight hours' work, in any case."

"I get you. Where's your car this morning?"

"The radiator is frozen."

"Oh! Too bad! Might mean a new jacket, hmm? Bad business, letting radiators freeze. Still, no one could guess the thermometer was going to drop so far."

"By the way," his friend inquired, "have you made any overtures to the superintendent about—"

"Not yet, Steele. I want to catch him in just the right humor. But I—I'll tell you frankly—I'm tempted to do it, whether he wants to make me chief of detectives or not. I'm mightily tempted to do it."

Steele had been urging Gray to accept a position as manager of his office in Chicago, to fill a vacancy left by the resignation of Arthur Williams.

"Have you any one else in view?"

"One," the private investigator admitted. "An exceptionally bright young man named Dexter, from New Hampshire. But he has an agency of his own there."

"Well," Gray observed, as they turned a sharp corner and skidded in the light snow, "this Stewart affair is certainly a queer one. We can't find out how the murderer got into the house. Everything was shut tight and fastened. We want to know how on earth the fellow got in. Or was he inside already—and, if so, how did he get out and leave everything locked behind him?"

"Thompson says there are no clews at all."

"Well, he's certainly wrong about that, Steele. Sergeant White wouldn't tell him, I guess. There are altogether too many clews. And they implicate—well, it's such a big order that the commissioner refuses to allow any action at present."

"Would you give me an outline of what you know?"

"I surely will. In the first place, Stewart called headquarters, evidently in great fright, just as he called your office. Captain Needham called eighteen, and they rushed Sergeant White out to his house with two men.

"As they approached the place, they heard a whistle being blown, and calls for police. And right at the end of the lawn, where the wall comes to a point at Arborway and Burton Street, a man was hiding in the shrubbery.

"They took him in the house and held him. At first, things looked bad for him. But, as far as Reilly can see, he's simply a tramp; and, confound it, he had no motive to kill Stewart."

"M-mm," said Steele. "Unless my memory is at fault, Gray, the last time we worked on a case with young Mr. Reilly, he proceeded to outguess us quite shamefully, didn't he?"

The inspector smiled. "Well, we're giving you a chance to even the score now. As I said, I don't see what possible reason this hobo could have had for killing Stewart, or how he could have got into the house and done it if he had wanted to. Since his arrest, they've found a lot more—a whole lot more."

"Implicating whom?"

"W-well—" Gray hesitated. "Ever heard of Winslow Fraim?"

Steele displayed keener interest. "The Fraim who was rumored to be involved with Stewart in the Benson perjury matter?"

"That's the fellow. One of these very oily, smooth-working chaps. He was connected with Stewart in a good many more things that I dare say you never heard of—especially while they were out West together some years ago.

"In fact, Fraim's brother was mayor of a town out there, and had to leave one night under cover of darkness. Fraim and Stewart quarreled violently several months ago over money matters. I hear Fraim said Stewart had defrauded him and promised to square things.

"But Fraim is a tough bird to handle—rich and influential, with all kinds of friends 'up aloft.' He could break me easily if he felt like it. Here's the house right ahead."

CHAPTER VI

A TYPICAL VAGRANT

HARRY GRAY had hoped that much valuable evidence would be found preserved in the snow by the cold snap. He was doomed to disappointment, however, for it had been a hard and dry snow, and had blown and drifted until the east wind had abated about midnight. The only footprints and wheel tracks discernible on Stewart's premises were those made by the police in the early morning.

The inspector showed Malcome Steele the approximate spot where Frank Reilly of headquarters had found an automatic pistol, equipped with a Maxim silencer, in a drift behind the garage.

"A thirty-eight," he added. "Fully loaded—no shots fired."

"What was the caliber of the bullet which killed Stewart?"

"That we don't know, and won't know until to-night," replied Gray, in disgust. "Dr. McQueen, the medical examiner in the south district, is out of town; and his assistant has been taken ill. Porter, from the north district, won't make the examination. McQueen will be back to-night.

"The main trouble with our system of justice at present, Steele, is that every one connected with it is too darned afraid he might do a little of some one else's work!"

"I guess that's about the truth of it," his friend agreed. "Then the body is still in the house?"

"Oh, no; Porter did look after that much. It's at the south mortuary, waiting for McQueen."

Steele was taken to the dining room, where young Detective Reilly shook hands warmly with him.

"Sure, it's a pleasure to have you workin' with us again!" he declared, with the faintest suggestion of amusement in his merry blue eyes. "A strange case, indeed, Mr. Steele. One fellow we have, but he has no motive.

"Another man has the motive—an' sure, we've found his car ditched near-by besides—but Sergeant White says he has an alibi for the time o' the killin', all the same."

Steele sat down thoughtfully and glanced around the room.

"M-mm—yes—it seems so," he seconded. "An automatic pistol outside; a murdered man inside; and no glass broken. By the way, you spoke of a whistle being blown as the first officers arrived, Gray. Who was blowing it?"

"A young man named Duncan. We can't make out yet whether he's a friend of the family, of the daughter, or what he is. Says he always carries a whistle on his key-ring."

"Stewart had a daughter?"

"Yes. She's in Philadelphia, the servant Johnson says. And there's another peculiar circumstance. Johnson was called to his home in Salem late yesterday afternoon by a fake telegram. We have the telegram."

Steele stretched his long legs before him and crossed his feet. "It begins to look as though some one did a very careful piece of work."

"That's it." Gray nodded in a meaning way. "A smooth piece of work."

"Maybe, Mr. Steele," offered Reilly,

taking up his hat, "you'd like to come along with us? We're going to interview both of these fellows we have in mind."

"Both—"

"The tramp, Egan, first—him that they grabbed down here by the gate, you know. At the station he told a pretty straight story, they say. He swears he only come in from the street to ask for some food, an' by the looks of him he needed some."

"Yes, thank you; I'll be glad to go with you," the private investigator said.

John Egan appeared to be a typical vagrant. He was of medium stature, rather pale and emaciated, although wiry of build, with unkempt hair and filthy clothing.

Harry Gray asked a few questions which the prisoner answered in a straightforward manner.

"I've not always been down in the world, mister inspector," he told him, earnestly. "But for a year or so me luck has been out for fair. I've tried to get work, and I ain't never touched the booze—"

"That part's all right," returned Gray. "We want to know how you happened to be in Mr. Roscoe Stewart's grounds when he was murdered."

"S' help me, sir, I had nothing to do with that! I swear it, sir! I just been telling the captain, here, I was on'y there in the hopes of getting a bite to eat. Never a morsel had passed me lips in two days, inspector—"

"Whom did you ask for food at Mr. Stewart's house?" Steele inquired.

"I didn't see no one to ask, sir. The whole house was dark. And just while I stood there, wonderin'like, I hears a whistle and a man shouting for the police. So I starts to run, not bein' anxious to get in trouble—"

"So you're changing your story!" bullied the captain of division eighteen. "What did you tell Lieutenant Burke this morning earlier?"

The man glanced up in fear.

"S' help me, I never told him nothin' different, chief! 'Cause they ain't nothin' different to tell! I told him I was just goin' to ask the folks for a bite to eat. Then he asked me how long had I been ridin' the rods, and I told him two years, and—"

"Two years, have you? How long you been in this town?"

"I just come a few days ago, chief!"

"That so? Where were you before that?"

"I been in Pittsburgh for three months, sir."

"Oh, in Pittsburgh, were you? How'd you get over here—breeze it?"

"No, sir. I'll tell the truth about it, sir. I stole a ride on a freight train. I ain't got no money—"

"All right—all right!" And the captain gave the prisoner a push back into the corner of his cell.

CHAPTER VII

THE STOLEN CAR

WINSLOW FRAIM, clad in his bathrobe, received the three men at his luxurious apartment on Southboro Street. He was a large man of forty, with dull beads of perspiration on his face.

"I've just talked with the commissioner," he told them, gently and frankly. "I realize, of course, that I am probably in a serious predicament. I think my only safe course is to lay everything openly before you."

"A sensible decision, sir," replied Gray.

"This morning I was told that my Chrysler car had been found wrecked on the Arborway not far from Mr. Stewart's home last evening. I—I was quite sure then that I could convince you I had nothing to do with its being there—"

"Let us have the circumstances, Mr. Fraim," urged Gray, in a respectful and reassuring manner. "When did you see the car last? You say that it was stolen?"

"Yes! Last evening, at some time between six and eight, it was taken from in front of my door."

"You reported the theft at station three, I suppose?"

"I certainly did, as soon as I discovered—"

"At what time did you report the theft?"

"Shortly after eight o'clock, inspector."

Gray made a note of it.

Fraim seemed very uneasy. He cleared his throat.

"I left the car standing right outside here," he declared. "It simply must have been stolen, gentlemen, and by some chance wrecked and abandoned by the thieves on the Arborway. I—I can think of nothing else to account for it.

"For my own part, I was with a Mr. Valentine Morse of New York from six thirty until eight. He was trying to interest me—that is, to obtain financial backing for—for a certain business undertaking that he plans.

"We were simply riding about town in his machine, talking over the proposition, as we didn't wish to be where our discussion could be overheard."

"Do you mind telling us what kind of a proposition it was?"

"I—don't feel quite at liberty to tell you at present."

"But you went to ride in his car, leaving yours in front of this building, and when you returned it was gone?"

"Precisely, inspector."

"Then, of course, Mr. Morse of New York will be in a position to corroborate this."

Fraim fumbled with the cord of his bathrobe. He glanced vapidly from Gray to Reilly, then back again, ignoring Steele.

"Y-yes—but I regret exceedingly that I—haven't been able to locate Mr. Morse this morning. He checked out unexpectedly from his hotel, and—and seems to have left town. I had never met him until yesterday. I—I know this must sound preposterous, inspector. I can't understand it, myself—"

Harry Gray thrust his hands deep in his pockets. "Then can you tell us anything about your recent disagreement with Mr. Roscoe Stewart, sir?"

Fraim shook his head.

"Since Mr. Stewart is dead," he answered deliberately, "I can only say that I regret our quarrel very deeply."

"Did you ever hear a more incredible story?" Gray demanded of Steele, when the three had left the apartment. "Surely no auto thief could have taken his car, and then abandoned it—purely by chance—within a half mile of Stewart's home at the very time when he was shot!"

"It scarcely seems reasonable," Steele agreed. "Could we examine the car?"

"Certainly. It's still in the brook by the Arborway."

He drove Steele to the place, while Frank Reilly returned to Stewart's house to continue his own investigations.

Fraim's automobile, a sedan, had left the Arborway, crashed through a small rail fence, and plunged down a thirty-foot embankment, wrecking itself against a tree beside a brook. The front axle and springs were broken, and the radiator was smashed.

Steele looked carefully at the interior. The car, like all Chryslers of its type, had a single switch on the dashboard which controlled both the ignition and the lights.

He called Gray's attention to the fact that the small parking-lights were still on, and that the gear lever was in neutral.

The inspector nodded. "No indication that the driver was injured, is there?"

"No," Steele said. "I doubt if he was injured."

"You don't think for a minute that the driver could have been any one except Fraim? Man, it's dead open and shut, as I see it. He has the motive.

"He sends a fake telegram calling the servant away, drives out here, parks near the gate—Mrs. Wentworth, a neighbor, saw a car there about seven fifteen—and walks up to the house. How he got in, I admit we still have to find out. But he killed Stewart, and then ran back to his car.

"He drove away fast, skidded in the snow here, and went over the embankment. So, with the machine wrecked here, he had to invent the theft story."

Steele nodded. "The motor theft story to evade consequences of some trouble is an old dodge," he agreed. "But in this case, would Fraim, deliberately planning such a crime, have been asinine enough to use his own car, when some one could have obtained another for him? And why, if this car was wrecked here accidentally, did Fraim pause to take it out of gear and switch on the parking-lights after the smash?"

"The impact may have jolted the gear-lever out, Steele."

"But it couldn't have switched on the parking-lights."

"Perhaps he was driving with those on instead of his headlights. Perhaps he did that to avoid being seen so far, and possibly that's why he ran off the road."

"Now, Harry, surely you are familiar with the switch in this type of Chrysler car. The ignition and lights are combined. It is impossible to run the motor of this car with these parking-lights on. That is peculiar to Chryslers. Now, why, if Fraim wrecked the car here accidentally, did he pause to turn on the parking-lights? The motor certainly must have stalled."

"He might have stopped to do it," his friend maintained.

"Oh, yes; that's true. He might have," Steele agreed.

They spent about twenty-five minutes in their examination, while a bus and several other machines passed along the Arborway above them. Then Gray drove back to Stewart's residence. As they approached, he pointed in surprise to a large sedan which stood across the road from the slain man's gate, facing the city.

"The commissioner!" he exclaimed. "I wonder how long he's been here."

"Between fifteen and twenty minutes," his companion offered.

"How on earth do you know?"

Steele smiled faintly and indicated the wheel-tracks in the softening snow which had drifted at the side of the Arborway.

"The truck which passed a short time ago, and the roadster which passed fifteen minutes ago, were forced to turn out for his car," he stated. "The bus which passed twenty minutes ago, wasn't."

CHAPTER VIII

OILY FINGERS

DETECTIVE FRANK REILLY was busy investigating along a line of his own.

Experience had taught him that in cases of unexplained tragedy, the key to the puzzle may often be found among the letters and papers of the victim; and he intended to make a thorough search of Roscoe Stewart's study, library, and bedroom.

Upon arriving at the house, after leaving Inspector Gray and Malcome Steele, he discovered to his astonishment that no less an official than the commissioner of police was already following the same method of inquiry.

The commissioner, aided by a special officer, was busy examining the contents of Stewart's desk in the study. Reilly did not presume to enter the room until his superior had finished.

When he did enter, he delayed his search of the desk until the last, believing that he could discover little after the commissioner had been over the ground.

In the top drawer, however, his sharp eyes eventually found something which had escaped the older man's notice.

This was a box of cartridges of forty-five caliber made for use in a well known type of service revolver. The box was more than half filled.

It occurred to Reilly that it was a trifle strange for Stewart to have kept revolver cartridges close at hand in his desk, but no revolver. A careful search of the study failed to reveal a weapon.

He sent for the servant, Johnson.

Johnson was a small, pale, meek man, who acted as though he had received a great deal of harsh treatment in his life. He inclined his head respectfully when Reilly showed his badge.

"How long have you been in Mr. Stewart's service?" the detective inquired.

"Six years, sir."

"Ever known him to act afraid of anything?"

Johnson hesitated. "I—can't say that I have, sir—"

"Well, now, I mean, did he ever act like he was afraid?"

"N-no, sir; not unless it was by his insistence upon having the house securely locked at night. He was always quite particular about that."

"Sure. That was the way we found it last night. Do you know if he kept a gun in the house?"

"Yes, he did."

"Where?"

" Right there in the desk which you have been examining, sir."

" Is it there now?"

" I certainly presume so. It was there—"

He stopped as Reilly exhibited the top drawer.

" W-why—that's strange, sir."

" You've no idea what become of it?"

" I certainly haven't! It was there the other day—"

" All right," said Reilly, looking at him keenly. " Now, about that fake telegram you got yesterday."

" I—I've no idea who could have sent it, sir—"

" Exactly what time did it come?"

" Shortly after five o'clock."

" Humph. Was Mr. Stewart here then?"

" No, sir. He was down town. I left a note for him, explaining that I was called away—"

" Oh, then you knew he was goin' to be back soon?"

The man nodded. " I knew he would be back before seven thirty, for he had an appointment here with a Mr. Fothergill."

" Oh, with a Mr. Fothergill, eh?"

" Yes, sir."

" All right, me man. That's all now. You can go out."

" Yes, sir."

Left alone, Reilly again looked thoughtfully at the cartridges. In his mind, the missing revolver bulked large. Who had taken it? Who, besides Stewart and Johnson, knew that it was kept in the study?

A discoloration at the bottom of the cardboard box caught his attention. He scrutinized it carefully; then tipped out the cartridges in his hand and examined it from the inside.

He poured the cartridges back, and found his fingers moist and sticky. Taking out several, he smelled them.

" Oil," declared Reilly.

He frowned in perplexity.

Then he caught his breath and peered at the cover of the box. Distinct upon its surface, just below the manfacturers' name, were the oily prints of two small, slender fingers.

Reilly carried the box to the window. He found it impossible to decide how recent the prints were. But there were made with the same oil which had soaked into the bottom of the box. Machine oil.

And this was a small hand. A woman's hand.

His next move was to interview the other servants. The cook was immediately disqualified. She was extremely fat; she weighed over two hundred, he felt certain. Hilda Larsen's hands were much too large.

Mary O'Brien was a small, pretty girl; but Reilly liked Mary, and he was heartily glad when he saw that her fingers were short and oval instead of long and slender.

He sent again for Johnson.

" Tell me, Johnson," urged Reilly confidentially, " is there a Mrs. Stewart?"

" Yes, sir. Mrs. Stewart is in Europe."

" Oh, in Europe, eh?"

" Yes, sir."

" An' about how long has she been there, now?"

" Mrs. Stewart has been away since early November, sir."

" Humph," mused Reilly. " There's no other ladies livin' here, I suppose?"

" Miss Virginia lives here, sir."

" Miss Virginia?"

" Mr. Stewart's daughter. She is in Philadelphia—I—no—begging your pardon, inspector—I am informed that she is back in town this forenoon, and has been told of Mr. Stewart's death."

" An' how long has Miss Stewart been in Philadelphia?"

" A little more than a week."

" She's not been to the house since she came back, I suppose?"

" No, sir; I think not."

Again Reilly stood deep in thought for a moment.

" All right, Johnson," he decided. " That's all."

CHAPTER IX

THE SECOND GENERATION

VIRGINIA STEWART came to the house shortly before noon. She was a slender girl of twenty-two, with clear complexion and large, full blue eyes.

Although she was pale, Frank Reilly could not escape the vague impression that she suffered more from the shock of the tragedy than from a very keen grief. A friend, Dorothy Welford, accompanied her.

At his first opportunity, the young detective apologized in his best manner for intruding, and explained that he had been assigned to clear up the circumstances of her father's death.

He presented a document which he had found in a closet upstairs, and asked the girl whether it had any significance to her.

There were several papers bound by a clip, the top sheet thickly covered with dust. She took them in an unsteady hand, but returned them almost immediately. The papers comprised a memorandum of a merger of the business interests of Clarence Faulkner and Thomas Strong.

"I—don't think I've ever seen this—" she said in a weak voice.

Reilly thanked her, placed the dusty papers carefully in a big envelope, and left the room. Although apparently disappointed, he had obtained exactly what he desired. He had obtained an excellent set of finger-prints made by Virginia Stewart.

He went at once to Captain Peters, the finger-print expert of the department, taking the papers and also the cover of the cartridge box.

The captain was an expert in every sense of the word, and he worked swiftly and surely. In the early afternoon Reilly returned to Stewart's home with the information he desired.

This time he found the girl with Grafton Duncan, the young man whom he had seen at the house on the previous evening. From the nature of their interview Reilly immediately decided that he was intruding.

He withdrew to the butler's pantry and chatted with Mary O'Brien for a half hour. When a glance into the library showed him that Miss Stewart was at liberty, he paused long enough to assure Mary that he hoped he might talk with her again.

He entered the library, hat in hand.

"Beggin' your pardon once more, Miss Stewart," he ventured, respectfully, "but may I speak with you for a few minutes?"

She turned. It was apparent that she was maintaining composure with an effort. Yet, as before, Reilly was almost certain that he discerned more of shock and bewilderment than of sorrow.

"Yes. What is it?"

"This is Detective Reilly of headquarters, ma'am," he said. "I was speakin' with you a few minutes this mornin'. Beggin' your pardon for askin' the question, ma'am, but I'm told you have not seen your father since you left for Philadelphia about eight or nine days ago?"

She responded very quietly. "No."

"It was this mornin' you returned, ma'am?"

"Yes."

He studied her for an instant with his bright blue eyes.

"You wasn't here last evenin' by any chance, Miss Stewart?"

The girl started, raising her glance to meet his for a second.

"W-why—as a matter of fact," she replied. "I'm amazed that you have guessed it—but I did almost come to the house last evening."

"Sure, an' would you tell me, miss," he asked courteously, "what you mean when you said you 'almost come to the house'?"

"I came in my friend's car," she explained. "We had just motored from Philadelphia, and at first I thought I would come home, although my friend, Miss Welford, wished me to spend the evening at her home. We—we drove here, almost to the door—"

"Yes, miss? Did you see Mr. Stewart at that time?"

"Oh, no," she hastened, "we didn't come in. We stopped on the Arborway, near the fence. We were there several minutes—Miss Welford was trying to persuade me. I saw that the house was all dark, and thought every one was away—so I went with her to her home."

"An', if you please, ma'am, about what time was this?"

"I think it was shortly after seven."

The detective considered, frowning again. This seemed to tally with the automobile which a neighbor had observed. He studied Virginia Stewart more closely. It seemed impossible, heartless, to attempt to connect this girl with—

But he had his duty to perform. He cleared his throat.

"It's very sorry indeed I am to be askin' this question, ma'am," he said quietly, "but I must know when it was, and why, that you took your father's revolver."

She gasped and pressed her hand to her lips—a gesture of fright and bewilderment.

"I—I—why, I don't know what you mean!"

"Isn't it the truth that you took Mr. Stewart's revolver from his desk?"

"Certainly I have never taken his revolver!"

"Did you know that he kept one there, ma'am?"

Her eyes were wide, her lips parted. "Y-yes—"

"But you have not taken it?"

"Positively not! I—I don't understand—"

"Did you take any of his cartridges, miss?"

She caught her breath. Her voice seemed frozen.

"Tell me, please, Miss Stewart," Reilly insisted. "Did you take any of Mr. Stewart's cartridges?"

"No, I did not." Her tone was calmer.

"Can you explain to me, then, ma'am, how it is that your finger-prints are so plain on the box of cartridges?"

The girl drew back, very pale, and sank into a chair.

"Indeed I'm sorry to be causin' you so much alarm, ma'am!" declared Reilly earnestly. "But don't you see that you must tell me what you have done with Mr. Stewart's revolver?"

"But—but I—I haven't taken the revolver!"

The girl collapsed utterly. In a few broken sentences she told him all that she knew.

CHAPTER X

A CALL TO HEADQUARTERS

THE late afternoon brought two developments in the case.

The first was the release of John Egan, the vagrant who had been arrested on Stewart's grounds. The police could not hold him more than twenty-four hours as an "s. p.," without bringing a definite charge against him.

As they had found no evidence to connect him with the lawyer's death, he was dismissed with a warning not to trespass on private grounds for the purpose of begging.

The second event was the recall of Detective Frank Reilly to headquarters. In response to the summons, Reilly came at once to the commissioner's office.

The police commissioner was a heavy, fleshy man, with a sagging lower lip and a general air of abstraction and disinterest in everything that he undertook.

He was really a very shrewd man, but few would have suspected it. When the young detective entered, nearly a minute passed before his superior glanced at him.

"Well, what is it?"

"You wanted to see me, sir? Frank Reilly?"

"Oh, yes. I damned well want to see you." The older man's glance hardened. "Reilly, when I detail a man to work on a case, I want him to go at that case with his mind open and his eyes open, instead of taking a preconceived notion that some fool has put in his head and sticking to it. What kind of police work do you call that?

"There's absolutely no reason at all to suspect Mr. Winslow Fraim in connection with this crime; but instead of getting to work and digging out the facts, you've been spending your time trying to pin something on him."

Reilly's face flushed. For a second he strove for words, while he wrung his felt hat in his hands.

"Well," his superior flung at him, "isn't that the the truth of it? Isn't that exactly what you've been trying to get away with?"

"No, it is not, sir!" the youth returned with spirit. "Me nor any one else on the case, sir! We've not been tryin' to hang anythin' on any one! We don't believe in railroadin' folks, Mr. Commissioner!"

"No? Then what are you trying tc tie up Mr. Fraim in this thing for? He's given you a satisfactory explanation of how his automobile happened to be there, hasn't he? But you've got your mind made up—"

"No, sir, I have not!" Reilly cut in. "As a matter of truth, I've not been considerin' Mr. Fraim at all. I don't think he done it. I think the case is too plain. To my way of thinkin', some one is tryin' to send him up for it. But it ain't me, Mr. Commissioner—an' I think before long I can prove who it is."

His superior studied him. "Then how is it he's been questioned twice at his apartment?"

"I—I think Inspector Gray done that, sir—"

"Oh, I see! Well, I was told it was you. Now, if you're going at this with an open mind, let's hear what progress you've made. What have you got to show for it? What line *are* you taking?"

Reilly hesitated. "Well—it's like this, sir. Have you ever heard tell anythin' about Mr. Stewart's wife?"

The commissioner shook his head.

"I'm told she's an awful speedy-actin' woman," confided the young detective. "She's his second wife, by the way. Sure, she can do what she likes with his money now, I guess. He got rid of his first wife three years ago, after he set himself up in this fast bunch that calls themselves smart society."

The older man caught his breath. "Never mind society, Reilly! Let's have—"

"Sure, an' that's what I'm comin' to, sir!" the other returned indomitably. "They can call themselves what they please; but I pray God no kin of mine will ever get into society like that. Young women taken home drunk from their parties, and all such things.

"To be sure, they had a complaint here at headquarters about one of Stewart's festivals; and it's proud I'd be if I could say the department went through with it instead of hushin' it up. Mr. Stewart wanted none of his first wife in such society as that. So what does he do but he frames her up, three years ago, an' gets a divorce an' marries again.

"He fixed things so he got custody of the daughter, too; an' since then I hear he ain't never brought her up as a young girl should be. The mother was bitter about it. So was her brother, a man named Frank Armitage, of Atlanta—he's here in town this week. So was a young chap named Duncan who's in love with the daughter.

"An' not two weeks ago there was an altercation between Stewart an' young Duncan; and Stewart told Duncan if ever he come to the house again and talked to him like that—"

"Like what?"

"About the way he'd been bringin' up his daughter, sir. He said if Duncan ever talked to him like that again, he'd shoot him. It was heard by two of the household, sir. So now do you see what I'm workin' on, Mr. Commissioner?"

The older man was silent. He was amazed.

"An' sure, there's a box of cartridges with the daughter's finger-prints in machine oil, in Mr. Stewart's desk—as no doubt you yourself must have seen when you was goin' through his papers."

The commissioner returned a blank stare.

"You are observant, Reilly," he admitted at length.

"I try to be that, sir."

"Where did you get all this dope about the wife and the daughter?"

Reilly hesitated.

"Come, come, man! Out with it! Where did you get it?"

"From—from Mary O'Brien, a girl that works at the house—"

"Humph. All right. Go back and finish what you've started."

"Thank you—I will, sir!"

When Reilly had gone, the commissioner seized the telephone and called his chief of detectives.

"Morgan, I've changed my mind. Put Reilly back on that case! And send Garrity to work with him, instead of Gray."

CHAPTER XI

SOME STARTLING DISCLOSURES

REILLY and Steele had been working along entirely different lines all day. Fate decreed that the results of their efforts should appear simultaneously.

Shortly before nine in the evening, the

police commissioner was called at his residence and was informed that important action had been taken in the Stewart case.

His secretary made the call, and was unable to state just what action had occurred. A man had come to the office informing him that an arrest had been made, and desiring to speak with the commissioner in person.

The commissioner sent for his car and rode at once to headquarters. Climbing the stairs laboriously, with his cigar dropping ashes on his dinner jacket, he stopped short when he found himself facing Malcome Steele. He nodded a cool salutation.

The commissioner did not like Steele. He hadn't anything personal against him; but, being of a peculiar temperament, he was inclined to regard any independent investigator as a potential enemy.

He passed on into his office, where his secretary waited.

" What the devil—is it Steele who's got action on the Stewart case?"

" Mr. Malcome Steel, of the National Detective Agency; yes, sir. I understood him to say that an arrest has been made."

The commissioner sat down heavily and uncomfortably.

" Damn! " he muttered. " Who—where was the arrest?"

" He didn't say, sir. Reilly is here, too, Mr. Commissioner; and he says he has something very important."

" Send them both in. And you stay. I won't talk to Steele alone."

The secretary complied. The two investigators entered—Reilly flushed with suppressed excitement; Steele surveying the others thoughtfully with his deep gray eyes, his face expressionless.

" Well, Mr. Steele," the commissioner challenged abruptly, " what's on your mind?"

The director of the private agency returned a faint smile.

" I thought, Mr. Commissioner, that it might interest you to read a statement made this evening at police headquarters in Springfield."

The official scowled. " In Springfield? What statement? Who made it?"

Without further comment, Steele laid a paper on his desk: *" Statement made to Captain Burgess, Office of the Chief of Police, Springfield, in the presence of James Keliher, Stenographer.*

" Yes; I planned to get Roscoe Stewart. the blackguard! He defrauded me of shares worth two hundred and fifty thousand in Denver. It was a ' legal robbery.' You know what that is, probably. The law can't touch him for it.

" But it was a swindle, and I made up my mind that both he and his partner, Fraim, would pay.

" Yes; I'm telling you: I planned deliberately to murder Stewart and to make Fraim pay for it. For a year I've had detectives watching them, trying to get one or both of them legally. But they were too influential and too clever.

" I learned of their quarrel, and I came East, ready to act. It was my chance to make one pay for the other's death. No one in this part of the country knew that I had reason to injure Stewart or Fraim.

" In New York I hired an assistant, for really a very small sum—a crook who is well known there. He impersonated a fictitious Valentine Morse and made certain that Fraim could have no alibi for the hour of Stewart's death, although he would think he had a good one.

" My purpose was to make Fraim tell a story which would be absolutely unbelievable. So I took his car from in front of his door, drove it to a place on the Arborway not far from Stewart's, and waited there in it until I felt sure Stewart's chauffeur had gone to supper.

" I had already eliminated Johnson by a telegram. In the car I attired myself in a way that I thought would keep Stewart from recognizing me until the last instant, if he should catch sight of me. I knew he was there in the house, alone, waiting to confer with a supposed client whose name he thought was Fothergill.

" At the right time I got out and pushed Fraim's car over the edge of the embankment, to make it look like an accident. It was snowing hard, and I knew there'd be no footprints.

" I went at once to his grounds, carrying an automatic pistol with a silencer, a set of skeleton latchkeys, and a jimmy. The keys, however, proved useless, as Stewart had bolted the doors.

"The house was all dark except the study downstairs. I approached, and saw Stewart sitting at his desk. For a moment I was on the point of plugging him through the window, then and there.

"But an automobile had stopped on the Arborway near the grounds, and I didn't want to risk the crashing glass. It would give the lie to the Fraim theory later.

"Stewart looked up suddenly; and I was mortally afraid that he had seen and recognized me. There was terror in his face. I went at once in search of the telephone wires, and cut them. It seems now that I wasn't quick enough in finding them.

"With my keys useless, I picked one of the dining room windows and tried to force it. But the lock was unusually strong. Anyway, I'm not used to forcing windows.

"The first thing I knew, there was a flash of fire inside and the roar of a gun. I looked in—and right where the light from a street lamp fell on the floor I saw Stewart, lying mortally wounded.

"Before God I swear that I don't know who shot him. It was no accomplice of mine. I threw away my pistol and jimmy and started to run, for I was afraid the shot would attract attention.

"As I ran, some one began blowing a whistle and shouting for the police, and near the gate I was seen by three officers and captured.

"I thought it was all up then. But soon I reflected that my disguise was good, that no one knew I had any motive, and that I might get away with it yet and implicate Fraim. I gave my name as John Egan and sat tight.

"I did get away with it, too, until you arrested me to-night. Had Fraim been brought into my presence, it would have been all off. But he wasn't, and the police there let me go.

"I am making this statement now because Captain Burgess tells me it will save me from the charge of murder. I swear solemnly that I didn't murder Stewart, although I fully intended to.

"Signed—FREDERICK WESTHAVER."

The commissioner glanced up from the paper, his lip sagging.

"Have you read this, Reilly?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Steele showed it to me."

"Humph," said his superior, in a dull way. "How did you happen to have this man rearrested, if I may ask, Mr. Steele?"

The private investigator smiled faintly again. "He changed his clothes."

"I don't understand—"

"I suspected him because of one remark that he made while impersonating a tramp at station eighteen. He wasn't familiar with a well-known expression among hobos. Every genuine tramp in the country must know that 'breezing it' means stealing a train-ride, but John Egan didn't.

"When he was released I sent an operative, Brown, to shadow him. He was careful enough until he left this city. He went on a freight train. So did Brown.

"But in Springfield Mr. Egan went into a lodging house as a tramp and emerged as a gentleman. My operative found a police officer and had him arrested before he could continue his travels. He had bought a ticket West."

"Humph!" declared the commissioner. "But still we don't know—"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," interrupted Reilly, "but we do know. Sure, I've been only waitin' for the medical examiner's report before I told you how Stewart was killed.

"Two weeks ago, sir, he threatened to shoot Mr. Grafton Duncan if ever he come to the house an' talked to him like that again. An' his daughter, Miss Virginia, her that's in love with Duncan, hears him. Sure, what does she do?

"She knows he always keeps a loaded gun in that desk. But when she was young she used to go hunting with her father. She was told once that if cartridges gets oil on them they're useless.

"What does she do, I'm askin' you, sir? She admits it now. One night she takes all the cartridges—them in the revolver, too—and soaks them in machine oil. Thinkin' to spoil them all for shootin' if ever her father should lose his head in anger, see? But oil don't always spoil the cartridge, Mr. Commissioner.

"Sometimes it spoils the load, but not the primer. In the first cartridge Stewart fired last night, only the load was spoiled. The primer goes off, with just strength enough to push the bullet up into the barrel of the gun.

"Then the next cartridge, mind you—it wasn't reached by the oil at all. It goes off full charge; and with another bullet already in the barrel, the only thing it can do it bursts the gun. It bursts a jagged sliver right out of it, through Stewart's eye into his head. But he must uv been holdin' the thing in a damn queer position to uv got it, even at that."

The commissioner stared at him.

"But, man, if that theory's true," he bellowed, "what became of the bursted revolver? Did it evaporate?"

Reilly flushed crimson.

"No, Mr. Commissioner," he replied mildly. "Bein' made of good metal, it couldn't evaporate. But I'm figurin' that when the first party of police officers come into the room in the dark, one of them must uv struck his foot ag'in' it accidental-like and kicked it right through that hole in the wall which goes into the chimney.

"I got to thinkin' it over about supper time, sir—so I goes down cellar an' digs open the base of the chimney. An' sure, here's the forty-five revolver, sir, with the jagged hole burst in it!"

The telephone jangled harshly. The commissioner took it up.

"Police commissioner's office?"

"Commissioner talking!" he barked.

"This is McQueen, the medical examiner. That Stewart report you wanted—the bullet caliber, you know? Say—that wasn't a bullet at all; it was a jagged piece of gun-barrel about one-fourth of an inch in width. Defective material, I should say—"

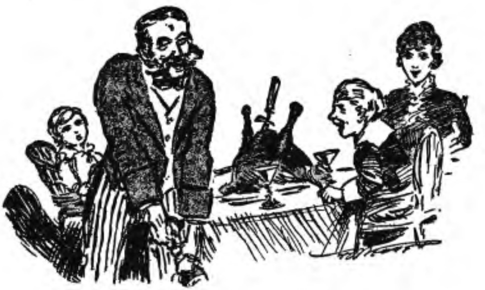
The commissioner sat glancing vacantly from Reilly to the signed statement on his desk. Gradually his frown disappeared.

"W-well—" he opined, "I don't see but this lets Fraim out altogether, doesn't it?"

"Oh, sure, sir," replied Reilly instantly. "'Tis plain now that Mr. Fraim had nothin' to do with it."

"Reilly, on account of this piece of work you are in line for promotion!" said the police commissioner warmly.

THE END



Chantrelle opened a bottle of champagne for Christmas dinner

A DRAMA OF HIGH PASSIONS

By Robert W. Sneddon

NO MORE REVEALING LOVE LETTERS HAVE EVER APPEARED IN PRINT THAN THESE BETWEEN PROF. CHANTRELLE AND HIS LOVELY PUPIL, MISS DYER

A Story of Fact

R. L. STEVENSON was still in the city of Edinburgh, still divided between the profession of advocate and writer, when the trial of Eugene Marie Chantrelle for the murder of his wife, Elizabeth, was held in the Court of Justiciary. It did not occur to him, however, to seize upon its harrowing features and convert them into literature as "A Scottish Tragedy."

Yet here was material ready to his hand, though not a tale of mystery unless it were the mystery of human depravity, not a tale of treasure unless it were the treasure of a woman's love.

But master romancer in embryo as Stevenson was, he did not discern the romance of this case.

To him, no doubt, as to his bewigged brothers at the bar it was no more, no less than a sordid tragedy of domestic infelicity, a greedy murder for gain, a husband in pecuniary difficulties slaying his wife for her insurance money.

Lost upon him was that dramatic scene in court, which no melodramatic playwright so far as I know has ever dared to lift from the realms of real life onto the stage, of the child of these unhappy parents bearing witness against his father.

There was no appeal to him as a novelist in the revelation of the wild, untamed passion of a conventionally brought up girl, of her surrender to the fascinations of a man and a foreigner many years older than herself.

He did not see pathos in the girl wife clinging to the respectability of a marriage so soon to be loveless, for the sake of her children and to avoid against affronting that dour and stern Scots convention which she had once challenged.

To divorce in those days there was attached almost as much of a stigma as love without wedlock. It was not for honest women. It was almost out of the question for a married woman like Elizabeth Chantrelle.

The case would have delighted Balzac, great historian of that civil warfare between good and evil which rages within the human breast.

Teacher and Pupil

And to us, writer and reader, who are interested in all that concerns humanity, the depths to which it may descend, the heights of divine sacrifice to which it may rise, the case of the Chantrelles is full of drama.

Teachers of foreign languages in young ladies' academies were then as a rule elderly and broken down foreigners eking out a miserable and tormented existence in a strange land. But the new teacher of French at Newington Academy was a surprise to the young ladies.

He was young, only thirty-two. He was handsome with his dark hair and fetching sideburns, his straight nose, flashing teeth, dancing eyes and vivacious gestures and speech. He had a delightful name, Eugene Marie Chantrelle.

He had the bearing of a soldier. Concealed beneath his sleeve was the scar of a saber cut received while fighting at the barricades as a Communist in Paris in 1851. He had left his country because a Napoleon sat on the throne.

And as he stood at his desk and surveyed the class one young girl drew a long breath and closed her eyes dreamily. Here was the hero of her dreams, the Prince Charming, the Young Chevalier.

Traitorous utterance as it may seem to my birthplace, Scotland though renowned for its gallant men is not renowned for the beauty or feminine charm of its women, stanch and true as they are.

You may spend a week in Edinburgh without seeing a single beauty to equal the many you may see within an hour in any American city. But when an Edinburgh beauty is encountered the man who is free of other loves is ready to swear her fair beyond compare.

And such a beauty was Elizabeth Cullen Dyer. Slender, of medium height, with hair of a golden red, expressive eyes, a complexion clear and painted by nature alone. She was only fourteen, budding into womanhood, when Chantrelle saw her first in his class.

At first he did not notice her, she was only a schoolgirl stumbling over her French verbs, annoying him with her faulty accent, but gradually his eyes rested on her more often than on any other. He found excuses to speak to her after class was over, to meet her in secret, before he met her family.

How that meeting came about he told eleven or so years later with a careless indifference.

The First Meeting

"I became acquainted with the family, eighteen months or two years after I became acquainted with herself. The way in which I first came to visit at her parents' house was this.

"I gave some of my pupils, but not Miss Dyer, tickets to a phrenological lecture, and shortly afterward one of these pupils gave me a ticket to another lecture, at which I saw them, and also Miss Dyer with her brother John.

"On leaving the lecture I accompanied home the Misses Stuart who were intimate friends of mine. Miss Dyer and her brother came along, with a Miss Smith.

"The Stuarts and I thought at the time that was forward on their part. After leaving them, John Dyer and Miss Smith walked on and I followed with my late wife. Dyer and Miss Smith disappeared and I had to take Miss Dyer home.

"I did not then go into the house, but a day or two afterward she asked me why I did not come to see her at home. She said her papa and mamma would be glad to see me, and an evening was fixed, when I called.

"I afterward learned from her mother that while she was happy to see me, her daughter had not asked leave for me to call."

Chantrelle was a native of Nantes, that city in which close to five thousand victims of the French revolution perished by drowning, being imprisoned in barges which were sunk in the river.

His father was a shipowner who gave him an excellent education followed by a course of study at Nantes Medical School continued at Strassburg and Paris.

Of Two Minds

After his communistic escapade he went to America, but what he did there is not recorded. He came across the Atlantic again to England, and taught languages in several cities before coming to Edinburgh.

He was an excellent linguist, a man of culture, and had a good address, and it was not long before he was teaching classes in several of the leading educational establishments of the city.

He even compiled several books on the French language which were adopted as text books. He added to his income by giving tuition in French, German, Latin and Greek.

It was little wonder that a schoolgirl was fascinated by this traveled, polished man of the world. Little wonder that she should have given herself to him.

We have several of her letters written in this period, with one or two of his, and reading them, we can see the respective characters of Elizabeth Chantrelle and Eugene. There is no sacrilege in giving this poor girl's letters to the public. None can point a finger of scorn or contempt. They were written from the heart and can evoke nothing but sympathy.

"My darling Eugene," she writes in one, "how could you for one moment suppose I would cease loving you? Dear Eugene, I really love you, I am sure as much as you love me. Did you get the note I put into your coat pocket? I am very sorry I have not been able to get beside you.

"I have not been out; you have no idea how well I am watched. But you know, dear, it is a great comfort to think you are so near me. I think you had better not walk so much in the square as people will be wondering what handsome gentleman it is, walking so often.

"I am in an awful hurry in case of mamma. I have only written because I could not get beside you, but will try. If your windows are to the front, sit at them and I will pass on the other side. Believe me, my own darling Eugene, ever your truly loving Lizzie. Burn this."

And what sort of a letter was Chantrelle writing, a cold brief note such as this:

"I cannot answer your note just now. I will as soon as I can. In the meantime, don't come over now. I wish you not to do so and moreover command you not to come. To-morrow I will see what can be done."

He has betrayed this girl, and his first thought is of letting her go upon her lonely path, but in spite of himself, her loveliness holds him to her. He is in half a mind to marry her, and tells her so, and she is jubilant, and then almost afraid she may not be worthy of him. He is still uncertain.

"Kisses Without Number"

"My darling Eugene," she tells him. "How very miserable you left me last night. I am sure when you spoke of giving me up you did not mean it. Really I could not live. The idea of your saying that I would soon forget you.

"Oh, Eugene, you do not know how I love you. I could never bear any one else to kiss or pet me. If it was broken off I would die. You think, perhaps, I do not mean it, but, really, I could not live without your love.

"I do so wish it was all settled. I think, dear, you think I do not love you, but the day seems to be twice as long when you are not coming.

"I heard Maggie say that surely I must be ill because I am so quiet. Will you settle it with papa and tell him to say yes or no. If no, we must be married without his consent as I could not live without you.

"I feel my love increasing daily as I am never content but with you. My darling Eugene, you do not know how intensely I love you, far more than I did. How different it will be when we are married, we shall have no one to bother us.

" I do wish we were married. I shall be so *very, very* faithful to you, my darling. I wish I had you here, but as it is impossible at present, I send you kisses without number. Ever yours, Lizzie."

Letters such as these roused a responsive spark in Chantrelle, for we find him writing:

She Does Not Complain

" My dear Lizzie, I could not remain so long without seeing you. I'll call this evening. If you are not in, I'll conclude that you don't very much care for me. Why do you want to die, you foolish little puss, there are many happy days in store for you yet? Now mind, if you are not in, I shall be very unhappy and cross. Ever yours, Eugene."

Such doubts as were in his mind were very apparent to this girl who was only fifteen years old, and she is ready to sacrifice herself if it will make the man she adores happy. She writes to him:

" My darling Eugene, I have been thinking over everything and have come to the conclusion that if you do not wish to I shall never ask you to marry me. But should we be married I will be very true and obedient. You will do with me just as you please.

" That day I spent with you, I thought that if I was constantly confined to the house by illness I should be quite happy if I was only with you. All I want on earth is to be always with you.

" I would be as happy as the day is long, which I am not now. Will you excuse this scribble as I am writing outside of the dining room window. I tell you again, dear Eugene, that no one else ever had me—never. Can you believe it?

" But if you will not marry me, I will never do anything against your wish. With fondest love and many, many kisses, ever your loving Lizzie."

She suggests that perhaps it will be better for them both if she frees him from his engagements, and he answers sharply:

" Lizzie, I do not believe a single word you say. I am ready to fulfill all my engagements with you when the time comes even though it should bring me to shame and misery. My house is always open to you when you choose to come, but I never will enter yours again. Eugene."

Elizabeth's parents were much opposed to Chantrelle's affair with their daughter. They had no idea to what lengths it had gone, and that Chantrelle and Elizabeth had given each other written acknowledgments that they took each other as wife and husband respectively. But there was now a cogent reason for marriage.

Chantrelle had failed to come and see Elizabeth and she writes to him:

" The only thing I can do is to go away, as it is evident I cannot stay and have a baby at home. But, dear, I will try and remain till your classes are done so that if they annoy you, you can go, too. I will just do anything. The shorter my life is the better.

" I feel as if I would go mad. It is quite true what mamma says—that when you give yourself to a man he loses all respect for you. But I do not say so of you, Eugene. I do not complain. What is the use?

Chantrelle's Answer

" The thing is done and I am ruined for life. The only thing for me to do is to go to the streets and shorten my life as much as possible. I never thought—but it is useless speaking.

" Well, my darling, do not annoy yourself about anything pertaining to me, as it is all over now. If you do not intend coming again let me know. It will be the last time I will ever trouble you. Ever your very loving Lizzie."

And what does Chantrelle say to this generous release? Does he answer it as a lover should? No, he sits down to a callous review of what injury is done to his health and pocket by being annoyed and worried.

" My dear Lizzie, you want me to answer your letter. I am sure I don't know what to say. You say you love me, but I am at a loss to know whether you do or not. I dare say you think you do, but you seem so cool and possessed at times when I am unhappy, that I sometimes fancy you are deceiving yourself.

"I would not for the life of me cause you the slightest grief, and I think all I can do for you is to sacrifice my feelings altogether and let you have your own way in everything. I cannot marry you at present for many reasons.

"I scarcely know whether I shall be able to take you in July. I am quite willing to trust you, but I would not expose you to any temptation. I could not keep D"—Driggs, a young man who lodged with him—"with me if you were my wife.

When Love Is Gone

"I have no doubt you would be as true as most women, but you have told me so many stories that I cannot always believe what you say. If I loved you less I would take you more readily, because I would not be so jealous. You are so young, I must think for you, or we might both rush into endless misery.

"However, I suppose I must let you have your own way in the matter. You ask when you may see me. I really don't know, for I don't intend to come over to your house in a hurry.

"What is the use of making you and myself miserable? You have no idea when I get annoyed in that way, what it costs me in the loss of health and money.

"I don't care for it myself, but how are we to get married if I don't get on and if my health fails me. I really believe if we don't get on better, we had better give up. It would be the greatest relief I could get under the circumstances, for then I would have no anxiety for the future.

"If I had a fortune I should not care what you did. If you deceived me it would break my heart, but you would have something to live on. If you made me unhappy I could not get on and we should starve.

"Why do you not come over yourself? Come over this afternoon. I'll be waiting for you. Do come, darling, if you can. Ever your loving Eugene."

This ill-fated pair were married in August of 1868, and two months later their eldest child, Eugene, was born.

Even in that short space of time Chantrelle had shown that whatever love he held toward his wife was gone. Henceforth he was to abuse her, to make her the butt of his blasphemy, to lay violent hands on her, to terrify her with threats of poisoning and shooting her.

One time she writes to her mother from Portobello, a seaside resort near Edinburgh where they spent a month each year, that she had gone to bed and had been sleeping for an hour or so, when—

"I was awakened by several severe blows. I got one on the side of the head which knocked me stupid. When I came to myself I could not move my face, and this morning I found my jaw out of place, my mouth inside skinned and my face all swollen.

"The servants who sleep in the next room heard it all, also the woman to whom the house belongs. They heard him say he would make mince-meat of me, and terrible language.

"I am ashamed to see any of them. The only thing for me to do is to leave him and go to some quiet place with the children—Eugene and Louis—for he talks of smashing them, too.

Refuge in Tears

"If I had money I should be away. Should I consult a lawyer? I am sorry to trouble you, but if he murders me, you might have been sorry not to have heard from me."

And again about the same time Chantrelle struck her as she was nursing baby Louis and struck the baby. The servants heard him say twice he would murder her and the children, and they went for the police. Elizabeth heard them coming and ran downstairs and begged them to go away.

She consulted a lawyer once about obtaining a divorce, but gave up the idea when she realized the publicity it would entail.

From the united evidence of her servants throughout this trying period it was clearly demonstrated that not a harsh word escaped from this sorely wronged wife's lips. She took refuge in silence, in tears or left the room. She was a "nice gentle lady" at all times, and devoted to her children and her home. Sometimes when things became too unendurable she went to her mother's, but always returned to Chantrelle for the sake of her children and her fear of public exposure.

Chantrelle at first was prosperous, but he was spending his money lavishly not on his family, but his own pleasures. He was a heavy drinker and a constant visitor to certain houses in the town where mercenary love was dispensed.

On Christmas Day

A drunken, unfaithful husband, his habits began to injure his professional work. He paid small attention to it. His classes grew smaller, and fewer pupils came to him for private tuition. He was in difficulties and owing money.

In October of 1877 he insured Elizabeth's life for one thousand pounds in case of death by accident. He made sure by inquiry of the agent as to what constituted "accidental death."

Elizabeth, who lived in constant dread of her husband now, had objected to this insurance and been silenced. A few days before her death she visited her mother.

"My life is insured now, and, mamma," she said, "you will see that my life will go soon after the insurance."

"You are talking nonsense," her mother replied. "You should not be afraid of that. There's no fears of that."

"I cannot help thinking it. Something within me tells me it will be so," said Elizabeth somberly.

But a year before Chantrelle had assaulted her and neighbors had summoned the police who had arrested Chantrelle. He had cursed and sworn as he was being removed, "I'll do for her yet." He had been convicted of breach of the peace and bound over to keep the peace.

Lately he had betrayed a conciliatory attitude which under the circumstances was more terrifying to Elizabeth than open brutality, yet even then she was eager to do anything to create a harmonious atmosphere for her children.

There was a new baby, too. She never quite lost hope that Chantrelle would reform. She did not know that only a short while before he had tried to take liberties with a young servant, who had come in to help her faithful Mary Byrne, a devoted Irish servant.

Christmas Day came and to all appearances the family was united. Chantrelle opened a bottle of champagne for dinner, and sent his wife and the two boys to the theater. He gave them money to take a cab home.

On New Year's Day Mrs. Chantrelle gave Mary Byrne a holiday, and Mary was out until about ten o'clock. When she came back she found her mistress in bed with the baby, and complaining of feeling ill.

She had always had good health, and the servant was surprised. Elizabeth asked Mary to give her some lemonade from a glass standing by the bed, and a piece of orange, and the servant did as she was asked and left her mistress. The gas was burning halfway up as usual. It was kept so all night.

A Smell of Gas

The servant heard nothing more during the night except the hushing of the baby by Master Eugene, which showed that Chantrelle had removed the baby from his wife's room and taken it to his own which he shared with the two boys. The servant's bedroom was next to that occupied by Chantrelle.

Between six and seven Mary Byrne rose, and as she was going downstairs to light the kitchen fire heard a strange sound from her mistress's bedroom.

The door was open and she looked in, and then went to the bed, and found Elizabeth unconscious and gasping. The gas was out, turned off, for there was no smell of gas in the room or elsewhere.

She ran into Chantrelle's bedroom and roused him. He took some time to come and she stood by her mistress's bed till he did come. She had told him his wife could not speak. Chantrelle bent over the bed. "Lizzie, what is wrong? Can't you speak?" It was the first time Mary had heard Chantrelle call his wife by name. He usually addressed her as *madame*.

He stood there, and then sent the servant to his own room saying he thought he heard the baby cry and she had better go and see what was the matter. She found the baby asleep and came back to the bedroom, just in time to see Chantrelle moving away from the window.

In a few minutes he asked her if she did not feel a smell of gas. She said she felt no smell, but soon afterward there was a strong smell of gas and she ran down and turned the gas off at the meter.

Indicted for Murder

Chantrelle who was a doctor in all but the possession of a degree, and prescribed for a number of private patients, mostly French people, dressed hastily and went out for a registered doctor. This was Dr. Carmichael who accepted Chantrelle's statement that his wife was suffering from gas poisoning. Carmichael set two assistants to giving artificial respiration, and called in Dr. Littlejohn, medical officer of the city, and Elizabeth was removed to Edinburgh Infirmary.

There Professor Maclagan, a poisons expert, came to the conclusion that the symptoms indicated not gas, but narcotic poisoning.

Elizabeth Chantrelle died that afternoon without regaining consciousness, leaving three children motherless. That which she had suffered and endured for, the bringing up and safeguarding of her children had been cut short by the hand of the man who should have shared that burden of love.

Maclagan had declared on first examination that he did not think it was a case of gas poisoning, but one of a narcotic poison, such as opium or morphia.

The post-mortem failed to show the presence of any narcotic poison, nor was there any signs of gas poison, no taint in the breath when alive, or taint in the body when opened after death.

Still the speedy absorption of narcotic poison might have obliterated all trace of it within some hours after administration. Chemical analysis yielded negative results.

This was rather a setback, but Mary Byrne directed attention to the night dress and the sheets used by her mistress. On them were stains of matter which had escaped from Mrs. Chantrelle's mouth.

These articles were submitte to Maclagan, Littlejohn and two other experts, who found unmistakable traces of opium. Chantrelle had a whole drug store in a closet, including extract of opium. He had bought a drachm of extract of opium on November 29.

Opium mixed rapidly with lemonade. The bitter taste was slight and covered by the taste of the lemonade. Opium could easily be conveyed in a lift of orange.

On the day on which Elizabeth Chantrelle was laid to rest, a funeral at which Chantrelle showed himself with tear-stained face, two men stepped up to him, and told him he was under arrest, and he was conveyed to Calton jail.

The indictment read that he had murdered his wife within his dwelling house in George Street, Edinburgh, by the administration of opium in lemonade and orange.

"She Was Funny!"

Three days later he made a declaration.

He was forty-three years old. He denied that he had administered poison of any sort to his wife. She was very seldom ill, and never had any serious ailment. When she was sick he prescribed for her and always put her right. Upon the whole they lived happily.

He then made statements damaging to Elizabeth, no longer there to defend herself.

"My wife had her peculiarities. I do not know whether she thought I was not sufficiently attentive to her. I was as attentive as I could be. I had a great deal to do. I was not at all jealous of her.

"We had a young man named Driggs, who had lived with me three years before our marriage, and continued to do so for one year after. There was a great deal of affection between my late wife and myself, but she was sometimes funny.

"For instance, when I was going out to teach at Leith High School, she would tell me she was going to drown herself. This happened several times and I would say: 'Nonsense, my dear. What would you do that for?'

"One Saturday, when she played the same game, I was so annoyed I said to her: 'Go and do it.' That would be five, not nine years ago.

"She was in the habit of washing herself in a tub in her bedroom before going to bed. On several occasions on my going up to her room after an hour afterward expecting to find her in bed, I found her stooping in a sitting posture, her head bent forward, her nose on the edge of the tub as if to put her face into the water.

"I frequently raised her up, and she appeared to be in a swoon, so that I had to lay her on the bed and rub her to bring her round. I soon came to think she was only feigning unconsciousness and told her so. She stopped it.

Jealousy Incarnate!

"She had not done anything of the kind I have described for about six years. I never thought that she seriously meant to make away with herself, but merely that reading penny trashy novels she had thought foolishly to reproduce the scenes she had read in them. My wife was the last person I could imagine trying to put an end to her life.

"If there was any bad feeling, we always made it up together. She was extremely jealous of me. On one occasion I was smoking and sipping my coffee after dinner when she came into the room and looked daggers at me. She asked me afterward what I meant by looking at 'that woman.' I assume she meant a woman whom I saw at a lodging house window opposite.

"With jealousy she kicked out of my house the Driggs family, Driggs, his mother and sister, who were worth two hundred and fifty pounds a year to me. She never got on with Mrs. Driggs, who had been a patient of mine three years previously.

"Sometimes when my wife was in the room, Mrs. Driggs would be lying on the sofa, and I sitting beside her in a low chair. She would be whispering to me about her illness, and when my wife saw this she would turn up her nose and walk out of the room.

"The way in which they came to be kicked out was this. My wife would never bring to me, when smoking after dinner, the glass ashtray, and out of politeness Miss Driggs would rise and do so. My wife said she did not like this, and there were some words between us.

"At this time I was told by young Driggs that my black servant had told his family that my wife had made some unpleasant remarks about them. I spoke to my wife about this. Next day she went to her mother, and when I came home I found her mother and sister sitting with Mrs. Driggs in my house.

"Mrs. Dyer refused to shake hands with me, which annoyed me on account of Mrs. Driggs's presence. I walked downstairs, and Mrs. Dyer and her daughter followed and even collared me to prevent me going out.

"I told them to leave my house, and when they would not, directed my black servant to go for the police, which he did not do. I afterward walked out disgusted and returned at ten o'clock, when I found a cab at the door and the Driggses going away.

To Enhance His Reputation

"Mrs. Dyer, her daughter and her son John being all in the house, I said: 'Now you see what you have done.' They all left with my wife, who returned next day and said she would come back if I behaved myself.

"I said I always did this and that she had better stay away altogether. She went back to her mother's, but returned in a couple of days as I knew she would. She could not be long at her mother's without a big fight.

"A complete rupture came about ultimately between me and my wife's family, and we got on much more smoothly. During the last two years we got on very smoothly."

Such were the trivial recollections of his dead wife which first occurred to this man under accusation of her murder. And then as he began to realize his position, he saw that to enhance his own reputation he must blacken hers. He did not hesitate to assail her.

"There were some things that occurred greatly to her disadvantage," he continued, "and as her friends are not likely to spare me, and are likely to say that I was harsh and unkind to her, whereas I am one of the kindest husbands that could be, kind to a degree, I am compelled to quote facts in support of my statement. When I say I was kind, I mean by that, forbearing and not resenting malice."

Let us see wherein his kindness consisted.

Chantrelle Snoops

"About three years ago, when we were on the very best of terms, I discovered my wife was carrying on an intrigue with a young man living in the same house. I made a noise about it."

He discovered what he called an intrigue in this way, as he tells. His wife accused him of kissing a servant, and though he called in the servant and got her to say it was untrue, his wife eventually dismissed the servant.

"She came back next day with an aunt and they were asking me at the door why she had been put away, when my wife, who had been listening, came up and made some remark.

"The servant said: 'You take men into the house when your husband is out.' I do not remember what my wife said, but I said to the servant girl: 'Who is it?' She replied: 'Mr. So and So,' naming a person downstairs.

"I went there and rang the bell, and fetched the party. I asked him in the presence of all if he had ever been in my house. He said he had, and made some excuse about bringing up the letters.

"I asked him if he was the postman—he said he was not. He said he had been in once or twice. I then said that will do, and he walked downstairs. The aunt and the servant then left. I then called on a lawyer, and he said if there was nothing serious I should be satisfied with an apology.

"I wrote to the young man for this, and got it. I did not entirely believe that there had been anything improper"—he had found out that his wife had spoken to the young man at the door about a dozen times—"between the young man and my wife, but I strongly suspected it because he avoided speaking to me or making my acquaintance."

Once upon the scent of something which he may hold as a weapon over his wife's head he keeps up the hunt. Listen to this man who assuredly was no admirer of the motto—Noblesse oblige.

"Suspecting there might be something more, I made an appointment with the said servant girl, and asked her if she knew anything more. She replied my wife had mentioned a young man whom she used to walk with before and meet at her mother's. He had given my wife a beautiful scent bottle and she had given him a cigar case, bought at a Miss Cooper's shop."

Such evidence might be suspect, coming from a servant girl who has been dismissed, but Chantrelle, his nose to the ground, follows the trail to Miss Cooper's shop.

"'By the way,' I said, 'my wife gave me a very pretty cigar case last Christmas.' The shopwoman said—she knew me: 'Yes, I sold it to your wife myself.'"

The Judas Kiss

Chantrelle bought a duplicate of this cigar case and went home. He asked his wife if she had anything to tell him before going to her mother's. She declared she had nothing to tell him, and they both went to Mrs. Dyer's.

There Chantrelle asked Elizabeth, in her mother's presence, if she had anything more to declare, and she said she had not. He told her the dismissed servant said she had given a cigar case to a young man and she denied this.

"I then asked her if she would swear on a Bible before God that she had never done so and she said she would. I then kissed her and we were all rejoicing together when I took the duplicate cigar case out of my pocket and showing it to them, asked my wife if she had never bought one like it.

"She denied having done so even after I had told her where I had bought it. She still denied it. She behaved like a panther and abused me by calling me a villain, a sneak, thief and scoundrel. Her mother then behaved like a thorough going liar. I asked her to go with me to the shop, but she would not, and said she did not believe me.

"I then walked home and shortly afterward my wife came home and abused me, and said she would go to London if I would only give the fare. I then said I would behave to her like a father if she would tell me all that happened and see if I could again forgive her."

Chantrelle who blandly confesses to having given his wife a Judas kiss of reconciliation just before he springs the cigar case upon her, now goes to lower depths.

The Trial Comes Up

He has learned that his wife and this young man, youthful friends of old standing, have apparently exchanged gifts. That is all he has to go upon in the matter, and even his wife denies that. Now he would have us believe that his wife confesses to adultery without one iota of evidence against her.

"She took a deal of persuasion and at length confessed to repeated adulterous intercourse with a certain young man, being the young man to whom she had given the cigar case, which she admitted having done. On her confession I forgave her and made it all up."

The young man had assailed his honor, the honor of a husband who himself was a frequenter of brothels, and he must be made to pay. He is a bank clerk.

Chantrelle goes to him and says he will charge him with an offense which will destroy his character, he will do so openly in front of the manager and directors. The young man defies him to do his worst, he has nothing to be ashamed of, but overnight reflection makes him change his mind.

Like the other victims of blackmail he knows that whether innocent or not an accusation is going to make trouble for him, and weakly he pays Chantrelle fifty pounds and writes him an apology.

This money Chantrelle says he sent to an aunt in Nantes to present to the Nantes Hospital.

In a second statement he modifies what he has said about his wife's health and state of mind. He states she was subject to fits of depression and threatened to take her life.

He had given her chloral hydrate, in the form of syrup of chloral, once or twice a month, to make her sleep at night, or as a stimulant during the day.

He was positive his wife had died from gas poisoning. He had discovered a broken gas pipe behind the shutter at the window, he had no idea there was such a pipe there.

The case came up for trial on May 7, 1878, before Lord Chief Justice Moncrieff.

The prisoner came into court, or was brought rather, dressed in mourning, wearing the white wrist bands then the masculine vogue for mourners. He was pale, but perfectly composed, and pleaded not guilty.

It was the endeavor of the prosecution to prove the cause of Elizabeth Chantrelle's death, and the part if any, taken by her husband in causing it.

It was plainly not suicide as the victim had been cheerful on the day preceding death, and had told a friend she would write to her in a day or two.

Threats of Poisoning

It was proved that Chantrelle was acquainted with the use of poisons, that he had opium in his possession, and that he had tried to mislead all persons concerned as to the cause of death.

He had protested innocence before being accused. He had been the first to mention poisoning in connection with himself.

Mary Byrne testified that two nights after the death there were policemen in the house, and Chantrelle said to her: "I wonder what brings them about the place. Do they want to make out that I poisoned my wife?"

The gas pipe behind the shutter in Mrs. Chantrelle's bedroom from which Chantrelle claimed came the escape of gas, was found to have been broken in such a way that it could not have been accidental, and Mary Byrne distinctly saw her master move away from the shutter.

Not until then was the slightest smell of gas escaping. It was only a few moments after the servant had noticed the smell that she ran down and turned the gas off at the meter. The gas was not on long enough to hurt any one.

As to Chantrelle's statement that he did not know there was a gas pipe there, plumbers gave evidence that he had stood by and watched them repair that very same pipe about a year earlier.

Chantrelle was the last person with deceased, and had given her orange and lemonade during the night. Their married relationship was bad, and witnesses had heard him threaten to poison Elizabeth in such a way as to defy detection.

The Boy Testifies

A most damaging item was the matter of insurance in relation to his dislike of his wife, his desire to be rid of her, and his pecuniary difficulties. The man was desperate for money to indulge his vices. He was at this time drinking a bottle of whisky a day, no watered stuff, but real Scotch. His creditors were pressing him.

Almost the first witness called by the prosecution was Eugene, the oldest child. He stood upon a stool in the witness box, and the Lord Advocate softened his gruff tones as he questioned the boy.

"I am the eldest of the family. Last New Year's day I had breakfast in the parlor with mamma and papa. Mamma had bacon, toast and tea to breakfast.

"Mamma sent me to look for a toy and when I returned, she was in the parlor. Mary was out, and I think Louis opened the door. I asked mamma if she was going out with baby, but I think she said 'No.' She was ill, though she did not say what was the matter with her. Papa came downstairs a little while afterward.

"He came into the parlor where we were and I think mamma said to him she was a little ill. Papa went out after that, taking Louis with him. They were out a good long while. After they went out mamma lay down on the sofa while I took baby.

"Mamma went into the dining room and I remained in the parlor with baby. I next saw mamma in the kitchen. I went up to the bedroom and when I came down again, she was in the parlor where I read her a story.

"When she was sitting at the parlor fire she vomited. It was like water. I was beside her and I held her head. She did not ask me to do it, but I did it because she did it to mine sometimes. I told papa when he came back. I think papa asked mamma if she were better and she said, 'No.'

"It was near dinner time and he asked mamma if she had been having champagne. She said she had not and he asked if she would like lemonade. She said she would and I was sent for three or four bottles.

"Papa also sent me and Louis for some grapes. We dined about five o'clock, but mamma did not eat anything. She lay down on the sofa. After dinner she put baby to bed and lay down beside him.

"That would be about six o'clock. I took her some lemonade and grapes and laid them at her bedside.

"Two of the bottles of lemonade which I took in had been drawn before that. Papa lay down on the sofa after dinner and afterward went out for a few minutes to the tobacconist's.

Evidence for the Defence

"Louis and I went to bed about half past nine. I went and said good night to mamma before going to the nursery. She was awake in her room and baby was with her. Her gas was a little lighted. She kissed me and said good night.

"I did not think there was any difference in her. She looked as usual. I did not notice whether she had taken the lemonade or the grapes. I asked her if she felt better.

"Papa brought baby to my bedroom. He remained for about ten minutes and then went away. I was awake when he came to bed, I don't know how long after he brought baby.

"I heard Mary come in in the morning and tell papa that mamma was ill. I recollect papa going for the doctor. He told Mary not to let me into mamma's room, but Louis and I went in.

"I recollect the doctor coming. I smelled gas that morning when we were in the room. It was after the doctor came. I went in after Louis the first time and I did not feel it then.

"We used to sleep in mamma's bedroom, but we gave up doing that before the New Year. When we went into the room after papa went for the doctor, there were small bits of orange on the stool. I did not notice any marks on the bed. I noticed after mamma was removed that there were stains on the bolster. I also saw a yellowish mark on the sheet.

"My papa and mamma got on well sometimes. I don't know any reason why they did not get on well. He called her bad names. I have heard him swear at her. Mamma never used bad names to him.

"Mamma left the room when he used bad words and sometimes she cried. I also cried sometimes when he did so. I have seen him strike her. He struck her with his hand on the side of the head.

"That was a long time before New Year's Day. I did not see him strike her after we were at Portobello—in August."

The defense now examined this poor boy, and naturally put leading questions to him so as to shed a favorable light on Chantrelle.

"My father has always been kind to me. He gave me everything I asked from him. He gave me pennies to buy toys, took me for walks and was kind to me in every way.

"He was kind to mamma, too. It was a long time before mamma died that the bad words and swearing took place. I can't say how long it is since he struck her on the head.

"I saw nothing to cry for a good while before mamma died. We all dined together on Christmas Day. We had a bottle of champagne, and papa and mamma were kind to each other on that day."

But the defense could elicit nothing more favorable to the prisoner. It tried to point out that Chantrelle, being a Frenchman, had customs of his own and he should not be held a murderer because he went out for breakfast, was rarely at home, and was unfaithful to his wife. It tried to point out that the symptoms noted in the case of the victim were more indicative of gas poisoning than narcotic.

When Chantrelle's counsel sat down, his client gasped: "Is that all the evidence for the defense?" He was taken aback by the brevity of his counsel.

The jury were out a few minutes over an hour and on their return found Chantrelle guilty of murder, and he was sentenced to death by hanging. His appearance outside the court was greeted with hisses, groans and yells.

Chantrelle's comment was:

"Would that I could but place a fuse in the center of this earth, that I could blow it to pieces, and with it the whole of humanity. I hate them."

He maintained in prison that the traces of opium found on the bolster and sheet had been rubbed in by some one with the object of incriminating him.

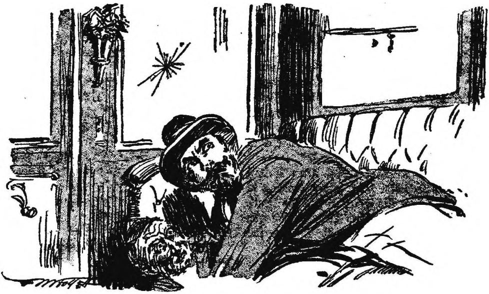
An almost unforgivable item came to light, that he had forbidden Elizabeth's brother, her twin, to visit her. And the reason, the vile reason he pretended was that he suspected them of incest.

We can almost see Chantrelle in his two rôles as husband and as the carefree man about town. No doubt there were many, men and women both, to swear that Chantrelle was a charming fellow, a gentleman, a model of courtesy and politeness, but if so none of them came forward to say so.

On the last day of May, Chantrelle went to his death, leaving behind him three little boys whom he had robbed of a devoted and loving mother.

Perhaps they found a foster mother, and little Louis and the baby had no memories of their own, but Eugene—he must have remembered that New Year's day, his day in court, too, when he dared not look at his father's staring eyes and fidgeting fingers.

Time rubs out the writing, and passes a merciful eraser over our childish troubles and terrors, and so, no doubt, it was with him. We pray so.



There was a tinkle of glass and a bullet plumped itself into the other side of the car

BY WHOSE HAND?

By Louise Rice

MANY OF THE WORLD'S BEST DETECTIVES PUT THEIR HEADS TOGETHER TO CATCH THE CLEVER CROOKS WHO SWIRL ABOUT THAT CURSED HAND

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

MARY SMITH, the great graphologist, receives evidence of the substitution of a double for the prominent London widow, Mrs. Alma Batten. Miss Smith turns the case over to the world-renowned detective, Juan Murphey. Murphey sends over three "society" operatives on a big yacht, and Hoofty, a "roughneck" operative, on a transatlantic liner. He himself sails on the same liner disguised as a Spanish grandee, "Don Jaime de Ventura," with one of his most talented assistants disguised as his valet, "Michael Strogoff." A girl named Annette Taylor begins to spy on them. One evening she runs into their suite in deathly fear of a man in a steward's uniform. The next day, she is found dead, with a dagger between her shoulder blades, and a misleading note pinned to the outside of her cabin door. As Juan and Michael return from the captain's preliminary inquest, they stand close together while Juan reaches in, to turn on the electric light. "Once before they had stood thus and an instant afterward had been fighting for their lives."

CHAPTER X

DEADLY CAUTION

THERE was a vivid memory of that in their minds at the moment, for they felt the impalpable presence of menacing existences. However the lights, springing out, showed them the rooms empty.

Silently they went in, still close together, shut and locked the door, and still keeping side by side, thoroughly searched every nook and cranny of the rooms before they said a word. Then they withdrew to their bathroom, turned on the water and stood to talk.

"Did you notice that writing left outside the door, Michael?" asked Juan, sitting down on a chair before the mirror and pulling off his wig carefully, that Michael

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might massage his head, for the thing was very tight-fitting, and there were times when the pressure of it on his scalp drove him wild with nervousness.

"No—as to anything beside the writing," said the old man, who had begun to carefully knead the other's shaven head.

"Listen, then. 'Stewardess. Please do not wake me in the morning. I have had a bad night and wish to sleep.' What does that tell you, my dear Michael?"

There was a silence, and after it had lasted a little while Don Jaime, looking in the mirror, saw the other shake his head.

"Well, it tells me that Miss Taylor was killed, not during the night, but in the morning!"

Another silence. Then Michael said:

"Oh!"

"Precisely!"

"'Please do not wake me in the morning. I *have had* a bad night.' Yes, of course!"

"You see, if it had really been written the night before, by the girl, she would have said: 'Please do not wake me in the morning, I am afraid I shall have a bad night.' Or something like that.

"The person who did write that was subconsciously aware that it was then morning or close to it, and involuntarily and without knowing it, wrote of the night as having passed.

"I don't know that that helps us much, but it establishes the fact—more or less—that she was alive during the major part of the night. When the finger-print men from Scotland Yard get to work they may be able to get prints that will help, or the captain may be able to find the fellow."

"I have always thought that in a large ship like this, a clever man could hide himself throughout the voyage by working at this and that, providing, of course, that he could get the right clothes for the jobs. It seems that this fellow did."

"You would know him again?"

"I think I would know him even if he were disguised, and especially if I saw him walk. There was something very distinctive about his motion. And his voice, too. It had an odd, grating sound.

"I suspect that it is a 'whisky' voice, and I don't think him as young as he was got up to seem. Perhaps his hair was dyed, or it might be a wig. There was something about the difference in two sides of his face, too."

"He goes in the records, of course."

"Oh, yes. I have sketched him profile, and full, and halfway." Shutting the bathroom behind him and locking it—for this was always done when Juan was in there without his make-up—Michael brought from what seemed like the flat side of an open trunk some thin sheets of paper, and took them back to the bathroom. "There he is," he said, and fell to massaging the shaven poll again.

Juan looked long and carefully. Michael had a really extraordinary gift, he knew. With sure, though seemingly careless pencil, he had placed on that little piece of tough tracing paper an almost breathing likeness, an ugly face, something malign and ferocious about it, despite the rather good-looking features.

The unevenness in the two sides of the face was well brought out. There was quite a library of these drawings, in a concealed wall safe, back in New York, in the big old-fashioned suburban house that Juan had called "home" since he was born.

Like Michael, Juan had a prodigious memory for faces.

"Ever see this bird before?"

"Never."

"Probably an English or Continental criminal. Though he does not really look the criminal at all, does he?"

"No, he does not."

By-and-by the make-up was all freshened, the dark stain all over the body inspected, and places where it seemed to have worn a little repaired, the special stain for the finger nails and toe nails renewed, the hair on legs and arms lightly touched to keep the red out of it.

Juan and Michael took no chances on Don Jaime being intentionally or unintentionally undressed and thus exposed to detection. Last of all, the wig was hauled on, a delicate operation, and Juan, inspecting himself in the glass, sighed and made a face at the darkly handsome person that he saw there.

"I'll be mighty glad when I get this mop off my head again," he said, pushing up a corner of it in order to scratch, with deep satisfaction.

No matter where they were, Don Jaime and his valet slept in the same room. They had developed a system to which they were so accustomed that they did not have to discuss it, which was that Michael no more than dozed through the one night, and that Juan no more than dozed through the following.

That they were both alive had been due, several times, to this system. Now, therefore, as they took to their respective couches, Juan just said laconically:

"Yours."

He then turned on his side, and in ten deep breaths was sleeping like a baby. Michael did not even doze. That "feeling" of his to which he could never give a name, but which less cautious people had called his "hunches," made him sit up, after a time, and reach under his pillow for the pistol which was never out of his reach.

Two hours dragged by. Silently, like a shadow, he got up and went to stand by the light switch. There was nothing definite that he could put a finger on, except that twice he had thought he heard a foot in the corridor. Between the bedroom and the corridor there was the small sitting room, but he could look right at the outside door.

At three o'clock, by the radiolight watch on his wrist, Michael was of a mind to return to his bed. He was tired with standing absolutely still, than which there is nothing more exhausting. He would have moved a foot in another moment.

The faintest of sounds reached him. Had he not been straining to hear, it would have passed unnoticed. He slipped the pistol into his right hand and placed a finger of his left on the switch. The noise continued, if noise it could be called; it was little more than a whisper of a sound.

Slowly, then, the blank blackness of the wall in which the corridor door stood, changed. A slip of light glimmered for a second, and was instantly blotted out. Some one had opened the door just wide enough to squeeze through, had come into the sitting room, and had shut the door behind him.

Michael pressed down the finger which rested on the light switch.

A split second afterward, his gun and another roared. Juan, awaking with that instant alertness which was one of his powers, had fired at the same moment that the other had, at the figure crouched for a spring.

The figure's hand, that one holding a long and shining knife, came toward the breast in a convulsive movement, and then the body plunged forward, along the floor, twitched, and lay still.

The air was still full of the faintly sweet odor of smokeless powder when feet came running in the corridor. The next moment some one knocked on the door, and then pushed it open.

The tableau still held. The frightened night steward saw the two passengers still holding their revolvers, and as he stared, the body on the floor gave a final convulsion.

The man's eyes seemed as though they would fall from his head, so far did they appear to protrude, but he was well-trained, like all the servants of the great liners.

"What—what happened—sir?" he stammered.

Juan swung a long leg out of bed. "I don't know, yet," he said coolly. "I was awakened by the light coming on, and the moment that I opened my eyes I saw this fellow leaping at my man here with a knife in his hand. We both fired at the same moment, but I am sure you will find that my bullet did not kill him. I aimed for the shoulder."

"I aimed for the legs," said Michael. He was trembling a little. A fight never distressed him, small as he was, but the death of any human being affected him deeply. Juan threw on a bathrobe and walked over to him.

"Sit down, my dear fellow," he said gently. "I am sure that you will find that you did not kill him, either."

"I suppose we had better see if he is alive," said the steward hesitatingly.

"No," said Juan, "what we must do is

to send for the doctor at once. You get those people who are filling the corridor out there into their rooms and send the doctor here. Tell them that my man shot at a thief—or, no—say that he shot by mistake at some one.

"The ship's officers must do as they please about giving out the news. I will lock the door behind you, and you bring the doctor as soon as you can get him. Also the head steward, and one of the ship's officers."

The corridor was full of people in disarray, Juan saw, as he let the steward out and heard him explaining, and urging people to return to their cabins.

Michael had regained his composure.

"Well, he played a return engagement," he said.

"That's the man, eh?"

"Yes."

"Huh! Well, that means that we are under a ban of some kind." Then, standing right over Michael, he went on, in their all but soundless talk: "All we know is that this is the man who came into the room after the girl. Careful. I begin to suspect everybody. This is a big thing we've headed into."

A moment afterward there came a tap at the door, and Michael let in two of the ship's officers, the head steward, and the doctor, who had with him a nurse from the hospital. Without a word he and she advanced to the crumpled figure and turned it over on its back, and it was then clear that both Michael and Juan were right in thinking that they had not killed the man.

There was a bullet wound in his right shoulder which would have made his knife useless to him, and there was a bullet in his left leg which would have checked his deadly rush, but that from which he had died was his own knife.

The two bullets, striking him almost simultaneously, had caused him to bring his right hand, with the knife in it, toward his own breast, and there it had sunk deep, and straight through his heart.

The man was naked above the waist save for a thin black "singlet," evidently part of a scanty suit of union underwear. The knife had met with no such obstacle as it would have, had he been wearing the usual number of upper garments. However, he had fallen directly on it, and so his death was really inevitable.

He had on black, worn trousers, black socks, and rubber-soled black shoes. Arms, hands, face, and neck had been smeared with coal dust. It was obvious that in such an array, the man might have slipped about the ship at night and escaped notice.

There were several objects in his pockets, A purse in which there were ten pounds in English money, a bunch of skeleton keys, a pouch of tobacco, a very small pipe, a box of matches, a tin box in which there were four pieces of a popular brand of eating chocolate, a twenty-five pistol of beautiful workmanship. The knife which was imbedded in his heart had a common bone handle. The doctor drew it slowly out. It was a kitchen knife, thin and narrow and sharp, the kind which is used for cutting roast meat in thin slices.

"This is the man who came into this room after the girl," said Michael, as the doctor turned and looked toward him, and he and Juan, together, then stated that, the valet being wakeful, he had heard the scrape of the key in the door, and had been standing right by the electric light switch when the man entered.

The light had awakened Don Jaime, and he and his man, seeing the sinister figure, crouched, knife in hand, had fired simultaneously. That was all that there was to tell, so far as they were concerned.

The doctor groaned. "The ship is surely having her share of excitement. I fear that Captain Shelburne will need my attention when he hears this," he added with the ghost of a smile on his grave face. "In all the years that the Aquitania has been afloat nothing like this has ever occurred on her.

"Well, I'll have the body removed at once and the rug taken out. It is certainly unfortunate for you, sir, that you and your man have become mixed up in this. I can't understand what the fellow was after."

His worried gaze shifted from the stalwart figure of the Spanish grandee to the little figure of the valet, and Juan saw in it that he was asking himself what kind of game was afoot anyway.

This was the one thing which the detective wished to avoid, as the slightest identification of himself with mysterious events would be a great detriment to his work.

"You don't suppose that some one who had this suite on some other voyage hid diamonds or something like that here, do you?" he asked, after seeming to reflect. "I've read of such things being done. It's the only thing that I can think of. Perhaps you had better have us moved to another suite."

The doctor's face cleared, and Juan knew that his momentary suspicion had passed.

"It's a case for the Yard, that's what," he said briskly, "and meanwhile, even for the short time that remains before we dock, I think it an excellent idea that you should change your suite."

The head steward said he would arrange with the purser for the exchange of suites.

CHAPTER XI

GETTING DOWN TO CASES

THE quiet man who came aboard just before the Aquitania docked at Southampton seemed more like a business man than a detective, but he was really, as Juan told Michael Strogoff, one of the Yard's very good operatives.

"Inspector Hand," he introduced himself to Captain Shelburne and Don Jaime who, with a number of others, were awaiting him in the captain's room.

The body of the man who had been killed by his own knife lay in the mortuary, and there the inspector went first, his little stick under his arm, rolling his gloves into a ball, wiping his face with a fine silk handkerchief—everything about him seeming precise, reserved and poised.

Juan grinned after him and, standing where the rest of the party could not see him, said, soundlessly to Michael: "Some of our New York roughneck dicks ought to see this bird."

When he came back and sat down at the desk with the captain he drew out a very prosaic notebook and took everybody's names and pedigrees before another word was said. Then he invited them to tell what they knew.

To Don Jaime he gave just the degree of special consideration that the distinguished figure of that gentleman seemed to demand, and to Michael he gave a pleasant manner which was distinctly removed from the perfunctory way in which he addressed the stewards and other employees of the ship.

One and all, they declared that they had never seen the dead man before. The head steward stated that the most diligent search had not brought out any fact which would show how the steward's uniform had been procured by the dead man.

The knife with which the man had sought to kill was from the meat department, and from a rack containing eleven others. It had been missed at eight the night before by the meat roast chef.

The inspector had also viewed the body of the girl who called herself Annette Taylor. He declared that neither she nor the other dead person were known to him by sight. He looked at the handwriting of Miss Taylor and at that of the note which had been left on her door, and agreed that they did not seem to be by the same hand.

Michael had already taken perfect tracings of these specimens, knowing well that they would be required by the police. What he had not surrendered was the paper with the girl's name and the address which the stewardess had given her, which she had written for him.

Inspector Hand wrote everything down in his book, and then declared that he would now go through the dead girl's effects, and was about to rise and dismiss the meeting when a steward brought him a note in an envelope. "Just came on board, sir," he stated, "by public messenger."

Inspector Hand opened the envelope and read rather a lengthy sheet of paper, which he then placed in his pocket. "Yes, yes," he said, visibly coming back to the matter in hand, "the matter is most unusual. It shall be carefully looked into.

"I can assure you, Captain Shelburne, that as little will be said about it in the press as possible. It might be that we could suggest that the two deaths were part of some intrigue between the two persons involved—obscure persons, of little interest. Yes, yes."

He turned to follow the steward who was to show him the girl's room, and with a second thought turned back to Don Jaime and Michael.

" As your man was the only one to speak to the deceased, perhaps he had better come with me," he said. " You may come, also, if you wish."

" Why—thank you, inspector—I think I will," said Don Jaime, who had been turning away indifferently. " I've never seen a detective of your standing at work, and it would interest me."

So the four of them, the steward, Inspector Hand, and Juan and Michael, arrived at that door at the end of the corridor, and the steward unlocked the door, over which there were sheets of paper tacked and wads of paper on the knob, so that any prints might be preserved. This had also been done on the door of the suite which had been Don Jaime's.

Inspector Hand took the key from the steward, thanked him, turned him out, and shut and locked the door on the inside. Then he looked at Juan appraisingly.

" I should never have known you, Mr. Murphey," he said in a low voice. " I must congratulate you."

" I did not meet you when I was last here as De Ventura," said Juan also in a low voice. " Allow me to present my colleague, who is known as Michael Strogoff. You will know him better as Harvey Lettner."

The inspector bowed. " Mr. Lettner, your brochures on crime are much in use over here," he stated respectfully. " I have, myself, practiced a few of your tricks when, as rarely happens, I am obliged to resort to some kind of disguise. We don't do a great deal of that sort of thing over here."

" Nor over there, either," said the man whom most of the world knew as Lettner, a writer on rare and erudite subjects, who had been for many years the " dresser " to a very great Shakespearean actor, a strange little figure in the literary, scholastic, and detective fields, and something of a legend to them all, for he was seldom seen in person.

" How did you get that note of yours off the boat and back here by messenger?" the inspector said to Juan. " You really astonished me."

" I wrote it this morning, sealed it in an envelope addressed to you here, then resealed it in an envelope addressed to a messenger service near the docks here, of which I happened to know, telling them that the letter inside was to be sent as directed immediately. I sent the message ashore with a passenger, a Mrs. Mason, whom I knew I could trust."

" Sounds simple, like all inspirations," said the Yard man. " Of course, it is most necessary that your identity shall remain concealed. Are you coming to the Yard to see about the job you are on? And is this part of it?"

" I think it is," said Juan, answering the last question first, " but Michael and I are very much in the dark as to what is really afoot. Yes, I'm coming to the Yard for a conference, but you had better call me for it in connection with this matter, so that it will seem natural for me to go. Now, if you will permit me, I will look on."

Inspector Hand may have felt that he was somewhat on his ettle, working thus beneath the eyes of two transatlantic confreres of such fame; for not so much as a stray hairpin in that room escaped him. The net result was precisely nothing.

Annette Taylor, for all that her meager belongings revealed, was just what she had said that she was. Her trunk and baggage bore her initials, and so did her cheap handkerchiefs and underwear, put on with indelible ink.

She had a few books with her of a general character, a toilet set in bone, a fountain pen, a bottle of moderate-priced toilette water.

" No letters, not a notebook, not a scrap of memoranda, and no money," Juan said, as the search was ended.

Inspector Hand nodded.

" I suppose that the murderer took the money. Her purse is empty, except for her cabin-door key. He sprang the catch as he went out."

" He might have taken the letters that she had with her, too?"

"Yes, he might. He did not look in the trunk, though, nor through the bags. Struck her as she lay asleep, and then pulled the bedclothes up around her again."

"The only strange thing about all this that you have found, is that you found so little," said Juan. "The most ignorant people usually have letters with them, bills, receipted or not, postals—things of that sort."

"Yes, there was evidently nothing in the trunk or the bags known to the murderer if, as you have suggested, this was more than a common murder. Whatever it was, if it was a thing—an object—was in the purse.

"The money found on the man might have been taken from her. I am inclined to agree with you that this is not an ordinary murder. I'll call you then in regard to it, in a day or two."

"Yes. Remember to call me through the Ritz. Explain over the wire what it's about. The operators always more or less listen in to calls, and if I am under suspicion by whatever gang is operating, at the switchboard is right where they will look for information about me."

There was now a knock on the door, and a spectacled young man with a camera and a small suitcase was admitted by the inspector.

"Take every print that you find, no matter what it is," said the inspector, preparing to leave. "Also photos of the room. Conference to-morrow morning."

In the corridor, where the steward awaited them, the inspector formally thanked Don Jaime and his man, was sorry that the matter remained practically without explanation, trusted that Don Jaime would have a pleasant stay in the British Isles, and was off, swinging his little stick, and looking more like a prosperous merchant than ever.

"A very fine example of English efficiency, that Inspector Hand," said Don Jaime to Michael as they went past the steward.

"A good machine," said Michael, when they were out of earshot of the steward.

"If the rank and file of ours were as good we could be thankful," the other replied. "Of course, he did not see the two drops of blood by the door."

"Nor that several other drops had been wiped off the carpet nearer the bed."

"Ah, ha, Michael—you always see more than I do."

"On the floor, especially; I'm nearer to it!"

"She opened the door to him, then?"

"The moment that she did, she saw her danger, or perhaps did not—her face was peaceful—and turned, and he struck her. Then he snatched her up and put her back in bed before there was more than a drop or two of blood to fall. He saw those near the bed—"

"Which argues that he turned on the light—"

"—and wiped them up, possibly with his bare hand."

"Does nothing occur to you, Michael?"

"N-no. I think that's all."

"She was in her nightdress, wasn't she, when struck?"

"Yes, yes—of course. Now you are the smart one."

"Did she strike you as the kind of a girl who would open her bedroom door to a *strange* man without stopping to throw on the robe that hung over her berth?"

"No."

"Very well, then. You see that she must have known the man. Not only that, she must have known him so intimately that she had no instinct to dress before receiving him."

"Let us think," said Michael. "Were they at all alike? I have her sketched—did it as soon as I talked to her."

Now they hurried to the suite and opened the dispatch bag which Michael always carried with him. "I put these sketches here, as the safest place," he said.

Together they looked long and carefully at the two pieces of paper on which there were, respectively, the profiles, full faces, and three-quarter views of the two who had died on the Aquitania.

After a long moment they raised their eyes, and nodded at each other.

"Relatives," said Michael positively. "Perhaps brother and sister, or even father and daughter. We shall see whether the man's hair was dyed. I suspect that it was. There was a peculiar color about it which makes me think that it is really gray."

"We have gained very little," said Juan, sighing. He had that one temperamental "trick." Unless things were at high tension he felt that no progress was being made.

CHAPTER XII

AT SCOTLAND YARD

WHEN the big car in which Don Jaime de Ventura and his "man" were traveling passed through the severe entrance of Scotland Yard he who was really the criminal scholar, Harvey Lettner, looked out curiously.

"I've never been in London before long enough to see all the places that I wanted to," he said. "This time I hope that I can see something of the old town. That was sure fast and furious work we had when you were here on the Buchner case; as Don Jaime, in that case, you sure were a heart breaker."

"You hush!" said his companion, with a well-imitated snarl. "That's what Hoofty is always—I wonder if he arrived all right? We ought to have had a note from him this morning."

"I was a little worried about him myself," said Michael, as they got out of the car and were met by a man who was evidently waiting for them. "But I got word to him before Inspector Hand came aboard and found that he was all right. Not a word had leaked to the steerage about the murders."

There are all sorts of things in the big pile of buildings called Scotland Yard, but the room into which "Don Jaime" and "Michael Strogoff" were ushered might have been the living room of a rather studious gentleman of quiet tastes.

It was the office of a chief inspector of one of the departments of the I. C. E., which is the official name of the organization housed in the historic pile.

Chief Inspector Cross proved to be a man who bore out the impression created by his room. He wore spectacles, and his suit, although of good quality, would have been the better for the attention of a valet.

Michael, who had played the valet so many times that he had a corner of his mind in which he actually was the servant, looked with disapproval at the wrinkled trouser knees and at the deep creases in the sleeves, and wished that he might suggest a fine man whom he knew—strictly in his character as Michael Strogoff—who might be had at a moderate sum, a prince of valets.

Chief Inspector Cross was also an exception to one's conception of a high police official, in that he had not the slightest air of sternness, but appeared, on the contrary, rather shy of his most distinguished-looking guest, whose dark good looks and immaculate turnout seemed to impress him.

While the introductions were taking place Inspector Hand came in, cane swinging, notebook out, handkerchief as fresh as ever, as though he had that moment stepped away from them on the Aquitania.

"I think you will be interested in this gentleman, sir," he said. "I suppose he was introduced to you as a Spaniard?"

The chief inspector said yes, he had been, and showed that his mental processes were not slow by instantly looking with added interest at Juan.

Inspector Hand smiled, and waved his well-manicured hand at the two guests in exactly the manner of a good merchant who has a surprising bargain with which to startle you.

"The make-up is astonishing," he said calmly. "I did not know myself that it was one, until told. This, sir, is Juan Murphey of New York, with Mr. Harvey Lettner, the well-known criminologist, whose brochures I think you will remember we have in the library.

"Mr. Murphey is under this name and appearance for purposes which he will relate to you. Mr. Lettner goes as his valet, Michael Strogoff."

The chief inspector rose, came forward, and offered his hand again to both his visitors.

"You astonish me, as well," he said. "We have several men here who specialize in make-up, but I confess that, like Inspector Hand, I should never have known that you were not appearing as yourself. As for Mr. Lettner—allow me to express, my dear sir, my admiration for your patience, scholarship, and knowledge of your special subjects."

He was a man who—you could see as he was studied—could not easily be amazed, but the diminutive, withered, and altogether odd-looking person who was now posing as a valet evidently struck him with so much surprise that he could hardly keep that sentiment out of his manner, and he was the more disconcerted in that the little gentleman who was, in his way, an international celebrity, smiled merrily at him with a full understanding of the effect produced.

"I wish that I had a few more inches in height, inspector; I'd swap them for some of the fame that you are kind enough to attribute to me. At least, I can play the valet to my distinguished young friend here, with better grace, perhaps, than if I were a bigger man—and that's a compensation. •Juan's society is worth a good deal—to a man who hates to be bored."

"From what I hear about the happenings on the Aquitania, you need not have experienced that sensation, crossing! Suppose now, you give me a straight-away account of everything, including the matter which causes you to be here as Don Jaime. By the way, is there such a family?"

"Oh, yes!" said Juan smiling. "My mother's."

The inspectors both looked surprised.

"My mother was the last of the family—a very old one. My father was an artist—and an Irishman. I don't know which to put first: both were equally important to him.

"He claimed to come from kings of the Emerald Isle and my mother really did come from the old line which sat on the Spanish throne in the person of Ferdinand, who had a wife named Isabella, destined to be of moment to a country where I, the last of the line, was to be born.

"There was still a fair amount of money when my mother was married to the Irish-American Murphey—and an old castle far in the hills in Spain, with a hundred or so acres of the most useless land you can imagine.

"It costs me several thousand dollars a year to keep it from falling to pieces, and to support the five families who have always lived on the mountain slopes."

For a moment after Juan Murphey ceased to speak there was a curious silence in the room. There had been something formal, something stately, antiquated, a breath of other times, and of kingly pride and power in the deep tones, the wonderful eyes.

"Well, that's that!" said Juan, and flashed on them his New York smile. "It helps, when I choose to take up this rôle, that there is a good deal of truth in it. Harvey, here, is a nut for Spanish history and I've always spoken the language, along with English, so that both are really mother tongues. That's enough about me.

"I tell you this, though, to show that I am so anxious not to have Don Jaime seem to have anything to do with Juan Murphey. *He* is always there, ready for *me* to slip into him at need.

"In this present case I want to stay in the character until I pass on to Spain, visit my people there and then, on the way back to the coast, slip into Murphey, cross into France, and arrive in Canada, from which place I will run down to New York with very few to know that I have been away."

"Yes, I see," said Chief Inspector Cross. "You may be sure that we will do everything to support your impersonation."

"And now I think that I ought to place this case before you, first briefly and then in detail.

"It begins when a client comes to see Miss Mary Smith, the graphologist, of New York. I think you know of her?"

"Author of 'Criminals and their Handwriting,' with myself as editor and partial collaborator," added Michael.

"Yes—yes. That is also in our library."

"Well, this client brings a letter to Miss Smith. Feels that there is something queer about it. Old friend, knows her intimately. Alma—Mrs. George Batten of 26 Hyacinthe Road, St. John's Wood, London."

"Ah, yes!" Inspectors Cross and Hand nodded.

"You know anything of her?"

"No, only what the papers say. She is young, rich, and popular; a widow. Very quiet—fine reputation."

"Yes. Well, Miss Smith states, from a letter received some time ago by her client, that this Mrs. Batten's character is just as you have stated, but on being shown another specimen received this month, the graphologist declares that the latter letter is written by another person altogether.

"My offices and Miss Smith's are in the same wing of an office building, and we sometimes consult with each other. She called me in. The client recalled various things which seemed to confirm the statement of the graphologist, although at first she had refused to admit the idea.

"The upshot of the matter was that I came over, with Michael—I beg your pardon, I get so used to calling him that—with Mr. Lettner, and that two more of my operatives, now on the yacht Aloha will be here shortly.

"I am sure that there was no way for the news to leak to whatever criminals are concerned in what we are convinced is some big plot, that de Ventura is myself.

"On the other hand, it is quite possible that the fact that this friend of Mrs. Batten's friend going to the graphologist might make the people back of all this nervous over the handwriting, which Miss Smith pronounced to be one of the most wonderful forgeries that she ever saw, and that this may have put them on their guard.

At any rate, coming over, this poor, fraudulently consumptive Annette Taylor attracted my attention by her sly efforts to spy on us, and then Michael here—confound it—well, I might as well say Michael and you'll understand, why, Michael had an interview with her in which she said that she was a poor seamstress.

"Then, later, she flies into my suite and begs him to be silent and to protect her. He locks her into a closet and then a steward whom he has never seen before knocks and pretends that he thinks there was a ring for him and, under an excuse, gets into the suite.

"He does not find the girl. She goes out afterward, frightened, but refusing to tell the captain, that the man had annoyed her.

"The next day she does not appear, we are worried about her, Michael goes to the cabin, finds that there was a note left on her door—you have that—finds her dead; and then, that night, an unknown man breaks into our suite and evidently means to do for either me or Michael or both of us.

"We shoot, just to disable him, but he falls on the knife he has out for us and kills himself.

"Inspector Hand will have told you that we did not find a thing in the cabin, but Michael and I did notice something which we did not mention to the inspector at the time, for the reason that we wanted to think it over, but which I am now prepared to tell you."

Inspector Hand bore this well. He just looked interested, and not at all as though he had been beaten at his own game.

"We saw," said Juan, "that there was a small drop of blood at the door of the room, and that several more had been dropped close to the berth."

There was a moment's silence. "I do not follow you, Mr. Murphey," said the chief inspector, then. "It was to be expected that there might be blood drop from the weapon or from the hands of the assassin."

Juan and Michael shook their heads, and Juan looked at the little man, nodding to him to continue.

"Let me explain, inspector," said Michael in his wonderful voice. "The dagger was driven in to the hilt between the girl's shoulders. Just that one blow. It pierced her heart.

"The weapon was not withdrawn. Bleeding at no time was great. It was internal. There was no blood whatever on the handle.

"In addition to that, there was the fact that the apex of the two drops which could be seen accurately—those near the door—were *toward* the door. You perceive, of course, the significance of that."

Both inspectors looked as if they wished that they did, and he who was Michael to almost every one who knew him, went on:

" I have made a study of blood drops, you may remember. Well, owing to the thickness of blood and the fact that it is warm when it falls and then congeals, we may often learn more from the disposal of a drop of it than we may from many other fluids.

" You see, if the weapon, hand, or person from which or whom the blood comes is moving *away* from a given point, the apex of the blood drops will be *toward* that point. The apex of the blood drops in the case in point were toward the door.

" Therefore, we believe that the girl herself opened the door, saw her danger, instinctively turned, was struck and that instant snatched up as she fell and swiftly put into the berth.

" The several drops near the bed had been smeared in the effort to obliterate them, but the drops near the door were intact."

" She was in her night dress?" said the chief inspector, and they saw that he had instantly made the right deduction.

CHAPTER XIII

A FLYING BULLET

"YOU see," said Juan, " that the woman known as Annette Taylor must have known the man whom she admitted with such fatal results, for she was, as Michael Strogoff states—and he is one of the shrewdest judges of human nature of whom I know—a girl of very good moral character, and also a person of real refinement.

" She would have at least partially dressed if the man had not known her very well. As to that, Michael has brought you the sketches which he made of both of these people."

The inspector looked carefully at the sketches which Michael handed him, and then nodded. " Undoubtedly, some relationship," he stated.

" Both unknown to you?"

" To me, yes. But, of course—"

His shrug expressively outlined the great network of records and people which made up the vast organization. " We shall have them photographed and Bertilloned and finger-printed—the latter, in fact, has now been done. I expect the reports any moment."

" Of course, we have taken one thing for granted," said Juan, " and that is that the man from whom the girl fled in terror was also the man who killed her, but that I think we may consider a foregone conclusion."

" It would seem so," said the inspector, and just then there was a tap at the door and a young man walked in with some photographs in his hand.

" Here you are, then, Martin," said the chief inspector, reaching for the photographs.

The man addressed as Martin placed a number of his prints on the desk, and laconically began describing them.

" Found on handle of dagger in girl's back—Found on handle of knife in man's breast—Found on door, inside and out, of girl's cabin—Found on door of Don Jaime de Ventura's suite."

Juan and Michael and the two inspectors leaned over eagerly. The comparisons were easy, which they are not always. Even a person not used to comparing finger-prints would have known that certain prints were, or were not the same.

As they looked, Inspectors Cross and Hand, Juan Murphey, and the man mostly known as Michael Strogoff, all drew back and stared at each other. Then they bent over the photographs again, and at last stood up and shook their heads.

The sets of finger-prints on the kitchen knife, on which the man had fallen and thus killed himself, and the prints found on the handle of the door of Juan's suite, were the same.

But there were entirely different prints on the dagger found in the body of the girl, and those same prints were on her cabin door.

In short, there was conclusive proof that the man who had attempted the midnight assassination of Don Jaime and probably his valet was *not* the man who committed the murder of Annette Taylor.

Juan groaned. " Oh, Lord—it's one of those mixed-up cases. Michael, now we *have* got our work cut out for us!"

" Er—we are not entirely without interest in the matter, either," Chief Inspector Cross murmured and, with a wry smile, Juan hastily turned to him to apologize.

" Of course, inspector. Pray, forgive me. That was a figure of speech, anyway. We shall all have to do our best—to assist Scotland Yard."

The inspector was not devoid of humor, but he was not a laughing man. He just gave Juan a twinkle of his eye, and then said, very seriously: " Now it is a case of whether we can identify either of these dead people. How about the prints?"

" No record," stated the terse Martin.

" We'll see what America has to say, too," said the inspector. " Perhaps one or both of these people may be known as criminals there. I shall be glad when this new international book of criminals is available. It is what the world ought to have."

" You will see what you can do about Mrs. Batten?" said Juan, standing up to go. " I will, of course, speak of this visit to the Yard. It would be quite an event in the life of the man whom I am impersonating, and he would speak of the impression made on him; I shall do so.

" Please be careful, if any of the I. C. E. men have occasion to speak to me, should this become a real ' case,' that they address me wholly as Don Jaime—but I think that I ought to be identified by the Yard—in case I need help or can hand on information?"

" We do not usually work with the outside, as you know, but in the case of such eminent scientists as Mr. Lettner and Miss Smith, the graphologist, we are always interested—and with a detective of such a character as your own, we are glad to cooperate."

" I appreciate this, for my colleagues and also for myself, inspector," Juan replied. " I ought to tell you that I had one of my operatives come over on the steerage with me, who will endeavor to get work at the house next door to Mrs. Batten's, a house where I expect to be a frequent guest.

" It will be quite easy for him to bring word here should I have something for you which ought not to be trusted to the mail. The telephone I will not use, of course; there are too many chances for a slip on that end.

" The man's description will do you no good, but I will give you two words which he will know and which no one beside our own organization does know. ' Hoofty goofty.' "

" What!"

" A name which originated in San Francisco, in the pioneer days. A famous ' character ' used it, an irresponsible, shiftless, and yet interesting man, who was a daredevil and a vagabond.

" I gave it to this man because he usually assumes that character, but he is apt to appear as almost anything, and has dozens of dialects which he can use perfectly; so, as I say, his description would do you little good. But the words will identify him."

" Your country is always full of amazing and amusing matters," said Inspector Cross. " Some time I shall surely make you a visit."

" What do you wager that I find an invitation for dinner from Mrs. Mason when we get back?" Juan said to Michael, as they were getting into their car, after having said adieu to the two inspectors, and to the sergeant who had shown them over part of the big place.

" I wish to lose no money, and therefore I wager nothing," said Michael. " I know that you ought to hitch your title, and another name to which you have a right, together. Don Juan—"

Don Jaime de Ventura never boyishly scuffled, as Juan Murphey loved to do, but he had his own way of making a reprisal; he suddenly caught the little man beside him in what seemed like a hand of iron and on the small but muscular leg of that gentleman left a respectably sized black and blue spot, due to a vigorous pinch.

" Ouch!" said Michael. " Confound you —where do you get those steel pliers you call your fingers?"

" Well, then—lay off that line of talk."

Michael was about to make some laughing reply when, to his infinite astonishment, Juan threw him to the floor of the car and at the same instant cast his long body prone on the seat. Not a second too soon, either, In the moment during which this violent action occurred, there was a tinkle of glass and a bullet plumped itself into the other side of the car. The driver looked around at the sound, and started to pull up.

"No, no, go on!" Juan signaled with his hand, and the reply was a spurt of speed. Their Jehu was taking no chances on lingering. A glance at the face of his fare had been enough.

In fact, Juan was more concerned than he had often been in any of the events of his hazardous career. He had not realized how much little Harvey Lettner—the quaint "Michael Strogoff" of his invention—meant to him until he saw how close he had come to losing him.

"W-w-h-a-t—what—was that?" Michael managed to get out.

Before he replied, Juan told the driver to slow up, and then assisted his friend to the seat. "Somebody shot at us, driver," he explained to the flustered chauffeur.

The man, half-slewed around in his seat, stared.

"Shot? Was that what broke the glass?"

"Yes. I was afraid to have you stop, at the moment. Some crazy person, perhaps. I will make a report of it to the police when we get back to the hotel. The bullet is right here."

"Lawd bless us!" the chauffeur ejaculated, forgetting the austere pose which he usually maintained. All the rest of the way he drove as in a daze.

"You see, Michael," said Juan in the latter's ear, "just as I glanced out of the window I had a vague impression that some one behind one of the market stalls we were just then passing was aiming a pistol our way. I saw the hand and part of the sleeve.

"It was purely instinct that made me throw you to the floor and myself out of line of fire, and it must have been one split second afterward that the person fired.

"I would have preferred not to have had this happen, and if the bullet had passed out the other window, I would have professed not to know what had broken the glass. As it was, there was nothing to do but act the part of travelers who know of no reason for any one shooting at them."

Michael did not speak, but he gripped the hand of Juan and wrung it, and the two men, always undemonstrative to each other, but really hearty friends, looked at each other with their affection shining in their eyes.

"No use in trying to thrash this out here," said Michael finally.

At the hotel Don Jaime, languid and indifferent, stated that some one "probably insane" had taken a shot at his car. He gave the approximate place at which the thing had occurred, shrugged off the congratulations of the manager on his escape, and went to his suite.

"Now then," he said, as he sank into a chair, "what are we up against? Can it be that I am known? Some way or other, I do not believe it. Was that an accident? The shot meant for some one else?"

"It seems incredible that you should have seen and acted quickly enough to save my life," said Michael. "I don't suppose that you can remember more than just that flashing impression of the pistol and the hand?"

"Indeed, my dear Michael, it was hardly a thing which was actually *seen*. It was like a flash which you sometimes see in the motion pictures—a thing in the background which is there and gone while you wink. My action was instinctive. It might well have been that what I saw was an illusion if it had not been for the evidence of the shot."

"I was never on a case with you when there seemed so many complications and when I was so conscious of danger at every step. From where that bullet struck, it looked as if it were intended for me, didn't it? And yet, it would have been very hard to aim that carefully—"

"We were not moving very fast at that moment; in fact, we were just moving on again after a traffic stall. The person was standing somewhat behind something on the stalls—boxes or crates—I have the vaguest impression."

There was a knock on the outer door of the suite, and at once Michael became the valet. Correct, subdued, and yet with authority in his manner he went toward the door.

The only incongruous thing about him was that from somewhere up his sleeve—in response to a quick gesture from Juan—he slid a pistol into view and then mysteriously caused it to disappear, as he grinned impishly over his shoulder before opening the door.

A uniformed messenger handed over a letter.

"I told you I'd have the invitation from Mrs. Mason!" exclaimed Juan, as he showed Michael the embossed M on the flap.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. MASON ENTERTAINS

MRS. MASON had a very handsome house, but its real charms were the trees, shrubs, and the big flower garden in the midst of which it was set. The house next door, No. 26, had less grounds, but was very large and imposing.

The exclusiveness of the locality was shown by everything and every one there, the houses, the grounds, the fine motors which glided along, the footmen and butlers, of whom glimpses could be had when doors were opened.

Mrs. Mason's drawing-room looked out on the south aspect of her garden and toward the Batten house, from which the garden was separated only by a low brick wall, topped with vines and bright-hued flowers.

There was a gate in the wall, and a path of beautifully tinted stones led to it through the Mason garden. This could be seen the moment that one entered the room, for the whole south side of it was mostly long windows, opening onto a small terrace.

There was no one in the room when Don Jaime de Ventura was left in it by the butler, and therefore he had time to make his observations. He saw that the windows of the Batten house were much smaller than those in the Mason house, and guessed that the Batten house was the older one, made in the days when the admittance of light and sun was not considered as important as it is to-day.

There was a big chimney shouldering toward him and several windows at odd angles, which made him conclude that the hall, the hall chimney, and the stairs were on the side facing him.

Then Mrs. Mason came in with her quick, light step, and her frank smile.

It was not for nothing that Juan Murphey had had a Spanish mother whose traditions had been of great estate. She had given her son intensive social training. She had left with him that pride of race which demands of itself that it shall act in a manner worthy of the noble tradition.

Mrs. Mason's fine eyes smiled on her visitor with genuine appreciation. She guessed that there were riches of his mind which she had not found, and beauties of his nature which no one save those very close to him would ever find, but she had already found him a delightful companion and a man of heart as well as intellect.

Juan, on his part, felt for this woman a genuine friendship. He, in turn, admired her intellectual power and her indifference to the stupidities of convention. As was usually the case when he was interested, he thought at once that it would be wonderful if Mary were there; and that thought, also as it often did, brought a sigh.

"It seems so appropriate to hear you sigh, Señor de Ventura," laughed Mrs. Mason. "You look so dark and mysterious and melancholy. Also, you look awfully keen and snippy—horrors—no—I mean snappy. Americanisms amuse me so much, and yet I never can be quite correct in using them."

"But I am not melancholy," said her visitor. "How can I be when you have been so gracious as to ask me to dine tonight, thus enabling me to escape the terrors and disappointments of viands prepared by the hotel chef? Hotel chefs have, you know, a secret. They have the best that the world has, in the way of food stuffs, they have expert help in their kitchens and they have every convenience, and yet—with this one secret of theirs they do something to food which no private cook can.

"They disguise all natural flavors, serve you meat which cannot be distinguished—

lamb from beef, chicken from pork—and reduce eating to a guessing contest. You guess what you are eating and the chef proves you wrong, every time."

Mrs. Mason laughed. She did not know that Don Jaime was echoing sentiments which he had heard her express on the Aquitania, before he had made her acquaintance by seeming to swoon in her arms.

" Well, I only hope that my cook comes up to your ideals of what a private cook ought to be," she said. " As a matter of fact, I think that she has spoiled me, for I have had her for ten years.

" I only wish that I could be so fortunate in a gardener. I have just lost Cordes, a man who really knew his business. He died while I was in America. I have just hired a friend of his, a young fellow who says that he came over on the same ship that we did. He has been in the States but did not find the opportunities there that he thought he would."

" Ah? Yes, I hope that he will prove satisfactory," Don Jaime murmured politely. No one could possibly have suspected that he received this information of " Hoofty's " promptness with satisfaction.

He wanted, desperately, to lead the talk to Mrs. Mason's neighbor. The women had, it was to be presumed, a great deal in common. Both were young and lovely, both were wealthy, and both were widows much sought after socially. But that would have to wait, no matter how long it might take.

The butler announced dinner and, to his considerable surprise, the stately Don Jaime discovered that he was the only guest. If the beautiful Bertha Mason had been a coquettish woman, he would have suspected that this was a boldly flirtatious move on her part, but the seriousness of her character precluded this view.

His interest quickened as he wondered if it could be possible that the very subject about which he wished to talk with Mrs. Mason, was the subject about which she wished to talk to him, and if this could be the reason for her most singular honoring of him.

The lady herself brought the matter up, when they were back in the drawing-room, and the butler had left them alone with their coffee.

" Let me assure you that your cook is a woman above price," said Don Jaime, with deep feeling. " Be careful. I warn you that if trickery of any kind can bring it about, I intend to lure her to my villa at Cannes."

" She is a wonder," replied Mrs. Mason simply, " and you would not be the first one who made that statement in jest and then tried it in all seriousness, unable to refrain from the temptation; but she is a confirmed Londoner.

" A husband—of sorts—lives ' down Lime'ouse wye ' as she confides to me now and then, and once a week she is gone a day and a night.

" I suspect she and the husband celebrate this event with large quantities of gin, but as she always returns, a bit bleary, but lacking none of her skill, I cheerfully have meals out that day and variously accommodate myself to this peculiarity of hers, which, of course, violates every canon of the servant ethics—which is the reason that she returns.

" But that's not what I had you to dinner for, Don Jaime," she ended abruptly. " I mean to eat one of her dinners and talk about her afterward. I should have liked to have some of my friends here to meet you; and in fact I have planned for a little dinner for that purpose in a few days, if you will honor me."

" *Madame,* you are too kind."

" But now, to-night, I want to talk to you very confidentially. You see, I know that there is no one in the world who can understand the strange things that I am going to say as well as yourself."

The Don gazed back at her earnestly, trying to be sure that his face betrayed nothing of his astonishment. What could she be about to say? His mind raced swiftly from one possibility to another while he maintained his quiescent, politely inquiring pose, but he was utterly unprepared for what followed.

" You are so well qualified to help people who have mysteries on their hands—*my dear Mr. Juan Murphey!*" she said, and threw herself back in her chair to chuckle with amusement, as well she might, for Juan allowed his lower jaw to drop in astonishment.

"My dear Mr. Murphey, I beg you to collect your features!" she said. "I assure you that I came into possession of this secret, not through any failure on your part to maintain your rôle, nor any slip on the part of the incomparable Michael, most learned of valets, but through a letter which I received from Miss Mary Smith!"

"From—*Mary?*"

"Aha! That's a potent name, or I'm mistaken. Well, dear Mr. Murphey, in order to keep your eyes from really rolling out onto the floor, let me tell you quickly.

"You see, I have been a client of Mary Smith's for several years, and I had an interview with her on the morning of the day when your Mrs. Hexter came in with a specimen of writing.

"Yes—yes—you see! I know a good deal about it. Mary has usually written to me at our place in Kent. She did not know my London address, for, in fact, I have not used this house a great deal—not usually more than the two months of the social season—well, after I left her office, I remembered that this year I intend to stay in town longer, and before I left the hotel I dropped her a line, giving her this one."

"I see, I see—the address was next door—"

"Yes! Mary got that letter of mine just after you and I had sailed away on the Aquitania. She sat right down and wrote me an account of things, and asked me to speak to you. I got the letter a few hours afterward."

"A few hours afterward, eh? What won't that woman do next? How did she get it to the ship?"

"Said she had a client who was a rum runner and had the fastest high-powered engine-driven boat on the Atlantic coast. He ran along side and sent the letter up.

"The captain was purple with rage, but I soothed him. I said it was a letter of supreme importance. I knew that it must be, the moment that I saw Mary's peculiarly-shaped envelope."

"Well, I'll be darned," said Juan, "Mary is worse than I am so far as having queer clients is concerned. I suppose the rum-runner shows her the handwriting of people he does business with and asks her if he can take their checks. To think of your knowing Mary! Why didn't you say so on board ship?"

Mrs. Mason's smiling face sobered.

"I tell you the truth, I was afraid to. At first, I thought that it was a good joke, letting you go on with the impersonation. You do it wonderfully. Are you really Spanish?"

"Partly."

"You know Mary. She's a perfect graveyard, so far as secrets are concerned. I vaguely knew that she knew you, but I had no idea that you were close friends, nor anything about you. I'm dying to see what you really look like. But, of course, the complexion is yours."

"It is not," said Juan with the faintest trace of an Irish brogue, "and me hair's the color of me fayther's bedad, the which is red, ma'm."

Mrs. Mason laughed again. "You and Mary! What a pair!"

Juan Murphey shook his head and his face fell. "No—not a pair," he said, and looked straight into the eyes of the woman toward whom he had felt such an instant friendship, the moment that he had begun to talk to her. Her fine eyes showed that she understood.

"Well, and so you determined very wisely to wait until I could seem to come and dine, leaving the world to gossip when it knows—as, of course, it will—that you have given such preference to your new acquaintance, the Spanish Don."

"Yes, that was so, but there is a good deal more to it than that. You see, Mary sent me a good account of the affair, and also the conclusions to which she had come. I had never thought of taking to her something which was troubling me—*about the same subject.*"

"A-h-h!" Juan breathed, and sat up very straight. "Now we are coming to it. I wanted, so much to ask you—"

"Yes. And I was about to talk to you, when those dreadful murders happened.

Tell me, are they part of this"—her glance strayed to the house next door—"this matter?"

"I haven't an idea. I was at Scotland Yard this morning, supposedly as Don Jaime, to be questioned about those two deaths, but really to have a general conference with Inspector Cross, and when we came away some one shot into the car and just missed us. We don't know whether that is part of anything, or not."

She showed her alarm and interest only by the widening of her eyes. Juan liked her more, and more trusted her nerve and good sense.

"Now that you know our side of it," he went on, "the best thing you can do is to give me a little more of that delightful coffee and tell me all that you know—or suspect."

CHAPTER XV

WHAT HER NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR SAW

"ALMA and I have known each other for a long time, in a general way, you see, but never so closely as the last few years when I have usually spent about two months here.

"She is a very sensitive and gentle person, and for a long time after her husband's death was practically a recluse. Her father built this house of hers, and she was born in it.

"She does not maintain a country place, but usually goes to France and Italy part of the year. Many of the houses about here are really occupied only for, at the most, four months of the year, but Alma always stayed in town a great deal.

"Mr. Batten liked town life and cared very little for the country, and nothing at all for sports. Alma never cared anything for sports, either."

"This is what we heard from Mrs. Hexter."

"Well, last year there was a time when I did not hear from Alma. She usually writes me with the utmost regularity about twice a month. Sometimes it is no more than a note—but she writes.

"I finally wrote to ask if she were well, and got a letter saying that she had been temporarily under the weather. Like Mrs. Hexter, I thought that she expressed herself in a way which seemed a little—what is it you Americans say?—high hattish?—well, never mind, and you needn't laugh. You know what I mean.

"When I came up to town Alma came over at once to see me, though, and to say how glad she was that I had arrived. Now that was something that she had never done before. It was not quite her manner.

"She usually came out in the garden when she saw me looking at the tulip bed, and we'd compare hers and mine. This sounds so inconsequential that, if I had not had Mary's letter I would never dare tell you of it.

"There were a lot of things like that. For one thing, Alma never used to say really clever things. You know what I mean. She usually replied very intelligently and well to anything that was said, but she did not sparkle—you understand.

"Now she started to slip a sparkle into her conversation. She started to—well, to talk, at times, as I had never known Alma to talk, and yet—there was something shallow and ill-informed about what she said when it came to the larger matters, world conditions, politics, and so on. Mary wrote me that this Mrs. Hexter had remarked that.

"There are a lot of little things like that. I can't say that they worried me, but they did distinctly puzzle me. I could not mention them, even if I would, to other people, for very few people really know Alma well.

"She has never been the person to encourage intimacies. In fact, I often thought her standards too exacting, so far as people were concerned.

"Taking that into consideration, you can imagine my surprise when I found that she was cultivating a certain half Bohemian set—no, no, I do not mean artists and writers of any standing; it would be an honor to know them—but these are people on the fringe of things.

"I can't say that I think any the worse of them for trying to get into that house, and I have to admit that the few I have met have behaved well and even proved rather interesting, but the point of the thing is that Alma would never have had these people in her house for intimate guests before this year.

" She was even rather indifferent to artists of real prominence, something which the duke gently chided her for. There seems to be a good deal of drinking going on *when the duke is not there*."

" Ah!"

" He is not there as much as he would like to be, for even though all his estates in Russia had been taken from him, he still had a good many interests here in England, being one of the few exiles who are not poor.

" Then, he is looked to by all the Russians here and on the Continent as the active head of the old aristocracy, and he is often away from England.

" The thing which started me to doing some thinking occurred two months ago. I always keep this house open, with the cook and a maid here, in case I decide to run up, or arrive from anywhere, for—just as you heard me say on the Aquitania and as you so cleverly quoted—I detest hotel food.

" Well, I came up for a few days to do some shopping. Alma did not know that I had arrived, for it was a bright, sunny day, and I sent my bag on by a messenger and walked, going in at the side entrance there, to which I always carry a key.

" I came into this room. The curtains were partially drawn, and as I was tired, I sat down to rest in the dim light. I could look right into that small window there, which is a room where the housekeeper often sits and sews. Alma is seldom there.

" Well, on that day, Alma was in that room and there were two of these semi-bohemians with her. One of them is really a Russian, I think. At least, the duke seems to know him.

" The housekeeper was laughing and talking as I have never seen her do before, and Alma was sitting on the table, swinging her feet and laughing. Unless you had known her, Juan Murphey, you could never imagine how that startled me. It would not have surprised me more if she had been standing on her head.

" I never knew Alma to make the slightest motion which was not dignity itself. But that is not all. All of them were drinking, and this was what was especially strange.

" The whisky was not in any decanter, of which Alma had some wonderful examples, but in a common bottle, and the glasses were ordinary whisky glasses.

" This is something which you would have to estimate by the light of what Alma is really like. She never drinks spirits, except when chilled, and then only in the smallest quantity, and she is especially particular about the way that everything is served in her house.

" As for her taking guests of even very ordinary caliber into the housekeeper's room, having in a bottle of whisky and drinking with them and with the housekeeper out of large, coarse glasses—well, I tell you that I have never had such a shock."

" I don't wonder," said Juan.

" It doesn't sound like much, but it was just as bad as if I had seen Alma stealing, or hugging her own butler or something like that. The queer thing was, too, that the housekeeper sat with her hand on Alma's knee.

" Alma is always kind to her servants, but in all the years I have known her I have never seen the slightest familiarity permitted them. The housekeeper is devoted to Alma, and has been with her many years. She is one of the most silent women that I have ever known, and the servants have told my servants that for weeks at a time they never saw any more of her than when they were called into her room to receive their orders and when she went through the house or the kitchens inspecting their work.

" Alma once told me that Mrs. Keenan had had a great tragedy in her life which was the reason for her peculiar manner. Well, imagine what it seemed like to see that solemn woman laughing and talking.

" The whole scene was so out of character that long after they had all left that room I just sat there in a daze.

" I told the housemaid that I was tired and would lie down and not to raise any of the windows or disturb the curtains, and then I lay on that couch over there and thought.

"It was growing dark and I had no idea of seeing anything more, but as I gazed absently at the window I saw that people had come into the room opposite again, and that time I went to my windows and looked carefully through the dusk.

"Mrs. Keenan was there and the Russian and they talked, and both of them drank as they talked. Nothing unusual to tell, but there was such an air of equality—and that woman, whom I had never seen raise her eyes in all these years—well, of course, she raised them, but I mean that she never seemed to pay attention to anything or anybody—that woman talked away with her eyes and her hands and her whole body, in a way that was not nice, like some rough character.

"For a moment I could have sworn that she was a bad person of some kind. And listen to this. Those two went out of that room arm in arm!"

"I—see!" said Juan, drawing a long breath. "Well, what did you do?"

"I? I didn't do anything. I went to bed with a headache and laid awake half the night. Once I got up and went to my window, which is also on this side and looked out, thinking that I had heard a noise next door and sure enough, there was a light in the back bedroom window which is Alma's dressing room.

"I was so worried that I watched it for a long time, and I am sure that I saw the shadows of several people passing the shade. You will laugh at me for deducing anything from such slight evidence, but I do believe that there were several people there—and that they were all drunk.

"Can you imagine what I felt? Drunken men in Alma's dressing room *at three o'clock, a. m.* It would be different if she were different."

"I—see," said Juan again.

"Well, I have never seen anything like that since, but I have felt a great difference in Alma. She seems to have rather intimate association with this Russian whom I saw talking to the housekeeper in that familiar way.

"His name is Bravortsky and he is said to have been a major in the Czar's forces. I have heard him mention the regiment and many details, but I never do remember anything about army or navy matters.

"Bravortsky is at the house a good deal, more often when the duke is not there than when he is. Once, when I went over to see Alma about some roses which we both have in our gardens the butler seemed startled when he saw me at the door, and I thought that I saw Alma run up the stairs; in fact, I could be almost sure that I saw her, and yet he said that she was not in.

"I am sure that I saw him look backward over his shoulder as if to make sure that she was out of sight. Of course, such a thing might happen at any time if a woman did not wish to see a chance visitor, but it is unthinkable that Alma should not see *me.* I think that Edith Hexter and I are her only real friends.

"When I went to see Mary Smith, a week ago, I did not think of presenting this problem to her. I often save any handwriting of celebrities that I happen to have, and as I had a number with me and wanted to see her anyway, I took them in, in person.

"What she wrote me as to her deductions about the handwriting of Alma, which Edith Hexter had just received, knocked me cold. You see, I had seen some things that would seem to give a good deal of color to that preposterous idea of Mary's."

"Not preposterous," Juan shook his head. "When Mary gives her professional opinion in that slow, careful way of hers, you may be sure that she is not mistaken. I am sure of her.

"You see, the old system of identification by handwriting totally ignored the graphological deductions of character and therefore was often inaccurate, but the union of the handwriting expert and the graphologist gives a true result.

"I'm going on the premises that Mary is right, and that the woman about whom we are now talking is not your old friend, not the old friend that Mrs. Hexter knows, but a woman who has been substituted for her. Tell me if you notice anything in her appearance which is different?"

"N-no—I can't say that I do, but I *can* say that her eyes do not seem the same. They are more beautiful, if anything, than they used to seem. Her voice is richer, too. She has more animation.

"All I can say is that it is as if you had taken rather a dim portrait and painted it in high colors. As I told you, what she does is not really different, but there is a little more impulsiveness about her.

"However, that which, to my mind, is most peculiar of all is this. Alma never cared for anything outside of her own home. She disliked sports, never walked except when in the country, and never set foot outside her own house after nightfall unless she went in a car.

"But lately I have seen her, on four different occasions, dressed very inconspicuously, leave the house after nine o'clock at night and walk away into the dark.

"Once I am sure that a man who had been standing at the corner of Hyacinthe Road and Camberwall Street turned and walked with her. I can only repeat that you would have to have known Alma to know how unusual such an action on her part would seem."

CHAPTER XVI

THE METHOD IN HIS MADNESS

THE butler tapped on the door at this point, entered, and informed his mistress that a young woman from Garrett's Agency had arrived. "About the position, *madame*."

"Will you excuse me a few minutes?" Mrs. Mason said to Juan. "This is an applicant for the position of housemaid. I sent out an urgent call to-day to several agencies, but none that they sent me pleased me.

"I don't know this agency, but they supply domestic servants of a superior order and I suppose have sent the girl at this late hour on the chance of getting her in."

"Wait a minute." Juan was smiling mischievously. "Do something for me. See this girl in here, will you? It's just a whim." Mrs. Mason stared for a moment, and then laughed. "Don Jaime has only to command," she said. "Bring the girl here, Dawkins.

"Now, what is going on?" she asked, as the man went out of the room.

"Wait; I'm not sure that anything is."

The young woman whom the butler brought into the drawing room a moment later was an excellent example of the good servant. She was dressed with extreme simplicity, carried herself with modest assurance, and was not at all flustered.

She gave her name to Mrs. Mason as Amelia Hutchinson, produced copies of her references, referred Mrs. Mason to the agency as to their possession of the originals, stated her qualifications, and sat silent afterward.

Mrs. Mason shot a doubtful look at Juan. She could not imagine what he had wanted the girl in for. As for Juan, he was in a quandary. The girl was either a very good actress, or she was just what she seemed to be. At last he passed Mrs. Mason a card on which he had scribbled:

Make an excuse to go out for a moment.

When he was alone with the girl, he said to her:

"Who gave you this assignment?"

The girl looked at him with surprise. "Assignment?" she said. "I don't understand, Mr. Hollingshead of the agency told me to come here."

Without a word Juan went out to the telephone which he had noticed in the hall, and called Mrs. Mason. "Call the agency," he said, "and say that you will take the girl. Ask for Mr. Hollingshead. Just as you are through, say, 'The terms are as agreed on.'"

"Yes, but—"

"He will then say something. Hang up the receiver and tell me what that is."

Mrs. Mason shook her head in half-assumed and half-real amazement, and then did as she was bidden.

"'That's all settled, then,'" she quoted, as she hung up the receiver.

Juan grinned and took her by the arm.

"Come back," he ordered, and marched her into the drawing-room where he said: "I just got the all settled sign on you, miss. I'm Juan Murphey."

The girl's impassive face flashed into life. She stood up, shook hands respectfully with Juan, and said: "I've often heard of you, sir, but never thought to be with you on a case."

Mrs. Mason sank into a chair, and rolled her eyes at the pair.

"Well!" she exclaimed. "Will somebody kindly explain? Why does the young woman have this assurance, and why do you tell her another name than your own, Don Jaime?"

"You are a discreet as well as charming lady," said Juan, still smiling. "This is one of the most expert indoor detectives that you could want to see."

"Oh, Mr. Murphey!"

"Yes, you are, my dear. What is your name? I've forgotten."

"Rose Maguire."

"But she came from a domestic servant agency," protested Mrs. Mason.

"That agency is a sort of double-barreled one," Juan replied. "It is really an excellent servant agency, but it is also a detective agency, known to a few, and often supplying England with servants who are also detectives.

"They have to be good servants, as well as detectives. I am sure that you will have no fault to find with your housemaid, Mrs. Mason."

"I won't know how to treat her," the woman wailed, with her usual half humorous attitude. "How can I order her around when she may be detecting at that very moment?"

"You need not think about that at all, Mrs. Mason," the pseudo housemaid replied, smiling. "After I leave this room just forget that I am anything but what I am hired for—unless I am needed to do something in the other line, or you want to consult me or to tell me something.

"Am I supposed to know something about the case, Mr. Murphey? I suppose that you have got word to Mr. Hollingshead that you are here?"

"Yes, I had Mrs. Mason give him the word, and received back his."

"So that was what those terms were?"

"Yes, Mrs. Mason. By that means Hollingshead, who is the man in charge of the detective branch of the agency, knows that you know who your housemaid is and, inferentially, that I am here. We have to be very careful in using the telephone, there are so many ways of tapping a telephone, these days, that practically nothing can be intrusted to it with the assurance of secrecy, which is the reason that I did not speak myself.

"Now, Rose, suppose that Mrs. Mason and I give you a very brief statement of what the matter is. I have no idea, at present, of what you can do. I just sent word to the agency by an operative of mine who arrived this morning that they should try to fill this place.

"I was not really certain that I could confide in Mrs. Mason at first, and trusted to chance to get word to you about the matter. By the way, Mrs. Mason, the gardener whom you hired this evening was that operative."

"My word!" The Englishwoman stared. "That is 'such speed,' isn't it? You Americans!"

"It is 'some speed,' yes. I'll have to take you in hand and teach you our vocabulary. Now, on this case, you begin with what you know, and I'll finish it."

Between the two of them they managed to give a comprehensive if hasty statement of the case to Rose Maguire, who merely nodded at their astonishing statements.

"The thing for me to do is to become as friendly with the servants next door as I can," she said.

"And now you'd better go," Juan said. We don't want the butler to know that you are anything but what you seem. Be here in the morning.

"Tell Hollingshead that I thank him for giving you to us, and that I'll not communicate direct with him if I can help it. I feel that every move that I make may be watched, and if possible I want to preserve the Spaniard for a time.

"That's a smart girl," he told Mrs. Mason, after Rose Maguire, instantly slipping into her character, had thanked Mrs. Mason for the position and had followed the butler out. "I have heard of her before. Some day she will be really worth while.

"Now we have two people to undermine

that place next door while we assail it from above. How am I going to be introduced there? It must not be too soon. Whether I am suspected or not, I must always maintain my pose. If I can disarm suspicion, so much the better."

"I wonder if you can get an introduction to Bravortsky or some of that crew? I tell you! Bravortsky has been in to tea once or twice, and I suspect that he will be here to-morrow, since Nicolas Yurdsky, the Russian pianist, is to come and he knows that.

"For some reason, he and all of them—Alma, too—are cultivating Yurdsky, who has been a friend of mine ever since, as a poor boy, he began playing here in London.

"Alma seemed not to care for him, but now—you know, even knowing all that I do, there are times when I simply cannot believe that it is not my Alma—my Alma who has fallen into evil hands, in some way. Do you think it possible that Mary Smith could be mistaken?"

"No!"

Mrs. Mason shrugged her shoulders and sighed. "When I think that the Alma that I know may be somewhere outside her own safe old home, which she loves so and that she so seldom wants to leave, it makes me frantic. If this is a substitute woman, she is a fiend and the whole thing is a diabolical plot!"

"That is exactly what it is. I am more convinced of it every moment. We must not hurry, though. A single false step will betray us. As for you, dear lady—I wish that you would allow Rose to sleep in your dressing room; I should feel safer."

"Why—I am safe, here in my own house. What do you mean?"

"I mean, that we have undoubtedly some of the cleverest and most desperate of European and possibly American criminals to deal with, and that they will not stop at anything.

"You and Mrs. Hexter are the only two persons well enough acquainted with the true Alma to become suspicious. She is on the other side of the Atlantic, but you are right here, next door. I do not feel easy.

"Please promise me that you will have Rose with you. She has a pistol, no doubt. For to-night, how about the cook?"

"I wouldn't ask her a favor outside of her kitchen, for a thousand pounds."

"How about the butler? Where does he sleep?"

"He and the cook have rooms on the third floor."

"So that you are alone in this house but for them?"

"Yes. The footman goes home. If I am entertaining a great deal, of course, I have in other servants, but the season is hardly opened yet."

"I don't like it."

"Oh, nonsense!"

He was still worried as he went down to his waiting car, for he had not succeeded in getting Bertha Mason to believe that there was any cause for her to be afraid, and he could see that it was still hard for her to make up her mind that the case was really dangerous.

Michael's face did not change as he welcomed his master to their suite in the Ritz, but Juan saw that he was pale.

"You'll have to get out of this habit of worrying about me, dear chap."

"Yes, sir."

"Come here," said Juan, and as Michael, after seeing that every shade was down and that there was no keyhole from the hall in a line with them, came to sit beside him, he went on to tell his colleague of all that had happened that evening.

"Where is Hoofty staying?" he asked, as he ended.

For answer Michael brought out a very correct-looking letter:

"I hope that you will drop in and see me before you leave London," said the writer, who addressed his note to "Mon cher Jaime." The note was a casual chat. In one part there was a quotation, evidently from a book of light philosophies. "That's the address," Michael stated. "I decoded it. '19 Warwick Lane.' That's down Limehouse way."

"You see the value of all the training that I insist on my operatives taking," Juan said. "Very often, there would be no occasion whatever for such elaborate precautions. Hoofty could send me in his address and write a report, just as he often does.

"But there are times and they are the most serious times to a detective, when he has to remember that the cunning of not only one high-class criminal, but of a number of them, perhaps under a clever leader, is pitted against him.

"I don't know that our mail will be or can be tampered with, but if we can plant our operatives in places, so can criminals, and I am convinced that hotel servants have far too little attention from the police of every country.

"Half of the big crimes are either planned in hotels or have part of their plots laid there. So I can't be sure that some employee here is not here for the express purpose of watching us. With the magnitude of the job which must be on hand, there may be many members of this gang which we are dealing with.

"I know that a great many people think that perfecting my operatives in disguise, teaching them to guard against surprises, and giving them means of secretly communicating with me and with each other, is all a waste of time.

"I acknowledge that we don't use these resources often and that a great deal of the work we do is of the simplest description. But when we do get into a mess like this, Michael, the ordinary detective methods are hopelessly outclassed."

CHAPTER XVII

TINKLING FINGERS

YURDSKY was playing.

Bravortsky leaned on the end of the piano with just a shade too obsequious a manner.

Several women and men were grouped near one of the long windows which opened on the terrace.

Mrs. Mason sat on a sofa with her friend Alma.

Don Jaime de Ventura, more like a painting by Velasquez than ever, stood by the mantle, his slim and graceful figure making every other man in the room look commonplace.

The housemaid, "Amelia Hutchinson," served tea, under the careful eye of the butler. It spoke volumes for her that he was not frowning slightly; Dawkins was the terror of untrained or careless servants.

Yurdsky was a superb pianist; but it seemed to Juan that the company paid a trifle too much court to him. He was a pale, quiet youth who had no personal vanity, but who was a sublime egotist when it came to his talent. There was no extravagance of praise which he would not accept as his due.

Juan had observed this company with minute attention, although his manner was that of a person who is habitually absent-minded. The women and the men were all just a trifle too authentic! In short, everybody looked his or her part too well.

Bravortsky was excessively military, the women were very Russian, and very French, and very English. The men, who had been introduced by various names, were so very much at ease!

But as for Mrs. George Batten, if Juan had not had an unshakable confidence in Mary Smith, not only as a woman, but as a scientist, he would have been convinced that the whole fabric of their surmises was a falsity.

There did not seem a particle of artificiality about her. She was rather quiet in her manner, although undeniably beautiful. Juan wondered that the two women closest to her, Edith Hexter and Bertha Mason, had not insisted on this point more.

He had been introduced to her and had had the opportunity to sit down on the sofa with the two women, but this was not in the game. He intended to seem aloof from all other women, and to give his friendship rather openly to Mrs. Mason.

In his inner consciousness, Juan knew very well that he had a good deal of magnetism, in his own usual person, and that as Don Jaime he really was something of what Hoofty was continually teasing him for being—a heart-breaker.

Outside the window through which Juan could look he now saw that worthy, properly smocked and hatted, working carefully around some rosebeds. Hoofty was clearly visible from the drawing-room and as

Yurdsky, after receiving adulation, was sitting down to rest and to drink his tea, Juan distinctly heard Alma Batten say to her friend:

" I see you have a new gardener in the place of old Cordes."

" Yes," Mrs. Mason replied. " I got him yesterday. It seems that Cordes knew him and gave him the address when he was dying in the hospital, poor old fellow. To think that I was not here. He'd been with me eight years."

" I have had to make some changes in my own staff," the rich, colorful voice went on. " You remember Thompkins? He used to tend the grounds as well as work in the house. He's gone to America.

" I wonder if your man could help me a little for the next few weeks until I can get another man like Thompkins? I don't need a man just for the grounds, you know. They are not as extensive as yours."

" Yes, I'll tell Brown to see you after dinner this evening, of course," Mrs. Mason replied.

There had been just a second's hesitation in her reply, and Juan thought that he guessed what had caused it. Like himself, she had been too amazed by this turn of good fortune to believe that it could be wholly fortuitous. Like her—as he felt sure—he instantly began to ask himself what lay behind this.

Speculation on this was brought abruptly to an end by the butler, who stopped in the middle of the large doorway of the drawing-room, ready to make an important announcement.

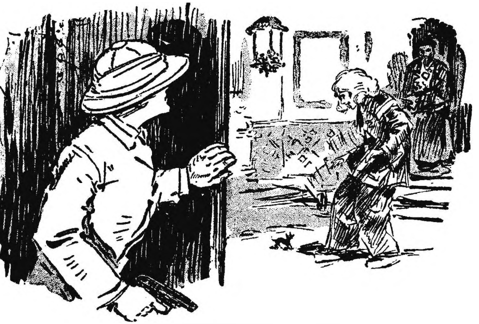
TO BE CONTINUED

William J. Flynn TAKES pleasure in promising you for next week an unusual treat. Austin J. Small, one of America's favorite detective story authors, begins " The Vantine Diamonds " in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION. Here is a story of really superior merit. Only once or twice a year does a mystery novel appear, suitable to be classed with this one.

Jack Bechdolt presents " The Tinkling Death," a splendid novelette; H. C. Bailey tells what happened to Reggie Fortune in " Zodiacs "; Thomas Topham gives you " The Educated Cop "; John Ames contributes " The Gypsy Moth "; and Don H. Thompson has " Behind the Curtain."

Among the special articles are " Murderous Medicos," by Zeta Rothschild; " Death in the Cup," by Robert W. Sneddon; " The Perfect Crime," by Lee l'Anau; " Sweet Alice Grey," by Henry Gollomb; and Solving Cipher Secrets, by M. E. Ohaver.

We are taking a separate paragraph to mention " The Black Bandit," a short story by Austin Roberts, whose " Rabbits " in a recent issue elicited so much enthusiastic comment.



She played with a dog little larger than her closed hand

PEKING

By R. W. Alexander

J. D. TURNED THE TORCH UPWARD AND IT CAUGHT THE FLASH OF LETTERS OF GOLD: TOGETHER HE AND JOAN READ THE MESSAGE AND THE CURSE

THEY stood where the Arches of Sorrow cast their shade, looking out across the sunlit plain toward the hills. The air shimmered in the noonday heat, and the gray piles of stone found shapes other than those with which the patient masons had endowed them.

Here and there a coolie plodded slowly cityward, laden bamboo pole on shoulder; to the west a string of camels went nodding along the unseen road, knee-deep in dust. But for these, and the tombs sprawled in the sunshine, Stewart and the girl were alone. Few came to the Plain of the Dead, and none lingered on it.

" May as well go on!" J. D. said.

They went on, their shadows dancing at their feet, toward the last resting place of the Lis. Joan was quiet, nervous, pale. J. D., a little anxious, watched her closely without appearing to watch her at all.

He thought the strain of the quest had been almost too much for her, and that the prospect of its ending had weakened her resistance. Added to this was the fear that she had searched in vain, that Li Hung Chang was really dead, and her sister with him. J. D. himself was afraid they would find it so.

" Not much to see, is there, Joan?"

" We'll have to find the way in."

They found the entrance to the tombs at the bottom of a short flight of steps, guarded by twin open-mouthed dragons to scare away evil spirits, roofed with a great block of stone that held a statue of Buddha.

Episode No. 6 of The Trail of the Soapstone Buddhas

But the entrance was sealed, impassable. It was closed by a door of bronze on massive hinges, inscribed with characters neither of them could decipher. Nothing less than a charge of dynamite would move it by force, and they saw no other way of moving it.

" Unless," J. D. suggested, " that statue has anything to do with it."

" Try," Joan said, rather listlessly.

He jumped, gripped the edge of the stone, pulled himself up beside the Buddha. " What d'you suggest, Joan?"

" Oh, anything. Twist its head."

J. D. took the great head between his hands, exerted a steady pressure. He felt it give, and with a hollow clang the door below swung open.

" That was a good guess," he said lightly. Dropping down, he took Joan's arm, and together they faced the gloom beyond the door.

" It's so dark," Joan said, hesitating. Her experience in the underground chamber in Shanghai had made her nervous where darkness was concerned.

" I brought a torch," J. D. said. " Tombs are dark places." He played the light on the stone floor, and they went forward slowly. The door clanged shut behind them.

" Should have thought of propping it open," J. D. said lightly, feeling the girl start. " But there's sure to be some way of getting out, so don't worry." He rapped with one heel on the stone, and a hollow boom answered him. " It was walking on this that did it. Anyway, we'll see what's to be seen. You're not afraid?"

Her face was dim in shadow, but he saw her smile with some of the old joyous recklessness. " No. Or only that we've followed a false trail."

They went forward some distance between the sculptured walls, into a hall where the gods of Old China sat staring calmly at things unseen by mortal eyes. Dust on the floor softened their footsteps; almost unconsciously, they spoke in whispers, reluctant to break the silence of the dead. For the dead of a score of centuries were about them, the dead of the family of Li.

Old men and women, maidens and boys and babies, they seemed to watch these two intruders and wonder what brought them here. They were neither friendly nor hostile, but serene. So Joan whispered, glancing about her as the white beam of the torch crept here and there among the coffins in their stone niches.

" We have to find Li Tzu," J. D. said softly. He bent a little to peer at a coffin. " They're all named, you see. And he'll be among the latest left down here, if not the latest."

They found the coffin of Li Tzu at the feet of a god in the far shadows of the hall. They read his name in golden lettering on the inlaid aromatic wood, and knew that here lay the last key of the six that opened the door to the treasure of the Soapstone Buddhas. Yet they hesitated a moment before using it. Then the girl touched J. D.'s wrist.

" You remember the message?"

" ' Look where Li Tzu, my father, looks. Read and obey,' " J. D. said thoughtfully. " Judging by the position of the coffin, he's looking at the ceiling, isn't he?" He flashed the white beam of the torch upward, played it on the arched stone twenty or more feet above the coffin. They caught the flash of letters of gold, and he steadied his hand. Together they read the message and the curse.

" ' These are the words of Li Hung Chang, spoken before the spirits of his ancestors. If there is evil in your heart, turn away before you do greater evil, and are cursed. If there is good, open the coffin beneath, fearing nothing, and follow the road to which it is the gate.

" ' If there is evil, and you follow the road, may you, and your sons, and your sons' sons, be cursed for ten thousand generations. May your wives and your daughters know shame, and your spirit and the spirits of your descendants be forever prey to the Spirits of the Lower Kingdom.

" ' May your name be a spitting and an execration throughout all China, and the names of your ancestors. These are the words of Li Hung Chang. Read and obey.' "

For some time J. D. and the girl were

silent, while still the light of the torch played on the golden lettering, and the words of Li Hung Chang gleamed down at them from the cold gray stone, like bars of sunshine on a storm-dark sea.

It seemed that the quiet dead watched them as they stood there in the back-flung shadow of the torch and the hand that held it, and wondered about them, crowding nearer in the gloom.

"It seems peculiar," J. D. said at length. "I mean, the Chinese are so reverent about their dead."

"It's horrible," Joan said. Her fingers tightened on his arm. "Let's go out, Dave, please. If Elaine is here, she's dead. In a way, I hope she *is* dead, though that may seem strange.

"It's so dark in here, so *cold!* I think these old dead people are all laughing at us, and joking among themselves. Can't you hear them whispering, whispering—" She ended shakily, staring with wide eyes of horror into the shadows.

J. D. slipped an arm about her waist. "H'sh!" he said soothingly. "Keep a grip on your nerves, Joan." He pressed her close to him, and felt her yield much as a child might, fearful of the dark. "Remember I'm with you."

She laughed, a little unsteadily. "I'm sorry. I'll try to be brave."

"Of course, I'll bring you out if you really want to go, and if we can get out."

"No, I'm all right now. Open the coffin."

He hesitated. "You're sure you're not afraid?"

"We have no evil in our hearts," she said gravely. She glanced about her into the darkness that concealed the coffins. "I think they know, too."

J. D. nodded, bent over the coffin of Li Tzu, lifted the lid. It lifted easily, on smooth hinges. The girl uttered a little startled cry. The coffin was empty. More, it had no bottom but a flight of steps that ran downward from it into darkness. An odor of dampness came to them, and a cold breath like clammy fingers upon their cheeks.

"So this is the road we have to follow," J. D. said. "Feel ready for it, Joan?"

"Yes," she answered, a note of returned courage in her voice.

II

SIDE by side they stepped into the coffin and went slowly down, the light of the torch guiding their feet. Above them, the lid thudded into place, bringing to birth queer echoes to play about in spaces unseen, unguessed, to die reluctantly to silence.

There were few more than a dozen steps, ending in a passage with a floor of clay and walls and a roof of unhewn stone. The walls oozed moisture, and the roof; and here and there the light of the torch shone redly back at them from puddles on the floor.

The air was stale and heavy as the air of an underwater cavern, and seemed to press close about them, chokingly. The mud of the floor clung to their feet, and in places J. D. splashed through inches of water with Joan in his arms.

Once a rat crossed their path, scrambling up the rough wall to vanish in a gap between two stones; and once a toad with ruby-red eyes stared down at them from a high crevice, heavy-lidded and placid, undisturbed alike by their coming and their going.

But for these they saw no living thing, but pressed on in a lifeless quiet with only the sound of their own footfalls and their voices to break this silence that seemed of centuries.

"You're not tired, Joan?"

"No; but we've gone an awful distance, haven't we?"

"About a mile, I think," J. D. said. "Though it's hard to judge. If you're tired, we'll rest a bit."

She shook her head. "It's too wet, and messy, and generally unpleasant. I'd like to get out into the sunshine again as quickly as possible."

They plodded on, careless now of the state of the shoes, walking through puddles and over dry ground alike. The tunnel was far from straight, and its floor far from level; it had been constructed in a haphazard manner, and here and there the stones bulged in the walls, admitting little drifts of clay to form low mounds reaching half across its width.

In places, too, the root of a bush or tree showed starkly, thrust from the soil between the stones, proving the tunnel ran not far below the surface of the ground. So they went on until J. D. noticed how the girl's steps lagged, and felt the increasing weight of her hand upon his arm.

"Tired, Joan?"

Smiling, she confessed it. "Just a little."

"Let me carry you a bit?"

"I'm not so tired as all that, thanks," she said shyly.

"Pooh, pooh!" J. D. said, and caught her up before she guessed his intention. Then she laughed, and put one arm about his shoulders. She knew his strength, and knew he could carry her an hour before draining it more than a trifle. And she was wearier than she had admitted.

She had slept little on the journey from Shanghai, and still less the previous night. Back in Singapore and Mandalay the quest had been a joyous adventure; but now, with the end almost in sight, the threat of failure shadowed her with the fear that everything had been in vain.

But no—not everything. She had made the acquaintance of the man in whose arms she now lay so contentedly, and that counted more than she would have liked to confess to any but J. D. himself, and not even to him until he had made some confessions of his own.

He did not carry her far. The passage ended abruptly in a flight of steps similar to that they had descended, but headed with a door. He set her on her feet, whispered. "S'sh!" and went silently up the steps. A few moments he listened, his ear close to the metal-ribbed wood, then beckoned her. "Doesn't seem to be anything doing, Joan. We'll see if we can get through, eh?"

She nodded, and with cautious fingers he tried the door. It opened readily. Beyond it they saw a glimmer of light about the edges of a fold of heavy curtain. They passed through quietly, and the door swung shut behind them.

"I wonder—" J. D. whispered, stretching out one hand.

The curtain stirred as he touched it. It was wrenched away, and they saw the room, and the swordsman crouching there, one hand out to toss aside their cover, the other back and up, tensed with the weight of the curved blade.

J. D. dived for his legs, brought him crashing down. The sword described a glittering arc, fell point-first, and stood quivering in the floor.

The two men rolled and tumbled about it until J. D. dragged his pistol out and struck twice with the heavy barrel. He rose to his feet, alert, listening. There was no sound to indicate that the noise of the struggle had been overheard. Relaxing, he turned to the girl.

"Better be ready for anything, Joan."

"I am," she said, tapping the little pistol in her hand. The sparkle had come back into her eyes, and the color to her cheeks, with the imminence of danger. She looked down at the unconscious man. "What about tying him?"

"Hardly necessary," J. D. said. "If there's going to be trouble, we'll have met it long before he comes to."

They glanced about the room. It was small, barely furnished. Joan walked softly across to the window, and looked out on a corner of a garden within high walls. Beyond it, distant now, was the Plain of the Dead.

"We're somewhere in the foothills, Dave."

"I guessed it," J. D. nodded, joining her. "A pretty big house, too, judging by the garden. But hadn't we better see what's to be seen?"

They crossed to the one door of the room other than that by which they had entered, and stood at it a moment, listening. No sound came from beyond, and, very cautiously, J. D. pushed it open.

They looked into a larger and more luxurious room. It was unoccupied. They went through it slowly, and again halted at a door to listen, their breaths stilled, their eyes intent. And as they stood, from somewhere beyond the door came a girl's quick laugh.

"Dave, Dave!" Joan whispered. "See if that's—Elaine. Please! I'm afraid."

"Stay where you are, then," J. D. said. "Shoot if anything happens, and I'll be back in two seconds." He pushed at the door, felt it yield, and slipped through.

III

THE room in which he found himself was more beautiful than any other he had ever seen. There were treasures on its walls that American and European collectors would have given their fortunes to possess.

There were rugs on the floor worth a king's ransom, miracles in color and sheer loveliness of conception. There were vases filled with flowers, themselves more graceful than the flowers.

There were carvings of ivory and jade, and landscape paintings by China's Old Masters. Yet the room was not crowded. Each object stood alone, with plenty of space about it, to be judged by its own merit.

J. D. saw all this with a quick glance, then concentrated on the loveliest thing in the room.

She played with a dog little larger than her closed hand, a dog with long hair and eyes like black diamonds. It rushed at her across the carpet, and with quick movements she evaded it, or lifted it up and held it at arm's length, or rolled it over and over gently.

Her garb was the jacket and trousers of heavy silk worn by Chinese ladies; but her hair was the purest gold, and her eyes were blue, and her cheeks had the delicate flush of roses in them. J. D. knew he had found Elaine Manville.

The old man who sat watching the girl at play was a Chinese of the Chinese. His head was covered with a skullcap scrolled in silver thread. The nails of his little fingers were sheathed in silver. His hands were long and fine, the hands of a man, but graceful as the hands of a woman.

A mustache drooped limply from the corners of his mouth, touching the breast of his silken jacket. His face in repose was calm almost to severity, wonderfully lighted by a quick fleeting smile as he watched the laughing girl.

It was the face of a man of integrity and honor, and of strength of character, second to none. It was the face of a man born to lead others, whether or not to his own good. The face of one who follows his destiny, careless of what may lie in his path.

J. D. stood there a moment unobserved, so quiet had been his entry. Then the girl saw him, and rose from her knees, putting out one hand toward the old man. The old man started, and would have struck a gong that stood beside him; but J. D. swung his pistol up.

"Quiet, Li Hung Chang!"

Li Hung Chang took the girl's hand, caressed it reassuringly. "Who are you?"

"One who has followed the trail of the Soapstone Buddhas," J. D. said.

No trace of emotion showed on the old man's face. It seemed as if the treasure he had hidden was no more to him than to the tiny dog which sniffed about his feet.

"What do you seek?"

"Nothing your treasure could give me," J. D. said smiling. "But I come with one from whom you stole a treasure greater than the treasure you took from the Peking Court."

"What is this treasure?"

"She stands beside you, Li Hung Chang."

Li Hung Chang nodded slowly. J. D. slipped the pistol into his belt; it was needed no more.

"So it has come," said Li Hung Chang. "The time of parting I have feared so much has come. Day by day and year by year I have watched her grow and gather loveliness, and day by day and year by year I have told myself she should be with her people, living as they live, seeing China as they see China, seeing us as they see us.

"Often I have had the message ready; but always I have told myself that she was young, and that another day would be but a day, and a week a week. So from a little thing that crawled about the floor she has grown to be as you see her now, and still she stayed with me."

J. D. nodded. "But the other has more claim." He tapped on the door behind him, and opened it for Joan. She stood an instant hesitant, then slowly passed him, and halted again.

"*Elaine!*"

The girl stood silent, but a little pale, one hand at her breast, her eyes wide.

"Elaine, don't you know me?" Joan pleaded.

"I do," said the girl, very softly, in perfect English. "I remember you, a little." Walking forward, she held up her face to Joan, who took her in her arms and kissed her. "But it's so long ago—"

She began to cry, her face against Joan's shoulder. J. D. stood in embarrassed silence, but Li Hung Chang watched with a smile half wistful, half pleased. While still the two girls whispered together, he turned to J. D.

"The guard at the door attacked you? You did not kill him?"

"No."

"I am glad. He is faithful, and the sight of a white man must have surprised him. He has watched for fifteen years, and you are the first to come. One of our people he would have brought to me. So Sin Tiel, S'hih Quen, and the others, are dead?"

J. D. nodded.

"If you would tell me—" Li Hung Chang began.

A white man, pistol in hand, stood in the doorway.

"Keep your hands still," he said easily to J. D., "until we get to know each other. I suppose you're Stewart?"

"I am," J. D. said, waiting.

"That's all right, then." The stranger slipped the gun back into his pocket. "Joan here will introduce us."

"Dave," Joan said, "this is my brother Jim."

They shook hands. Jim Manville turned to Li Hung Chang.

"Li Hunch Chang, do you remember me?"

"You are as your father was thirty years ago," Li Hung Chang said slowly. "It might be he who stands where you stand now." He moved one hand. "Be seated."

"First," Joan said, "won't you say hello to your little sister, Jim?"

Laughing, embarrassed, he picked Elaine up in his arms, kissed her, and sat down with her on his knee. "Such a thing to go twenty thousand miles to find!"

"To begin at the beginning," Li Hung Chang said in his precise English, "sixteen years ago, at the outbreak of anti-foreign feeling, I advised your father to stay in my house in Peking. But he preferred to leave the capital, and make for the white settlements either in Shanghai or Tientsin as opportunity came.

"Tientsin being the nearer, and the foreign naval forces being concentrated there, the road thither was watched, and he decided in favor of Shanghai. On the way, your mother was murdered by brigands, and the baby stolen and held, presumably with ideas of ransom.

"Your father, helpless with the country as it was then, sent a message to me, and I dispatched spies who succeeded in locating and rescuing the baby. But it was then too late to send her to your father, who had successfully reached Shanghai, so I kept her, contenting myself with assuring him of her safety, and intending to return her when opportunity arose.

"I saw the allied forces advance on Peking, halt, and retreat. I saw the bloody encounter in Tientsin, and the second and triumphal advance of the white armies. I had known it would eventually be so, and had prepared. Force can accomplish little, and what it does accomplish is but transient.

"I knew that for awhile the West would rule the East, until the East had learned to rule itself. I knew, too, that when the East awoke she would need riches.

"So I took the greater portion of the treasures of the Summer Palace, and hid it away, and had the news spread that I was dead. And for sixteen years I have stayed here, within sight of the city where I served the empress, without discovery.

"The allied army was close on Peking when by stealth I left the city, and, knowing what would follow, I was afraid to leave the child. It was not until afterward that I learned your father had come with the army from Tientsin, and had shortly died.

"Pursuing inquiries necessarily cautious, I found that you were being cared for by relatives in Shanghai, and that the baby was believed dead. It was then that temptation came to me to keep her awhile, for I had grown to love her.

" So year after year she stayed with me, and I taught her what I thought would be of value to her, and kept before her mind the fact that she was white. When she was old enough, I told her of her parents, and why she was here with me, and she agreed to stay yet a little longer. She has seemed content enough, and even happy." He turned to Elaine. " Is it not so?"

She nodded, but her glance was on her brother. " I was wonderfully happy, always."

" I had meant to send her to you when she was of an age to marry," Li Hung Chang continued; " but you have come to take her first. Perhaps that is as well, for in my old age and selfishness I might have kept her by me until the springs of love had died in her breast, and her face had lost its beauty."

Joan nodded. She had intended, a little, to reprove him; but in face of what he had said she could not find the words.

IV

"JIM and I decided there was a chance of her being alive," she said, " because of the rumors of the treasure you had hidden, and because there was no definite proof that you were dead. For a long time we meant to search, but could find no starting point, and no clew, however small.

" Then Jim was given a post in the Diplomatic Service, and after a few years our chance came. The government had discovered one of the holders of the Soapstone Buddhas, and wanted a man to follow up the clews.

" They thought a white man would have more chance, and Jim was given the job, but without official recognition. He was to work as he pleased, and if he got into trouble was in no way to demand or expect help.

" The government just then was in great need of funds, and wanted the treasure badly. The Boy Emperor was far from secure on his throne, and all China was seething with unrest.

" Jim talked it over with me, and I told him I was going to take a hand in it. He didn't like that, but I wouldn't listen to his reasons why I should stay at home out of danger, and in the end we agreed to work together.

" We were to keep in constant touch with one another, and exchange any information gained. But"—she smiled at J. D.—" in no way was one to even so much as hint at the existence of the other, so that if one went under the other could go on. Then Jim set out to look for Sin Tiel.

" But Sin Tiel had been warned, and had left Peking. We trailed him first to Shanghai, and then to Canton; and there he joined a ship, the Gay Girl, as a hand, paying a little money for the privilege.

" Jim, who is a miracle at disguises, made himself into a coolie, and did the same. In the meantime I took another boat for Manila, where the brig was bound first.

" Sin Tiel, apparently thinking he'd shaken off pursuit, wasn't careful enough aboard the brig, and T'i somehow learned he had the Buddha. T'i was one of the three ruffians who owned the brig. The others were Dutch Sammy and da Costa.

" They knew that if he suspected their knowledge he'd fling the Buddha overboard, so they plotted to get him ashore on some lonely island and murder him. They agreed on Ituri, and headed for it on the pretense of needing water.

" But Sin Tiel suspected them, and swam ashore at night, and when they murdered him next day he'd got rid of the Buddha.

" Jim thought T'i and the others had the Buddha, and stayed on the brig. But after awhile he concluded they hadn't it, and decided to leave as soon as he got in touch with me at Singapore.

" Meanwhile, I was in Singapore, and heard rumors of a castaway who'd been picked up on Ituri. I'd talked with Jim in Sydney, and learned of Sin Tiel landing on Ituri, so now I thought this man might know something about the Buddha.

" I made inquiries, and found he was one J. D. Stewart. I went to the hotel he was staying at, and watched him; but he didn't seem suspicious.

"Then the Gay Girl came along, and I talked it over with Jim, and while he decided to stay on the brig because T'i and the others were also interested in J. D. Stewart, I was to search Mr. Stewart's room in the hotel and see if I could find anything. Besides that, I was to warn T'i to keep off the trail.

"I was searching Mr. Stewart's room when he came in, and he gave me the Buddha when I asked him for it. I told Jim the message, and made for Mandalay. But T'i and the others had shadowed me, and they made for Mandalay as well.

"Jim went ashore after them to warn me, but got mixed up in a street fight and was in jail for the night. Mr. Stewart appeared again in time to rescue me from the brig, but not before T'i had learned the second message.

"Jim was with T'i and Dutch Sammy and da Costa on their rush to Pei-Chut, when they tried to ambush Mr. Stewart. After that, he stayed with them because they were going on to Canton, and he thought that the best way of watching them.

"At Canton, they captured me again, and he rescued me, and because he was angry set the brig afire, thinking that would put an end to their activities.

"But it didn't, and we followed T'i and Dutch Sammy to Shanghai, where we separated. Jim was still thinking out his plan when Mr. Stewart and I got the Buddha, so I sent him the message, knowing he'd follow on. And that's how we found you, Li Hung Chang."

"And you?" Li Hung Chang said to Jim. "Which treasure have you come to seek?"

"The one I have on my knee. No other. I'll bring it home with me and show it the western world."

Li Hung Chang sighed. "And you, Mr. Stewart?"

J. D. looked at Joan, who looked at the floor.

"If you would see the other treasure, then—"

He rose, crossed to one wall, pressed on a panel that seemed no different from the others. A section of the wood swung back, leaving a narrow door through which the bright sunshine streamed to a floor of solid stone.

They followed eagerly in single file, from the sunshine into gathering shadows, until J. D. used his torch. Li Hung Chang came to a second door, opening it in the same manner. From a shelf beside it he took a silver lamp, and touched a match to the wick. With this in hand, he went on into the room that held the treasure of the Soapstone Buddhas.

It stood about them in the red light of the lamp, like a scene from the "Thousand and One Nights." There were statues of gold and ivory and silver, and chests of scented wood containing precious stones, and robes stiff with jewels.

They caught the cold flare of diamonds, the sheen of pearls, the hot blaze of rubies. They saw swords that had never been meant to know blood, and couches of silver on golden dragons.

Everything had been chosen for its value, and the equal of few of the treasures there could be found through all the world. The Summer Palace had been ransacked to fill this single room, and the result, seen thus for the first time, was bewildering.

"For this," Li Hung Chang said sadly, "my friends have died; for this, the enemies of China have killed. For this is for China, and the man who tries to steal it is an enemy of China."

A soft laugh answered him. They turned quickly, and saw T'i in the shadows of the doorway, a revolver in one hand.

"The first to move without my word dies. Keep your hands still, white man." The revolver swung an inch so as to cover J. D. "Take out your weapon slowly, and drop it. Slowly, slowly! Now, you." He menaced Joan. "And you." Jim's gun clattered to the floor. "So!"

"Rash man," Li Hung Chang cried warningly, "would you betray your country and your gods? Did you not read the curse that rests on him who steals these riches? Beware!"

"Curses?" T'i said. "What are curses to me?"

"Then meet your fate," Li Hung Chang said, and dropped the lamp.

T'i fired twice, the red stabs of flame lighting for an instant the shadows. Then came a crash as if the roof had fallen, yet strangely softened and subdued. The room shook, and little treasures tumbled to the floor. And then came silence, until J. D. spoke:

"I think he's gone."

"He is," said the voice of Li Hung Chang. "I felt his spirit pass."

The white beam of J. D.'s torch cut through the darkness, flooding the spot where T'i had stood. But T'i stood there no longer. In his place a statue of Buddha, taller than a man, sheathed in gold, lay on its side, fallen from the base on which it had rested sixteen long years.

Beneath it was shadow, and from the shadow came only something brown and sluggish that crept across the floor, and formed in little pools that caught the light dimly.

A short time before J. D. and Joan were married, a parcel came to them. It was short and square and heavy, and they wondered what it contained.

"More salt-cellars," J. D. said. "People who give wedding presents display a lamentable lack of originality."

"Half a dozen volumes of poetry," said Jim.

"A set of glass doorknobs," said Joan.

"A decanter," said Elaine.

They opened the box, and found it packed with silk, in the middle of which was something hard. Carefully, Joan removed the silk, fold by fold. A golden Buddha a few inches high beamed up at them.

"From Li Hung Chang," J. D. said, "Like it, Joan?"

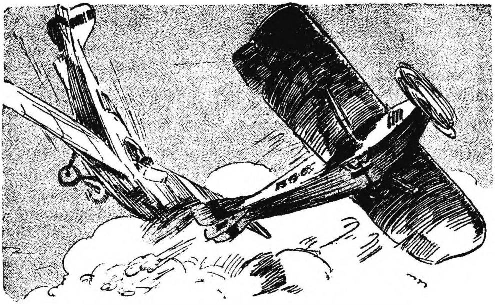
"Love it," Joan said softly.

"There's writing on it," said Elaine.

Joan held it to the light, read aloud the tiny Chinese characters.

"'The end of the trail.'"

Anthony Trent begs to announce his early reappearance in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION



It came in a diving rush from blinding sunlight, high and to the rear

THE FLYING COURIER

By John Ames

AFTER BREAKFAST AT KÖNIGSBERG, ANCIENT STRONGHOLD OF THE PRUSSIAN KINGS, THE GREAT TWELVE-PASSENGER PLANE HOPPED OFF FOR RUSSIA

" MR. READING, the Department of State has borrowed you from the Air Mail Service for a mission of international importance. Can you be prepared to sail on the Leviathan tomorrow?"

" Yes, Mr. Secretary."

If Reading felt surprise or any other emotion over the suddenness of the assignment, the wind-carved features of the flying detective gave no indication of it.

The Secretary of State smiled approvingly. " Your chief has informed me that you are accustomed to swift changes in the scenes of your operations as an investigator."

" That is not difficult for a flying man, sir," said the special agent. " We are used to traveling light and on short notice."

" Evidently," remarked the secretary. " I am told you left San Francisco for Washington only yesterday morning."

" Yes, sir. The usually prevailing winds from West to East were unusually strong and helped me quite a bit. I had to make only one stop at Omaha."

" Then you will need sleep, Mr. Reading. I shall have your passports, letters, and funds ready so that you may take the midnight train to New York."

" If there is nothing to prevent, I should prefer to fly over this evening," said Reading.

The secretary smiled again. " There is nothing to prevent. All the instructions you will require before leaving I shall give you now, verbally. I imagine that nothing would prevent you from flying on to Europe if a proper plane were placed at your disposal."

"No, sir. Nothing but exceptionally stormy weather over the Atlantic."

The statesman's smile became a thoughtful frown. "You flying men make me feel as if I belonged back in another age."

Something very nearly like that had been suggested not long before by Senator Borden, in a speech attacking the Administration and the State Department for holding up diplomatic recognition of Soviet Russia.

"But now to the point," said the secretary, who loved this phrase but seldom conformed to it. "It will be necessary for you to sail on the Leviathan, for there will be a passenger aboard whose movements it will be your duty to observe.

"You have been chosen for this mission for several reasons. One is that it will involve flying and that as an investigator you are at home in that field. Another reason is that we are assured of your discretion. It is necessary that you know in advance what is involved."

The secretary carefully and slowly wiped an eyeglass. He continued: "Despite nearly a decade of subversive activity by agents of the Soviet Government operating in the United States and in the countries to the South, the American Government has recently seriously considered resumption of diplomatic relations with Russia.

"We had come to believe that at last Moscow realized the futility of preaching revolution in other countries, and was ready to resume rightful obligations in the family of nations."

Reading, remembering that the secretary had been a Senator, hoped he was not in for a speech.

"We received solemn assurances from the Soviet government," said the secretary, "that our conditions would be met, and that not only would communist propaganda cease in the United States, but also in the Latin-American countries, where the ascendency of communist doctrine would be a source of apprehension to us.

"Three days ago we learned that Manuel Perez, whose activities we know have involved at least two Central American revolutions, and who has been a frequent visitor at Moscow in recent years, is again on his way to the Russian capital. He is on the Leviathan's passenger list, and is ostensibly going to Paris for a holiday.

"Of course we could find an excuse to hold him and deport him to the southern port from which he came to New York, but we are most interested in learning whether his present journey means that Moscow is still active in the Americas.

"It will be your task to find out. I need not remind you that it is a delicate one."

Reading inclined his head slightly.

"Your connection with the Air Mail service is known to the ship news reporters. If you are asked as to your purpose abroad it will be best to say that you are on leave and interested in observing the development of commercial aviation in Europe.

"It will be best, of course, not to attempt to follow Perez too closely when you reach the other side. If our information is correct he is likely to remain in Moscow for a week or two.

"Our embassy at Berlin has sources of information there, and after you reach Europe and before you go to Moscow it will keep you informed of any unexpected development.

"For the sake of appearances it will be advisable for you to spend a few days on the continental airways before starting for Moscow.

"As it is, the motives of your journey abroad may possibly be suspected; but that will make little difference, as Moscow watches closely the movements of all Americans who enter Russia, and you would be under surveillance in any event."

Reading listened carefully to further detailed instructions, mainly as to methods of communication with the State Department through the European embassies. The great man shook hands with him and he took his leave.

The sun had dropped below the horizon of a roseate summer sky, and a twilight breeze from the southwest was speeding Reading's plane toward the Atlantic seaboard. As he passed over the suburbs of Baltimore and headed across upper Chesapeake Bay he switched on his lights.

Then, three thousand feet below, under a faint purpling haze, twinkled the lights of Wilmington—Philadelphia and Camden—

the Delaware River and Trenton—the great airship hangar at Lakehurst, with the Los Angeles, which had flown across the Atlantic from Germany, floating idly from its tall mast—Hadley Field at New Brunswick, the eastern terminal of the Transcontinental Air Mail Line.

He was expected, and the flood lights of the field made his night landing as easy as one at noon. He had left Washington a little less than two hours before. Before midnight he was asleep in his hotel in New York.

II

JIM READING had returned from France a famous ace. His exploits in the Air Mail Service had added to his fame. He realized that it would be best not to dodge the ship news men, for if it became known after he sailed that he had made a mysterious departure, suspicion and conjecture might arise. This was, paradoxically, a secret mission which would have to be carried out largely in the open.

His replies to the reporters were truthful enough, so far as they went. The Secretary of State was pleased to observe, the morning after the Leviathan sailed, that Reading's departure had been dismissed with a few paragraphs, and these buried under the news that Mary Garden had denied, before sailing for a grand opera star's summer holiday abroad, that she had proposed marriage to Gene Tunney.

On the second afternoon at sea he was invited to make a fourth at shuffleboard and was introduced by a shipboard acquaintance to Manuel Perez as an opponent. There was none of the sinister spy about Perez. A handsome little Latin-American, his ivory smile well known in a hundred cafés in Central and South America and in Europe, he made friends easily.

Most of those who had met him on shipboard and in Paris, Madrid, London, Moscow, Berlin, New York and the Latin-American capitals probably classified him as one of the numerous wealthy Argentinians whose restless pleasure-loving take them everywhere.

He smiled engagingly as he bowed and shook hands with the wiry sandy-haired American. "Ah, I have often read of Captain Reading. I am glad we are opposed only at shuffleboard, rather than in the air."

Reading's squinty blue-gray eyes returned Perez's smile. "You are a flyer, Mr. Perez?"

"Not an accomplished one, captain. I learned to love air travel on visits to Europe and recently I have been taking lessons in piloting."

Reading was about to ask him whether he intended to do much air traveling in Europe on the present trip, but thought better of it and decided not to.

"You will fly in Europe?" Perez asked Reading.

"I am not taking a plane with me, but I am interested in the development of commercial aviation in Europe, and while I am on leave I expect to use the opportunity to see something of it—riding as a passenger."

"Will not that be a little dull for such a pilot as you?"

"No," replied Reading. "There will be much for me to see which I have not seen before. I have not been abroad since the war, and passenger flying on scheduled airways has, as you know, only been developed since the armistice."

For the remainder of the voyage Reading met Perez casually once a day or so, usually in the smoking room or on the promenade deck. The latter's companions seemed to be casual acquaintances met on shipboard.

He enjoyed himself with the air of a man in easy circumstances going abroad for the summer pleasures of Europe. He talked readily of previous visits to European cities, but did not mention having been in Moscow.

Reading spent a day in London, mostly under the wing of the American Air Attaché, Colonel Barry Scott, and established contact with the ambassador, with whom he briefly discussed his mission.

"Probably it will be best," said the ambassador, "if you are not seen too much at the embassies over here before you go to Moscow. An industrious branch of the Soviet political police operates in the European capitals.

"Because you are well known as an

aviator it will do no harm, I suppose, to be seen about with the air attachés; you are naturally interested in aviation over here; but, so far as possible, you will, of course, let it appear that this is the sole reason for your contact with the embassies.

"When you return from Russia we shall try to make proper amends for our present necessary lack of hospitality."

"I understand, Mr. Ambassador; thank you," replied Reading as he rose to go.

Not altogether to his surprise he found himself a fellow passenger with Manuel Perez in an Imperial Airways plane in a pleasant Channel crossing to Paris. They parted at Le Bourget Airdrome.

"Perhaps we shall meet again in Paris," said Perez. "I expect to remain some little time before going on to the Mediterranean."

"I'm sorry, but I expect to fly on to Berlin by way of Amsterdam. I am specially interested in having a look at the Lufthansa organization, which seems to be spreading faster than any other airways development in Europe."

"Ah, that will be interesting, I am sure," agreed Perez politely. "I, too, intend to travel by airplane as much as possible this summer. Perhaps we shall meet again at one of the airdromes."

"I trust so," responded Reading.

He called briefly at the Embassy, where Major Henry Harrison, the Air Attaché, promised to inform him, through the embassy at Berlin, as to Perez's movements. He took off the next morning for Berlin.

On the way to Amsterdam he flew over country in northeastern France and Belgium which brought back to him memories of flying that had not been accomplished in limousine cabin planes. It was near Amiens that he had bagged his fifth German and his aceship.

The windmill country of Holland, with its dikes and canals, charmed him as a traveler, but not as an aviator. The riparious terrain offered few emergency landing fields.

At the Schiphol Airdrome near Amsterdam he changed to a Lufthansa plane for Berlin. It took off on schedule thirty minutes after the arrival of the ship from Paris. The pilot was a veteran of the German air force. For all Reading knew, he was now confidently trusting his life to a man who had earnestly tried to kill him a few years since.

The plane sailed over the picturesque Zuider Zee coastland and headed for the German border. Not far to the south of their course was Doorn, where the pilot's former boss was comfortably interned on a delightful estate that had belonged to a Dutch country gentleman.

Then over the German frontier and across the quietly flowing Ems River to Hanover, from which, after a brief stop for fuel, the plane took the air for Berlin. Soon Potsdam, and then the pleasant suburbs of Berlin. Reading reflected that since luncheon, and before dinner, he had traveled a path that had marked an epoch in history.

When he sailed from France after the Armistice he had thought—at least hoped—that he was through with international difficulties. Now he found himself mixed up in another, and in peace time. An unpredictable world!

He remembered that as an eager young cadet in wartime he had hoped to fly to Berlin ahead of a victorious army. Now he was flying into the German capital—with a former enemy pilot at the controls.

The plane half circled the big Tempelhofer Airdrome—the Tempelhofer Feld of imperial maneuvers—and glided down to a gentle landing before the Lufthansa hangars and waiting room.

A neat little lad in a dapper gray uniform took his bag to the waiting room, where customs officers only casually inspected his baggage.

His passport was examined and viséed, he signed the register of air passengers, and was ready to enter the service bus bound for Unter den Linden when his right arm and hand were grasped.

"Captain Reading, aren't you? My name's Patterson, air attaché at the embassy here. Harrison at Paris wired me you would be in on this bus.

"You must have had a good tail wind; your ship is twenty minutes early, and so I am a few minutes late. I welcome you."

"Thanks, major. Good of you to come."

"I've reserved a room for you at the Adlon, and we'll drive there now, if you like. You're to have dinner with me there, unless you've made another engagement."

"No; I'll be glad to accept."

Major Patterson turned toward a stocky spectacled man in mufti who bowed slightly and smiled as he approached. The attaché greeted him.

"Good afternoon, Herr Direktor. Let me present Captain Reading, who has come from America on leave to observe the operation of your excellent airways. Captain Reading, this is Herr Mueller, a director of Lufthansa."

After an exchange of compliments, during which Reading found the airways official spoke a more meticulous English than his own, an invitation to inspect the airdrome and the maintenance plant at Staaken was accepted for the following afternoon.

"During the war our friend Mueller was superintendent of one of the Fokker factories here that kept us so busy in France," remarked Patterson as they drove away from the field. "Your pilot got five or six of us in northern France. Charming fellows to get along with now, though. Their planes and their beer and Rhine wine will be at your disposal while you're here."

Patterson swung his Lancia to the right, through the Brandenburg Gate and along Unter den Linden to the Adlon.

"Call for you in an hour, Reading," said the attaché, and departed, to allow his guest time to bathe and dress for dinner.

III

THE following morning Reading was presented to the ambassador, who told him that, operating through Deruluft, the Königsberg-Moscow branch of Lufthansa, the embassy had found no difficulty in arranging for a Russian vise of his passport.

"A year ago it would have been different—much different," he said. "But now that they are expecting recognition and financial credits from the United States they are anxious to please.

"The Soviet Embassy here—it is near your hotel—seems satisfied that you are over only to study commercial aviation. They will learn that you are pitching right into it here, and that will help to avert suspicion. Patterson will look after you while you are in Germany, and he will arrange your contact with our sub-rosa agent in Moscow.

"In the Soviet capital you will, of course, be entirely on your own, as we have no embassy there, and if you get into trouble, and they find out what you are there for, you will have to rely mainly on yourself."

Reading reflected that he had frequently got into and out of tight places without diplomatic assistance, but he realized the position of the ambassador, one of whose duties, during the breach with Russia, had been to warn American travelers that they entered that country largely at their own risk—when they were permitted to enter at all.

After his afternoon at Tempelhofer and Staaken he found himself regretting that such interesting inspections—for he was primarily an aviator—were not his sole mission abroad.

"These German pilots," said Major Patterson, "are spreading German commercial aviation from London to Peking and from Stockholm to the Alps.

"They have nothing to compare with our Air Mail, but they are so far ahead in passenger transportation that it would take the rest of the world from three to five years to catch up."

"The planes seem to move in and out of their airdromes with the regularity of railway trains," remarked Reading. "Tell me about the line from Königsberg to Moscow—what kind of passengers travel over it?"

"That is an important question, particularly in view of the job you are engaged upon now," said Patterson smilingly. "It's hardly a secret here in Berlin that a very large percentage of them are diplomatic couriers between Moscow and Berlin—and undercover agents, mostly Soviet Russians, traveling between the two capitals.

"Many of them go through here to London and other European centers, and, at least until recent months, quite a few have gone on to New York and the Latin-American ports.

"A few business men, and still fewer tourists, make up the rest of the passenger lists. Often the planes—there's one a day each way—are so loaded with freight and mail that there is no room for travelers."

They were in the waiting room at Tempelhofer, waiting for an attendant to bring the attaché's car. Major Patterson casually picked up the passenger register and glanced at the day's list. A name caught his eye.

"Let's go, Reading; here's the car," he said.

Patterson slowed down to light a cigarette as they passed out of the airdrome gate, and as he handed his case to Reading he smiled and said:

"Perez! Your friend got in from Paris this afternoon and is booked to leave on the express to-night for Moscow, *via* Königsberg. Plane leaves two hours after midnight, gets to the Prussian terminal a little after sunrise, and is due at Trotzky Field late in the afternoon.

"I heard one of the pilots remark that the ship is booked solid, but you'd best wait until to-morrow night anyway. I gather that has been your intention—not to keep too close to him until he gets to his destination. After dinner to-night I'll tell you about our undercover man in Moscow and how you are to meet."

"I have a hunch," said Reading, "that I had better not lose too much time in following him into Russia. He seems to be in a hurry. But to-morrow night will be soon enough, I think. If we had been fellow-passengers to-night he might have got to thinking too intently upon coincidences of travel."

IV

THE trimotored metal monoplane, carrying twelve passengers besides its crew of pilot and mechanic, and more than a ton of freight and mail, took off and headed through the night toward the Baltic. Reading found himself thinking of what night-bombing raids might have accomplished during the war had these planes been developed then.

Sunrise dissipated a low down fog over which they had been flying, and there was no need for landing lights at Danzig, where they stopped briefly for fuel and clearance through the customs office of the Danzig Free State. An hour and a half later they were at Königsberg, ancient stronghold of the Prussian kings.

Then, after a quick continental breakfast, off for Smolensk, the first stop in Russia. The plane did not stop at Kovno, the capital of Lithuania, but dropped mail on the airdrome there.

On across little Latvia and over the Russian border, with a fair tail-wind helping them toward the Soviet capital at a rate of more than a hundred miles an hour.

The twelve hundred-mile journey from Berlin, consuming more than two days by train, would be made in about fifteen hours' elapsed time.

Reading observed with keen interest the trench scars and shell holes in the country over which he was flying—left untouched as relics from warfare between Russia and Germany and civil wars between the Red armies and the military remnants of the monarchy. Unlovely terrain for a forced landing, he reflected.

The pilot, who had fought in the Russian campaign of Hindenberg, had skirted carefully along the border between Latvia and Poland. Neither German nor Russian planes were permitted to fly over Polish territory, and this made a slight detour necessary.

A forced landing meant confiscation of the plane and arrest of its occupants. When there was an opportunity to fly high over fog this detour rule was ignored. If Poland didn't know it was being flown over, what was the difference?

As the plane approached a landing at the far end of the Smolensk military airdrome, which the Soviet government permitted commercial planes to use, the mechanic drew curtains over the cabin windows.

Travelers were not permitted to make close observations of the military establishment at Smolensk, an important key of offense or defense in Soviet strategy, particularly if Moscow needed to be defended against invasion.

Despite that he believed in the skill and carefulness of the pilot, Reading felt vaguely uncomfortable in this blind descent from the clouds to the ground. He knew, of course, that the pilot's cockpit was not curtained.

Two-thirds of the way from Smolensk to Moscow the plane flew over Borodino, where the Napoleonic invasion of Holy Russia won its fatal victory and blundered on to Moscow and eventual disaster. If Napoleon could have invaded with a fleet of large planes, establishing bases behind him as he advanced—

A patriotically red sun was low in a hazily pink Russian sky when the plane landed on Trotzky Field.

As it wheeled to come down against a light breeze Reading, gazing over the almost Oriental sky line of Moscow, caught sight of the massive old Kremlin, behind whose walls the Soviet government lay intrenched—and without which walls its experiment in communism would have ended in its earlier stages.

Soldiers of the Red army were on guard at Trotzky Field, it, like the one at Smolensk, primarily a military airdrome. Reading's baggage and papers were examined much more thoroughly here than at Berlin, and his passport examined carefully.

Himself the last passenger to turn over his passage ticket he found himself alone in a small office with the sharp-faced young man whose duty it was to check in the arrivals for the Deruluft company.

Patterson had instructed him to find a moment alone with this man, who now smiled shrewdly. "Captain Reading, I have taken the liberty of ordering a car for you and reserving quarters at the Savoy. Shall I call at your room at nine o'clock? My name is Alexander Moldenko."

"Thank you; I shall expect you. Come directly to the room without announcing yourself at the desk."

There was a knock at the office door, and the pilot of the trip, Hans Pohlig, entered. Speaking the careful English taught at German universities, he addressed Reading:

"If Captain Reading will consent, the pilots of our company who are in Moscow will be honored to have him at dinner tomorrow evening. You will perhaps desire to rest to-night."

"Thank you," replied Reading. "I shall be glad to come—but I must warn you that my German is limited and my command of Russian non-existent."

Pohlig smiled. "Some of my brother pilots speak a little of your language, and I shall be pleased to act as your interpreter. Where may I call for you at seven o'clock to-morrow?"

"At the Savoy Hotel, if you please."

"Thank you; I shall be there for you at that hour."

V

"PEREZ arrived yesterday afternoon," reported Moldenko, "and was admitted to the Kremlin this morning. He flies back to Germany in three days. I have reserved a place also for you, and will attend to the visé necessary for your departure."

"Have you found it possible to learn anything definite as to his reason for being here?" asked Reading.

"No, captain; I can give you only limited service in Moscow, and must not press my inquiries too closely." He turned a wrist, as though he were turning a jailer's key, and grinned a little apprehensively.

"I can make no other suggestion except that it is likely that his mission must be learned from the contents of his dispatch case when he leaves Moscow. I am not a member of the Communist party and must be careful."

"Where is he stopping?"

"Here in the Savoy. You are likely to meet him. He has no reason to suspect that you are other than a member of the American Air Mail on leave and on a holiday tour of personal observation?"

"I don't think so. I met him on the steamer coming over, and again at Paris, and casually mentioned that I expected to fly to Moscow if the opportunity presented itself."

"That is well, captain, for if your reason for coming to Russia became known, or even strongly suspected, I should not like to guarantee your safety. Many things happen suddenly in Moscow."

Reading considered his position. He was in Moscow, and in the same hotel with him was the man he had followed by steamer and airplane five thousand miles from New York. Perhaps Perez had already learned of his arrival. Would he suspect his presence? Reading had had practically no choice except to take the chance.

He could claim no protection from an American embassy if his purpose in the Red capital—the heart of Soviet Russia, Communists loved to call it—became known or even strong suspected.

He knew that the confessedly ruthless government, a sterner dictatorship even than that of the czar's which it had displaced, would not hesitate to deal summarily with him if it regarded him as a serious threat to its international plans.

He must work quietly and carefully, and yet in the open. This could be no job of back-alley sleuthing. He determined to assume the initiative; to bring about as soon as possible another seemingly casual meeting with Perez.

Telephoning, he was told that Perez was not in his room, and had left no word as to when he would return.

Reading had decided upon a stroll in the direction of the Kremlin, and was crossing the lobby of the hotel when Perez entered. The American thought he detected the merest flash of apprehension in the eyes of the little Latin as he caught sight of him, but his mobile countenance smiled a polite greeting as he came forward with outstretched hand.

"Travelers' luck again, captain!" he exclaimed. "I had hardly hoped to meet with you again so soon—although I do remember you said that Moscow was included in the itinerary of your airways travel."

"It is pleasant to find you here, Mr. Perez," returned Reading. He was about to remark that the meeting was unexpected, but thought it best to let Perez volunteer an explanation as to why he was not in Paris or on the Mediterranean. This came quickly enough.

"The swiftness of air travel seems to increase the probability of such chance meetings of travelers who have met before, but perhaps you are surprised that I am here.

"I have had to interrupt my holiday to attend to business. The day after my arrival in Paris some South American connections cabled, asking me to make inquiries into the status of mining concessions which they have in the Ural region."

A wave of the hand. "And so you find me here."

Reading wondered whether to admire the other's assurance or doubt whether, after all, he was not on a wild-goose chase. Tips such as that which had caused the State Department to commandeer the Air Mail detective's services did not always assay according to expectations.

But he thought it best to let Perez know at once the time of his departure from Moscow, and so perhaps forestall any further suspicion that might arise from another forced coincidence.

"Why, my dear captain, I too have reserved a place in the plane for Berlin on Friday," he replied. "It will be a pleasure to fly with you again."

This with so convincing an air of amiability that Reading again found himself in speculation. If the Central American was, by chance, telling the truth, his visit to government offices meant nothing more than a business errand. Moldenko may have deceived himself.

But if Perez was in Moscow to convey revolutionary plans and funds south of the Rio Grande he was working boldly, almost openly, and against all the established canons of international intrigue. If he concealed a suspicion of Reading would he change his plans and fly out of Russia in another plane?

In that case he might head for Riga, the Latvian port, and leave Europe via the Baltic. There were small steamers on which he might sail directly to a Latin-American port.

It might have been a mistake to let him know when he was leaving Moscow. But Reading hoped that his own apparent candor would serve to fend off any suspicion Perez might have.

Perez ascended to his room, and Reading was again moving toward the door when a voice hailed him from the room clerk's desk.

"Jim Reading!"

He turned and saw David Rossiter of the New York *Globe*. They had been friends when Rossiter was a Washington correspondent.

"Dave, I'm glad to see you. I thought you had been sent to your London office. What are you doing here?"

"Transferred a month ago, when the first hint came that things were being patched up between Washington and Moscow. Nelson was glad to be switched to London and his favorite brand of Scotch, but said he was afraid he would have to use it as a chaser, after training on vodka for a year. You were going out. May I walk with you?"

"Of course—or would you rather come up to my room?" invited Reading. "I intended going out only for a short walk before turning in. My legs are stiff from sitting in a plane all day and no rudder-bar to kick."

"Let's walk then. Have you seen Red Square and the Kremlin at night?"

"No; I intended to walk in that direction."

Outside, on the dimly lighted sidewalk, Rossiter became the inquiring reporter.

"I'm your friend, Jim, but I am also Moscow correspondent of the *Globe*. I learned at the Deruluft office that you had arrived; they told me you were to be here for a few days as part of a trip to look over the European airways. Is that all, or you up to something else?"

In Washington Reading had learned to trust this newspaper man, and had several times confided in him and been quietly helped by him in his investigations. He knew that Rossiter would not violate a confidence in order to put over a news beat.

Rossiter respected Reading as one of the few agents of the government he knew who was not a publicity hunter. They had formed a real friendship. Neither attempted to use the other, but they had both gained in exchanges of information in times past.

It was known to the detective that the newspaper man had frequently been in the confidence of high government officials, especially in the State Department.

Reading now decided to confide in Rossiter, and was about to answer his question when the other added: "But if you are here on something you can't talk about, forget the question and any personal inclination you may have to answer it."

"I'm going to tell you what has brought me here, Dave. We may be able to help each other."

Rossiter listened in silence, then whistled softly.

"It's lucky I haven't filed a little yarn I've written about Perez's visit here. I had a talk with him to-day and he gave me the same story he told you.

"That wasn't worth cable tolls to New York as a news item if accepted as the truth, but I happened to know something of his previous activities in connection with Moscow, and I suggested in my yarn that part of his business here possibly was political.

"My copy might have been rejected by the censor, anyway, but it might also have put the foreign office—and Perez—on guard.

"Instead, I'm going to file a couple of hundred words of innocuous stuff taking him at his word—Vast Opportunity for Latin-American Trade Relations with Russia, and that sort of thing.

"The Soviet foreign office watches closely every bit of copy that goes out of Russia, and if there is any skullduggery on with Perez it will be best to have them think there isn't any suspected.

"I don't think any of the other correspondents working here now know about Perez's past jobs nor have talked with him since he arrived.

"There is so much to keep an eye on in Moscow, and throughout Russia and Siberia, that we have a news-sharing arrangement. This week I am looking after aviation, among other things, and I'll give the rest of the gang what I am sending out, together with a little story on the American aviator visiting the Moscow terminal of the European airways. Not the whole truth, but a useful grain of it, anyway."

Reading smiled. "No wonder they made you a news censor when you were in the A. E. F."

"I wasn't any too fond of that job," said Rossiter. "But as a newspaper man I've nursed along many a story under cover that premature bean-spilling would have spoiled."

"I have good reason to know it, Dave," said Reading.

They were passing the great wooden tomb of Lenin, before the massive walls of the Kremlin, above which floated a large red flag.

A powerful light from within the walls played upon this flag and, aided by a light wind from the northwest, made it a livid flame against the dark sky. Four soldiers of the Red Army guarded the tomb, which was weirdly illuminated by red flood-lights.

They stopped. Whereupon a disreputable droshky also stopped, a few feet away. An even more disreputable-looking and ragged izvostchik offered his services. Rossiter waved him away. The droshky, drawn jerkily over uneven coblestones by an ancient nag of a horse, rattled off.

"Lenin, before he died," said Rossiter, "had come to realize that undiluted Bolshevism wouldn't evolve Utopia in Russia.

"If he had lived he would have modified the dictatorship of the proletariat very considerably. He had already made a beginning in that direction and, Marxian fanatic though he was, he saw clearly that Russia could not bring about world revolution without first demonstrating the success of its own.

"He is now venerated as a saint of the Russian people—a veneration he would have scorned and despised. Behind those walls two factions and two second-rate leaders fight to inherit the leadership that was Lenin's.

"These groups he ruled with an iron hand until he died. One faction—the extremists who still believe in a world revolution—is led by the former East Side New York pamphleteer, Trotzky; the other, the moderationists, is controlled by Stalin, the political boss of the Communist party.

"Just now Stalin seems to have the upper hand, and that is why Washington has been led to believe that it may be possible to deal with Moscow.

"But Stalin does not sufficiently dominate a powerful section of the Communist party that insists upon continued work for a world revolution. The outside world is able only to guess what is going on behind those thirteenth century walls, where Bolshevism is in a state of political siege."

"About Perez—what is your guess?" asked Reading.

"He is one among dozens who have been working as international agents for Moscow, operating in strategic countries the world over. China, for instance.

"Penfield, our Shanghai man, in confidential dispatches to New York has told us that Soviet Russia's hand is likely to be shown openly in South China before the end of 1926—less than six months from now.

"Perez is, of course, a liar, especially on the face of his statement that he will have concluded his business here and be ready to leave in three days.

"No business, except something prearranged, cut-and-dried, could be concluded between Russians and a Latin-American in that space of time.

"You have been south of the Rio Grande, and therefore know something of business methods there. Well, even Honduras is a high-pressure country compared with Russia. If an invading army should ever get inside the Kremlin it would be tripped up and helplessly entangled by red tape."

Reading was silent as they walked back toward the hotel. He was as far from a plan of action to get definite proof of a Russian plot in the Americas as he had been when he first met Perez on the Leviathan.

Rossiter proceeded to the telegraph office, and Reading returned to his room, where he smoked a cigarette and called it a day.

Through his window came the soft strains of a café balalaika orchestra playing "The Three Guitars," which he remembered having heard in a restaurant in Second Avenue, which advertised an exiled chef from Moscow.

VI

AT the dinner of the Deruluft pilots he found himself among his own kind and enjoyed it. Besides his pilot of the flight from Germany, two or three others spoke a little English.

His French helped him out with the Russian flyers of the Deruluft staff. These aviators a few years ago had fought against one another in the clouds over western Russia and eastern Germany; they now ate and drank together like squadron mates.

Moldenko was present. He indicated two diners at the far end of the table. They were opening a bottle of vodka. " Do you see the big Russian, Radin, with his arm around the German pilot, Koenig?" They had begun to sing a Russian song, which Radin evidently was teaching Koenig.

" They seem like old friends," Reading smilingly observed.

" They have been friends," said Moldenko, " since they met after the war, and Radin recalled Koenig as the pilot who shot him down near Kovno.

" They had a party to celebrate their reunion under polite circumstances, and the Russian got revenge by drinking Koenig into a forced landing under the table.

" Radin will pilot you and Perez to Germany. There will be no other passengers. Express freight and mail have taken most of the plane's capacity."

" What about Radin's capacity?" asked Reading. " I shouldn't like to take off with him if we had to leave in the morning."

" He does not fly to-morrow, and I have never known him to take a drop to drink the night before going on flying duty. As a war pilot he was known as a headlong and a relentlessly vicious foe, but he has proved to be a capable commercial pilot."

The following day Reading was a guest at Trotzky Field. He was not asked to inspect military machines, but a speedy little sport plane was tuned up and he was invited to fly it. Before taking off he was advised of a rule against flying over the Kremlin.

He delighted the Deruluft pilots and mechanics with an acrobatic exhibition, and was about to come down for a landing when he looked down and saw another plane of the same type taking off.

He rightly guessed that he was being challenged to a sporting dog-fight, a form of exhibition flying which can become almost as dangerous as the real thing if one or the other of the pilots, moved excessively by professional pride, presses his opponent too closely.

The ascending pilot proved to be Radin. Reading earnestly hoped that the Russian's head had cleared. Pilots regard half an hour's flying as the best of all hangover cures.

Probably Radin had come up as much for this as anything else. He waved a hand and grinned at the American as they went into action at three thousand feet above the airdrome.

Reading had courteously waited for Radin to make the first attack. It came in a diving rush from blinding sunlight high and to the rear.

If Reading had not thrown his ship into a swiftly zooming loop there would have been a collision. Radin's left wing missed him by less than a yard.

" The lad plays rough," thought Reading, and went into action. A thousand feet down, the Russian came out of his dive to find Reading plunging with the speed of gravity and a wide-open motor down on his tail.

His swift descent was almost vertical, and if he had not swerved at the last moment he would have crashed into his opponent's cockpit. Radin, possibly because he was not at his physical best, had been outmaneuvered.

It was a brief dog-fight, and Reading gave the critical spectators on the ground ample reason to believe that he might have defeated Radin at the Russian's best. Bearing in mind that first savage rush of his opponent, Reading retained the offensive and soon forced him to land. The Russian nearly crashed.

Laughter at Radin's expense was mingled with the applause of both the Russian and German pilots for the visitor. Radin's twisted smile when he extended punctilious congratulations had something in it that caused Reading to wonder if it would not have been more diplomatic to avoid so pointed an issue.

Then he noticed that Manuel Perez had joined the group of spectators since his take-off. A moment later when he looked for him he was gone. Radin, too, had disappeared.

As Reading approached the hangars he was met by Rossiter, who had accompanied him to the field.

"Give them a polite excuse for returning to your hotel," he said in a lowered voice. "I've just learned something that will mildly interest you."

After an exchange of compliments with his hosts, Reading drove off with Rossiter in the latter's car.

"Jim, that was a pretty piece of work. But you came close to letting that bird get you in the first round. I don't suppose you were looking for anything as realistic as that first diving attack?"

"No," replied Reading. "He was sure enough coming for me. Probably he misjudged the distance, or maybe he just wanted to show off a bit at my expense.

"Anyhow, I thought it best to bear down on him from then on. He drank quite a lot last night, and I wasn't sure that he might not have carried on this morning."

Rossiter was silent for a moment. "You'd better not fly to Germany with Radin and Perez," he said. "And don't accuse me of trying to swerve an officer from his duty until I've told you what you're up against."

"All right, Dave; like a good newspaper man get to the point of your story."

"While the pilots were making a fuss over you after you landed, I noticed Radin stride off to one of the hangars. He seemed to be slightly drunk and more than slightly sore. A pretty good pilot, but a vain one, shown up by the visiting American, he was feeling his humiliation very keenly.

"Perez, who had come to the field after you took off, followed Radin into the hangar. The greaser said something to him, and they climbed into the cabin of an idle plane. He looked around once to see if any one was near, and didn't notice that I was watching them.

"I followed and went around to the other side of the plane, where I got out of sight, and into a packing box standing on the hangar floor between this plane and another one.

"The cabin door on my side of the ship was not tightly closed—Perez probably hadn't noticed it—and I could hear what they said. They spoke in French, and I got most of it.

"Perez either is sure that you are on his tail, or he suspects it so strongly that he has convinced those he is acting for that, to make sure, an accident had better happen to you before you leave Russia. He has found out that Radin has gone deeply into debt with gamblers in Moscow and is in desperate circumstances.

"There was no frame-up to drive you into the ground in that show to-day. But Perez saw that Radin was ripe for something of the kind when he came down. He is a vindictive bird, for it didn't take Perez long to convince him.

"For five thousand rubles you are going to be polished off after the ship leaves Smolensk—somewhere in wild country between Vitebsk and the Latvian border.

"Radin at first shied at murder, but Perez convinced him that it was a patriotic duty to Soviet Russia to exterminate an enemy. Most of the pilots are not particularly ardent Communists, but Radin happens to be one."

Reading smiled grimly. "And just how is this job to be done, Dave?"

"I'm getting to that. There is to be motor trouble and a forced landing. You will, of course, get out of the plane to stretch your legs while the trouble is located and repaired.

"Perez will club you from behind; you will be lifted back into the plane, and when it is on its way again you will be thrown out.

"This will be reported as an accident when Perez and Radin get to Königsberg, and your body will be aboard the plane to prove it.

"It will have been crushed by a fall of

a thousand feet or so, which happened when you opened a door to throw out some waste paper and the plane lurched suddenly in rough air and threw you out. They landed and recovered your body.

"Even if there is suspicion there will be no one to prove anything, and there will be the mutually corroborative testimony of Radin and Perez."

"Sounds like a workable scheme, if the victim wasn't looking for it," remarked Reading, "and I guess I'll give them a chance at it."

"Don't be a damn fool, Jim. You might be able to handle them in a fight, but you're taking an unnecessary chance."

"What about my chance in Moscow, if the word is out to do me in? No, I guess I'll sit in."

VII

SMOLENSK, and then Vitebsk, merged into the landscape in the wake of the plane. Wooded country, wild and sparsely inhabited except for wolves and bears, lay four thousand feet below.

Perez had been, as usual, a delightful traveling companion; the charm of his smile never faded when he addressed Captain Reading, who smiled back at him with squinting gray-blue eyes.

Radin hunched morosely over his controls. He had shaken hands with Reading at the field, but avoided conversation.

Just before the departure Moldenko had found opportunity to tell Reading that Perez's dispatch case had been concealed in the wing of the big monoplane, to avoid inspection of it by the German customs officers at Königsberg.

The motor began to miss. Reading could not, because of Radin's bulk, see what he was doing, but he knew that he was manipulating the throttle and preparing to cut the switch. Less than a mile ahead was a level clearing, with plenty of room for an emergency landing and take-off.

Perez feigned a look of alarm and clutched at the sides of his seat as the plane circled downward.

The motor had stopped, and the wings made a swishing sound as they cut through the air in the glide to the ground.

Radin made a perfect dead-stick landing, and crawled down from the pilot's seat to the ground. He offered his cigarette case to Reading and Perez when they stepped down from the cabin.

"We may as well have a smoke before we see what is wrong with the motor," he said with a casual air. "I think it is only a fouled spark plug."

"Thank you," Reading replied. I'd be glad to help with the motor." His right hand was in his coat pocket and it held an automatic.

Perez, slightly behind and to Reading's right, struck—and as the detective stepped lightly aside, the butt of Perez's weapon harmlessly bludgeoned the air of western Russia.

Reading kicked his legs from under him and sent him sprawling. Then he stepped back and covered both men.

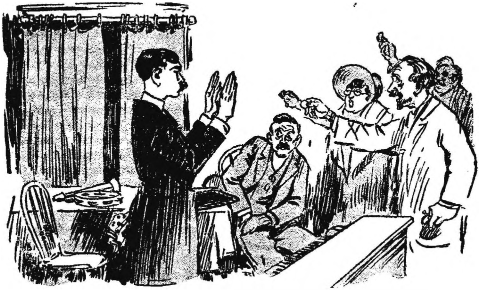
'Radin quickly abandoned a move toward a pocket of his flying suit. Perez's weapon had been sent flying. Reading recovered it and forced the Soviet agent to disarm the pilot. He pocketed both weapons and kept the conspirators covered with his own. They scowled sullenly but said nothing.

"Radin, your motor has a self-starter. Get back to the controls. Perez, enjoy the remainder of the flight to Germany in the seat beside your companion. I will ride in the cabin behind you.

"In return for your freedom when you reach Germany you will now give into my care the dispatch case in the wing compartment to your right. You will say nothing about our little forced landing.

At the American Embassy in Berlin the contents of Perez's dispatch case were examined and their essentials cabled by code to Washington. The plans involving the Panama Canal remained in Reading's keeping until he delivered those interesting documents in Washington.

Later, the Secretary of State informed the press that "recent reports to the effect that an agreement had been reached on the basis of which the United States of America would extend diplomatic recognition to the government of Soviet Russia have been premature and unwarranted."



But native shrewdness prevented the barber from demonstrating farther that night

LEVITATION

By W. C. Davis

ALL THE MEMBERS TURNED EVERYTHING POSSIBLE INTO CASH FOR THAT GLORIOUS NIGHT WHEN THE GHOSTLY MINT SHOULD RUN TO CAPACITY

A Story of Fact

AMONG the guests one night at a spiritualistic circle conducted by Hiram Cameron, in his "Old Curiosity Shop," East Main Street, Stockton, California, was a barber named La Mont. He, with a score or more of others, had paid into Cameron's exchequer the sum of twenty-five cents, the regular admission charge.

During the evening, the while Hiram squeezed such simple melodies as "Swaunee River" and "Annie Laurie" out of a wheezy accordion, "spirit" hands caressed the fevered and trembling brows of the guests, tamborines flew out of a cabinet, guitars and banjos were plunked and strummed, harmonicas droned, bells rang and an assorted array of small articles were heard to fall with dull or clanging thuds about the darkened room.

Spirit messages were received by the shivering believers from the dear departed. Through a trumpet, in hoarse whispers or sepulchral voices, Annie heard from George, Uncle Horace told nephew Harry that all was well with him in the land of the shades, *et cetera, ad libitum.*

For the better part of an hour Hiram entertained his guests with manifestations most amazing, and it was voted altogether a very successful séance.

After it was over Hiram invited all hands to inspect his spiritualistic studio for trap doors, sliding panels or other evidence of studied deceit.

Nothing was uncovered to fix the stigma of chicanery upon the operations of the wily Hiram.

"I don't claim it's spirits," drawled Cameron, " but if it's trickery, you've got to admit it's pretty clever."

Even the skeptics admitted that, though their better judgment cried out in protest. Hiram was not in the least perturbed when one man openly charged that he was a rank faker.

" I may be," answered Hiram, his equanimity unruffled, " but nobody has caught me at it."

And nobody ever did. His method was simplicity itself. No trapdoors or panels were disclosed, because there were none. He simply surrounded himself by confederates, and upon each side of any one who wasn't known to be " right," was one of them holding him so he couldn't make a move toward exposing Cameron.

Professing to be skeptics, the confederates circulated among the crowd before the séance, and thus knew in advance of any attempts at showing up Hiram. All were effectually nipped in the bud.

And these confederates, covered by Cameron's accordion music, " pulled " the manifestations. Cameron's whole scheme was as air-tight as it was simple, and he continued his séances until he grew tired of dividing the swag. Not until then did the truth come out.

So much for Hiram.

La Mont, who conducted a barber shop on the Stockton water front, was not at all convinced that Hiram's " manifestations " were produced by the aid of those who had joined the silent majority.

" Cameron is clever, and he is getting a lot of the sucker money," was La Mont's way of sizing up the situation. He determined that he would get some of it himself, concluding also that his operations would be far and above any piker considerations.

After attending a few more of Cameron's séances he gave it out that he was somewhat of a spiritualist himself, and invited some of Cameron's regular attendants to try a whirl with the shades at his home.

La Mont hinted that he would show them some phenomena calculated to make Hiram's efforts seem as simple as falling off the well known log, as soon as he got into his stride.

La Mont charged no admission fee during the period in which he was building up his victims for the final pluck. He led them along by slow degrees, by means of " rappings," spirit hands and the common tricks resorted to by most of the spiritualistic fakers.

He took occasion to explain, however, that he could promise nothing really startling until he got his circle in full confidence with his " guide," he being but the humble human instrument of those who had gone before.

" What I'm working toward," La Mont confided to his small but very select circle, " is reproduction by those in the spirit world, of objects laid upon the table by those in the circle. It is for that reason that I am proceeding slowly and cautiously, under orders of my guide, who informs me that very soon he will give you some very startling manifestations of his power, if you will have patience."

After a few weeks he announced one evening that his guide had promised him that if some one would place a coin upon the table he would make a gallant effort to duplicate it.

The lights were doused, and presently there came the sound of some one dropping a coin upon the table top. La Mont asked that all join him in singing " In the Sweet Bye and Bye." The melody welled from a dozen throats. One verse and the chorus. Then La Mont turned on the lights.

In the center of the table reposed two cartwheel dollars.

" Who put the original dollar there?" asked La Mont.

One of the guests indicated that he had made the contribution.

" Well, my guide has reproduced it for you," said the barber, solemnly, as he pushed the money toward him.

Amazement showed in every face. Here was concrete evidence of spirit power. There is nothing quite so convincing as the reproduction of money. Nobody thought to compare the dates on the coins, which may or may not have been the same. A dollar is a dollar, and what are a few years between friends and believers.

Then somebody timidly suggested that

maybe the esteemed guide might do business on a five-dollar basis. La Mont professed to believe that this would be somewhat of a strain on the guide, but he would see what could be done. Again the lights went out, and "Rock of Ages" reverberated through the room, a trifle out of key, but still distinguishable, after the fiver had been heard to tinkle on the mahogany.

Lights! There they were—two five spots! And the original donor took down his one hundred per cent profit.

La Mont had "put the wolf" in them in most abiding fashion. But he had to demur at forthwith attempts to wheedle a tenner out of his obliging guide. Possibly things hadn't gone so well at the barber shop that week.

La Mont promised, however, to make an earnest effort to have his guide reproduce a twenty-dollar gold piece some evening the following week.

When the next séance night rolled around, all hands were present, and all had money with them, each indicating a willingness to get action in the spirit mint.

But La Mont was foxy. He knew better than to excite suspicion by running the mint too smoothly. An occasional halt in the machinery, he was shrewd enough to realize, would serve to cinch the belief of his circle in his powers. Some disappointment was expressed when several attempts to reproduce proved dismal failures.

"Friends, I'm very much afraid we have been too avaricious," explained La Mont, after the fourth failure. "Perhaps the spirits are punishing us for evincing greed. We had better not provoke them farther, but wait until my guide assures me that we are again in their good graces."

So they forbore to try that shady mintage for a few sessions. When La Mont decided the psychological time had arrived, he suggested that somebody try a dollar. The lights were doused, and with startling suddenness the rattle of a companion piece was heard. Up the lights, and the guest who had put up the original capital took his profits.

The entente cordiale had been reëstablished. The mint in the land of the shades had been reopened! Coinage had resumed! The members of the circle dug into their jeans and brought forth fives, tens and twenties, offering them on the experimental altar, wholly in the interests of scientific demonstration, of course.

But native shrewdness prevented the barber demonstrating farther that night. That and a slight tightening in his personal money market.

He advised extreme caution in tempting the money kings of the spirit world. So far the members of the circle had been well favored, and he was not disposed to rush a free ghost to death, in a manner of speaking.

Perhaps to-morrow night they might try again.

The roll call the next night got a hundred per cent response. The knight of the shears told them his guide had arranged to reproduce a twenty-dollar gold piece, as a special favor. Now, did any one chance to bring such a coin? Seven of them had been so foresighted. Here was a complication. Who should be the favored one? He left them to settle it among themselves.

Much figuring developed that of the circle there were two members whose takings had been somewhat smaller than the others. So it was agreed that one of them should put up the twenty, while the other was declared "in" for half the net result.

The reproduction was a huge success. It took "Rock of Ages," "Old Kentucky Home" and "Gather at the River" to operate the mint on the other side of the Styx, but two double eagles were finally spread before the little assemblage when the lights went on again. As agreed, the dough was split two ways.

Over a period of several months La Mont kept his circle intact, all pledged to the closest secrecy. His "come on" work was of a high order.

The successes and the failures were about evenly divided, but, of course, nobody ever lost anything, even if the spirits occasionally shut the doors of the mint practically in their faces.

When the guide was absent for two or three sessions, as was sometimes the case, La Mont explained that he had been called to San Francisco or Sacramento or perhaps

London, where he was operating branch mints, as it were.

Then one evening La Mont announced that he had glad tidings for the faithful few. He was just from a very personal séance with the guide, who had informed him that on next Saturday evening this wonderful guide would have his spirit friends reproduce all the coin placed upon the table.

"I feel this is a wonderful opportunity for us all," La Mont solemnly told them. "I have been hoping for this all along. The spirits are powerful. If they can reproduce a dollar, why not a thousand, even a million? It is only necessary that the right conditions exist—that we are all *en rapport*.

"Therefore, friends, we will dispense with the séance to-night. But next Saturday night come with all the coin you can scrape together. It will be returned to you two-fold."

There was great joy in the circle. In their excitement some of them offered to divide with La Mont, but he would have none of it.

"It is not for me," he told them. "Should I accept a cent of the money, all would be lost. I am content to make you happy, in my humble way. I could not stultify my heaven-born gifts for sordid gain. But you have my gratitude for your kindly offers."

In the interim the members of the circle turned everything possible into cash against the night when the ghostly mint should run to capacity. They borrowed and begged and mortgaged.

Saturday night found the little band on hand early. It was to be a real clean-up. Several thousand dollars went into the heap on the table, which groaned under the weight. It was all in gold, for paper money had not come into general use at the time.

At La Mont's suggestion each donor placed his gold in a separate pile with his name on a slip of paper, so that confusion might be avoided.

The barber also took occasion to say that this was the most supreme effort his guide had attempted in his whole career, and owing to the great strain upon him and the long time required to accomplish this feat—the greatest in the history of the supernatural world—it would be necessary to sing the entire musical program of the circle, to give him strength for the task.

He suggested that it would be well to start the singing with "Swaunee River," going through the entire repertoire and winding up with "Heart Bowed Down." He urged them to sing loudly—to put their hearts and souls into it.

As darkness ensued the faithful members of the circle began singing loudly and soulfully. One after another the accustomed tunes were rendered until the entire list had been exhausted. Twenty or more minutes had been consumed in song.

They waited in silence for word from La Mont. After five minutes or so some one called him by name. There was no response. A timid hand reached in his direction, but contacted nothing.

The same hand swung over to the table and pawed about frantically. The table was as bare as Mother Hubbard's cupboard.

"Turn up the lights!"

The utterly flabbergasted members of the circle saw no La Mont and no money. The wily barber had staged as complete a sample of levitation as the history of spirit phenomena records.

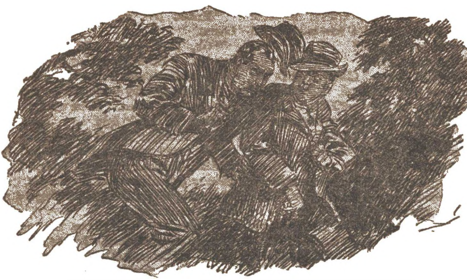
In the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth that ensued during the following days the story leaked out.

La Mont's mode of procedure had been even more simple than Cameron's. He had no confederates, for he needed none.

When a coin was placed upon the table, La Mont duplicated it in the darkness by no more complicated action than to quietly take one from his pocket and place it alongside the coin already there.

It cost him a few hundred dollars of his own money to build up his victims, but the final takings, running into five figures, made it worth while.

It was only necessary for him to quietly remove the stacked coin from the table at his last séance, while the room was in total darkness—the loud singing of his circle effectually masking any noise the operation might make—drop it into a convenient sack, slide out a convenient door and take an outgoing train that he knew about, destination unknown.



“Two. Two on foot,” he shouted and ran after them and bumped into Mr. Fortune

THE LION FISH

By H. C. Bailey

MR. FORTUNE LOOKED UP AT THE MEN. “HE WON'T SPEAK,” HE SAID. “HE'S GOING TO DIE TO-NIGHT.” “GOD HELP HIM,” REPLIED SUPERINTENDENT BELL

IN the hospital corridor two men stood waiting. A door opened and the round face of Mr. Reginald Fortune looked out at them. “Come on. Quite quiet,” he said.

They followed him into a little room where a man lay in bed. The nurse was holding a spouted cup to his lips. His head was bandaged. What little could be seen of his face was gray.

Mr. Fortune sat down and felt for his pulse. “Well, well. Another little drink didn't do you any harm, George,” he smiled. “Now you tell us all about it and we'll know what to do next.”

The other two men found chairs close by the bed and one had a notebook open.

The bandaged head moved on its pillows to look round Mr. Fortune and saw them and turned away. “I'm in for it, doctor,” a thick voice said. “You can't do me no good.”

“Don't you believe it. I'll do my bit. But you must give us a hand, George. I've got to know how this little mess happened.”

“Ain't you never been in a scrap? Just a bit of a scrap it was. I ain't got nuffink to grouse about.”

“Some of your own pals did you down?”

“Wasn't no pals of mine. Dunno who they was.”

“George! George!” said Mr. Fortune gently. “Have you got anybody you care about? I mean, the fellows that served you like this want looking after, or they'll be making things nasty for her.”

The body stirred, the bandaged head moved and groaned. Mr. Fortune looked at the nurse and the cup was put to the pale lips again. “Wotah yer bovverin' me for?” the thick voice said. “I can't do nuffink. I dunno nuffink.”

“Well, how did they start scrapping with you?”

"I dunno. We was drinkin' in some public. Went and 'ad a few more. And some'ow it got started."

"Who were they?"

"Tell yer I dunno. Chaps I got in wiv comin' 'ome from the races. I dunno none of 'em. Take my dyin' oaf I don't. But it was all fair. I ain't got nuffink against any of 'em, s'elp me, I ain't."

"My poor chap," Mr. Fortune said gently. "But I say—"

"Oh, my, leave me be," the man groaned. "I never done you no 'arm, doctor. Can't cher leave me die quiet?"

"You're a good fellow, George," said Mr. Fortune.

The man tried to laugh. "Not 'arf," he muttered. The bloodshot, bruised eyes stared up at Mr. Fortune; the lids flickered and closed.

Mr. Fortune's hand stayed some moments on the pulse. Then with one quiet movement he withdrew it, rose and turned. He shook his head at the two men, he waved them out. The nurse and he spoke together softly.

Half an hour later one of those two men, Superintendent Bell, was making his report to the chief of the criminal investigation department.

Mr. Fortune joined them, to be received by a cock of a quizzical eyebrow familiar to the friends of the Hon. Sidney Lomas. "Well, Reginald, so there was nothing doing after all."

"No." Mr. Fortune's round face had a childlike gravity. "He won't speak. He's going to die to-night."

"God help him," said Superintendent Bell.

"Yes. Yes," Mr. Fortune murmured, sank down into a chair and sighed.

"Oh, quite," Lomas agreed. "But Bell says he did speak; he told you he was damaged in a fair fight; no foul play; no complaints."

"Yes. That's what he told us. Poor chap. He's a good fellow in his fashion."

The superintendent shook a solemn head. "Been in with a nasty crowd, sir. Done some dirty work in his time. But he is a good plucky one, I don't mind owning I didn't think he'd die so game."

"Knows he's dying, does he?" said Lomas.

"Oh, Lord, yes!" said Mr. Fortune wearily. "He made up his mind he was going to die as soon as he was conscious."

"No reason why he should be afraid to tell the truth then. If he says he was smashed in a fair fight and nobody's to blame, we might as well believe him."

"It would save trouble, wouldn't it?" said Mr. Fortune. "Sorry, Lomas. I shall have to give evidence at the inquest. And I'm going to say he was sandbagged and kicked to death."

"Though he said there was no foul play," Lomas frowned. Lomas lit a cigarette. "That makes rather a nasty business of it, Reginald."

"Yes, I think so."

"He was afraid of the fellows that killed him even when he was dying!"

"Well—afraid of something if he told the truth, or hoping something if he didn't."

"Hoping while he was dying, sir?" Bell cried.

"He has a wife, you know. She came to see him this afternoon. You'd better look after Mrs. George Akers, Bell."

"It was a gang set on him, I suppose?" said Lomas.

"Several in it, yes."

"You believe he knows who they were?"

"He knows, all right. I thought he would have told me. He came near it this morning. But he's hardened since his wife saw him."

"And what's the theory, Reginald?"

"He knows who smashed him. He knows why he was smashed. He won't tell us, because his wife said he mustn't. Well, the inference is somebody's been getting at her."

Lomas inhaled smoke. "That is to say we've hit up against somebody in a large way of business?"

"Yes. Yes. It could be. What do you know about George Akers?"

Lomas shrugged and looked at Bell. "Loafer about the west end, sir. Only been through our hands for hustling with pickpockets. But we have had a notion he was working for some of the dope merchants. Giving them the office; standing by as bully when they wanted one, and so forth. Nothing to lay hold of, you know, but that's our idea."

"Hasn't been working for you, by any chance?" said Mr. Fortune.

Bell shook his head. "No, sir. One of our men did try to make something of him. This dope business has been getting out of hand. I don't know where the supplies are coming from."

"Somebody in a large way of business," Mr. Fortune murmured.

"Oh, it's a big business all right," said Bell. "But that don't account for George Akers being murdered. He didn't give anything away. Never came near it. It's months ago since we stopped trying for him. Whatever George Akers was smashed for, it wasn't for standing in with the police."

"They may have thought he was. They may have thought he would."

"The fellows who are managing the dope trade? Don't you believe it, Mr. Fortune. They know their men all right. You don't catch them running amuck."

"We haven't caught them, have we?" said Mr. Fortune mildly. "Do you remember that case in Paris, Bell? Gentleman in the dope industry who used to say to his employees 'The police won't kill you for refusing to inform, but if you do, I shall!' and it was so."

"But Akers didn't inform, sir," Bell objected.

"No. But he may have threatened. He may have run rusty. He may have got to know too much. He may have declined some unusually dirty job. Or he may not have been in the dope trade at all."

Lomas laughed. Bell breathed hard. "You do skip about, Mr. Fortune," he complained. "All you've been arguing is that he was."

"Oh, no. No. You said he was in the dope trade, not me. I was ony workin' out the idea, suggestive and provisional."

"It's all guessing," Lomas pronounced.

"No, I wouldn't say that. Quite solid facts. Murder by a gang. Dying man not surprised that he'd been killed. Thinks his murderers so powerful that he'd better die without getting 'em punished for it; so powerful they can make it worth his wife's while to keep in with them. And George isn't a timid spirit. But I don't want to believe he's right, Lomas."

Lomas lit another cigarette. "Poor devil," he said.

"But what's it all come to, sir?" Bell protested. "He's quarreled with his gang and they've smashed him and got at his wife to hush it up. We do have these cases."

"I wonder," Mr. Fortune murmured. Bell looked at him, dubious, resigned, patient. "I was only hintin' there's some brains in this one, Bell."

Bell made a mournful noise. "Some clever chap behind it all, sir?" he said wearily. He turned to Lomas. "Somebody in a large way of business, like you said, sir?" He shook his head at the two theorists. "It don't happen much, does it? My way of thinking, all we can do is to work over Akers's gang and see what we can make of his wife."

Lomas nodded and the superintendent went his heavy way. Lomas looked at Mr. Fortune. "He's right, you know, Reginald. It don't happen. When did you meet an organizer of crime?"

"Well, it's not much in my way," said Mr. Fortune. "I suppose this dope business has a managing director or so. If Akers was in it.

"But I never studied crime as an industry. What I get is generally a work of art: individual enterprise and fancy. I don't think I ever met a coöperative murder before. I don't like it." He looked plaintive, he wandered out.

II

SUPERINTENDENT BELL'S labors discovered nothing more. George Akers's gang was unanimously dumb. The widow came to the inquest, a waif of the streets in decent black, and, with tears, related that her man had gone to the races as usual—he got his living racing—and never came home again.

When she saw him in hospital he said he had been drinking and got into a scrap with some fellows; he didn't know who they were; she didn't know. George didn't have no enemies she ever heard of; not George. She wept herself out of the box. She went unchallenged.

The police could offer no other evidence but Mr. Fortune's, and on that the jury gave a verdict of willful murder against persons unknown. And George Akers was buried with his widow a lonely mourner, and before the week was out she had gone from the one room in Soho, which was her home, and was seen no more.

Superintendent Bell shook a sage head. "You can't make anything of it, sir. I dare say she knew something. I dare say she didn't. She's the sort to pick up with another man before her husband was cold.

"Maybe we'll come on the truth in a year or two, when we're looking for something else. Maybe we won't. We do get these cases."

"I wonder what George thinks about it," said Mr. Fortune.

But his attention was then distracted. Superintendent Bell's telephone rang. Superintendent Bell listened to a long narrative. "Landomere?" said the superintendent. "Spell it. Landomere. Right. I'll come round" He turned the pages of one book of reference and another "Do you know anything of Gerard Landomere, Mr. Fortune?"

"No. He doesn't sound real. What's he done?"

"Cut his throat."

"That gives him a certain interest."

"Would you like to have a look, sir?" said Bell eagerly.

"Oh, Bell, did I ever?" Mr. Fortune sighed and went with him.

Mr. Gerard Landomere lived in a block of flats behind Piccadilly, which provided service for those who wanted it. Mr. Landomere did, his valet having been dismissed the week before.

The man who came up to valet him that morning had found him in bed with blood about his throat and a razor in his hand. He was already dead. The steward of the flats telephoned for the police and a doctor. The doctor said it was suicide.

"That's what we've got, sir," said the inspector in Landomere's rooms. "I was just going through his things."

"Mr. Fortune would like to see the body," Bell said.

But Mr. Fortune was in no hurry. He looked about the room, which was hung with colored prints of the eighteenth century, sporting and erotic. It had chairs of comfort and some good pieces of old furniture and silver. "Who was Gerard Landomere, inspector?" he murmured.

"What you'd call a man about town, sir. No occupation. He's lived here years. They say he was a very quiet gentleman. Best of tenants. Bit behind with his payments just now, but nothing to signify."

"Not known to the police?"

"Oh, Lord, no, sir. I never heard of him."

"Landomere," Mr. Fortune murmured. "No, he doesn't sound real, does he?" He turned away into the bedroom, and Bell followed.

Gerard Landomere lay in a smoothly ordered bed. The clothes covered him to his chest. Above that was blood. His pyjamas were undone at the neck, his head lay back on the pillow, and on the left of his neck the flesh gaped. His right arm was bent across him and the hand still grasped a razor.

Bell drew in his breath. "Ah, he died quiet, sir," he said softly.

Reggie Fortune bent over the body.

His fingers went into the breast pocket of the pyjamas. He drew out a folded paper. It was stained and wet with blood, but the writing on it could be read. Reggie beckoned Bell.

> DEAR SIR:
>
> Confirming our conversation, I have to say that my friends cannot see their way to settle the matter for a smaller sum than two thousand pounds—£2,000. I hope to receive payment from you without further delay. Otherwise it will be necessary for us to lay the facts before the parties mentioned with the consequences to your position which I am sure you fully appreciate.
>
> Yours faithfully,
>
> A.

It was witten in a flowing clerk's hand. The paper was a sheet torn from a pad and bore no address.

"That's blackmail plain enough," said Bell.

"Yes. Yes. Quite plain."

"He got that and he daren't fight it. There was no way out for him but the razor."

"Yes. That is the obvious inference."

"Devilish things, these blackmail cases. Poor chap, I wonder what he'd done."

"Yes. I should like to meet A.," Mr. Fortune murmured. He went back to the body and stood looking down at it. His pink, round, boyish face displayed a plaintive surprise. "Anything strike you, Bell?"

"There's this valet, sir."

"The valet who was conveniently dismissed last week. Yes. I should look him up. But I meant here." He waved a hand at the dead man on the bed.

"It looks a straight case to me, sir."

"Well, where's the envelope?"

Bell considered that. Bell looked about the room. "Not here anyway, but it needn't be. Might be in the sitting room. I'll ask Logan."

"One moment. What about the light?"

"The light?" Bell's brain struggled. "I don't follow, sir."

"Well, you know, this blood was shed before dawn. Were the lights on when the body was found? Ask Logan that too."

Inspector Logan had been told the lights were all off. As for the envelope, it was certainly not in the sitting room. The gentleman didn't seem to have kept any papers at all.

Bell came back to the bedroom. Bell looked at Mr. Fortune. "That's queer, anyway."

"Yes. Curiouser and curiouser. He abolishes all his papers—but he cherishes a blackmailing letter—though he abolishes the envelope. His throat was cut in the night. And the lights were all off this morning."

"It is odd about the papers," Bell said slowly. "You're thinking somebody has been in the flat, sir. But this is no proof, to my mind. The papers—well, we've got to suppose the poor chap didn't hardly know what he was about last night.

"And the lights—I don't see anything in that. He wouldn't want light to cut his throat. I suppose he got his razor and switched off the light."

"Referrin' to the razor," said Reggie. "He used a safety on his lawful occasions. It's on the dressing table. An old friend. But he also had a case of razors handy. That's very unusual. And the case is new, Bell."

Bell took it up. "Looks pretty new. But it would be. If he used a safety, he'd have to buy another to kill himself."

"Yes, that would have to be considered," said Reggie in a dry, hard voice which startled Superintendent Bell.

"I don't get what you mean about the razors being new, sir." Bell came to the body and looked at the razor clasped in the dead hand. "Nothing unusual in a suicide buying a weapon. This is one of that set on the table." He touched the dead fingers gingerly. "The hand's stiff and hard grasping it."

"I noticed that," said Reggie meekly. "Anything else strike you, Bell?"

"No, sir. Clear case of suicide to my mind. I don't know what else there is."

"Blood's rather dark, isn't it?"

Bell stared at him. Bell looked down at the bed and drew back with something of horror on his solemn face. "Good Lord, Mr. Fortune, I couldn't tell. It's just blood to me. What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know," Reggie said contemplating the body. He turned away. "Found an answer to everything, haven't we, Bell? But there's several curious things. Let's see if Logan's got any more."

III

INSPECTOR LOGAN had got nothing at all. The old walnut bureau contained no papers, not so much as a check book. Inspector Logan considered that Mr. Landomere had taken good care not to leave anything behind.

"Looks as if he had something pretty nasty to hide," said Bell.

Reggie, wandering about the room, had come to a halt before a glass and a spirit decanter. Both were empty. Inspector Logan grinned. "He had a good drink before he went out, sir, didn't he?"

"Yes. Yes. That is indicated," Reggie murmured. He was smelling decanter and glass.

"It was whisky he used, sir," Logan helped him.

"Thanks. I did recognize it." He put down decanter and glass and still wandered about the room, looking closely at the prints, the furniture, stopped before an oak chest.

"Some rare old things he had. That's sixteenth century." He bent over it and rose with a sigh of respectful admiration. "Well, well. I shall have to do some work with the body. Have it removed, will you? I want the bed clothes, too. And that glass and decanter, Bell."

"Very good, sir. Any points you want us to work on?"

"Oh, the obvious. Did anybody come to the flat last night? Who are Mr. Landomere's friends, who's his banker, who's he been talking to on the telephone? You know all that. Better get hold of the discharged valet. He ought to be interesting."

"There's nothing else, sir?"

Reggie was looking at the few pieces of old silver on the bureau. "Oh, my aunt," he said softly. He turned in his hands a small cubical box. "Look at that," he held it out on his palm to Bell.

Bell poked at it, peered at it. "What is it, Mr. Fortune?"

"It's a pouncet box."

"That don't help me. What's it for?"

"It was made to hold Elizabethan smelling salts. That isn't wholly relevant. But it's engraved with a lion who has the body of a fish. See?"

"Yes, I see. But what about it?"

"Mr. Landomere was real after all," said Reggie. "I'll take this. Good-by."

Inspector Logan gazed at his superintendent. "I don't get what he means about Landomere being real," he grumbled. "And a fish lion! What's the sense of that? Sounds like he was being funny."

"This case isn't going to be funny, my lad," said Bell. "Give me that phone."

IV

IT was late in the next day when Reggie came into the room of the chief of the criminal investigation department, who was being brisk with papers and a secretary. "Hullo, Lomas. Pressin' on to closin' time? Something attempted, something done has earned a night's repose."

"You're aggressively cheerful, Reginald," said Lomas. "I expect you to justify it," and he got rid of the secretary. "Well?"

"Have you found Mrs. Akers?"

Lomas sighed and gave him a cigar. "No, Reginald, we have not found Mrs. Akers. We are rather busy with the Landomere case. Be relevant as soon as possible."

"I always am. Have you found Landomere's valet?"

"Not that I know of." He took up his telephone and talked to Superintendent Bell. "No, not yet. Logan thinks he is on the track of the fellow." He paused. "Why do you revert to the Akers case, Reginald?"

"Certain similarity. Hadn't you noticed it? Two men die violent deaths. Care in each case to obliterate the reason, and in each case the person who might know something fades away."

"And certain diifferences. A tout is kicked to death in a street row. A man of means cuts his throat in his flat."

Bell came into the room. "But the police know nothing about either of them," said Reggie cheerfully. "Or do you, Bell?"

Bell smiled. "I had to check Logan for saying you were being funny, sir. But were you pulling my leg about the lion fish?"

"Oh, my, Bell! Did I ever?" Reggie felt in his pockets and produced the pouncet box. "There you are. Beautiful piece, isn't it, Lomas? Lion's head on a fish's body. Lion of the sea. Lion de mer. Landomere."

"Landomere's arms, eh?" Lomas said. "Well, what about it?"

"First inference: Mr. Landomere's name is genuine and old. Lookin' into the matter, we find that the Landomeres were an ancient family in Downshire, founded by an eminent pirate of the middle ages. Hence the name, Lion of the Sea.

"They did a little in the profession later and eked it out by smuggling. As times got quieter, they decayed. They're supposed to have died out last century. I can't trace this fellow, but he'd stuck to a few of the old family things."

"All very interesting, Reginald," Lomas yawned. "I'm not compiling a history of the family of Landomeres. If you'll tell me how he died, we might get on."

"Oh, he died in his sleep."

"Good gad!" said Lomas.

"What, sir?" Bell cried. "Cut his throat in his sleep?"

"Yes. Yes. In a way. He didn't really cut his own throat. It happened like this. Some time in his absence his flat was entered and a sleeping draft put into his whisky. He came back, had his drink and went to bed. While he lay in a drugged sleep, his flat was entered again by somebody, probably two men or more. They brought that case of razors, they brought the blackmailing letter.

"They put a razor in his hand and so cut his throat. They put the letter in his pocket. Then they took all his papers, switched off the light and quit. Thus wiping out Mr. Landomere and all traces in the flat of how he'd been living and leaving quite good evidence that he destroyed his papers and committed suicide in fear of blackmail. Very thoughtful bit of crime. Like the extinction of George Akers."

"Damme, Reginald, you surpass yourself," Lomas smiled. "This is very ingenuous, but more than a little conjectural. Guessing isn't evidence."

"Thank you for those kind words."

"My dear fellow, I've the greatest respect for your opinion. But after all, an opinion isn't facts. You can't possibly know all this. It's a work of imagination constructed with very scanty and unreliable material."

"You think so? I bet you the jury won't."

"Great heavens, you're not going to tell this tale at the inquest?"

"I'm going to tell the jury that Superintendent Bell pointed out to me the man had died very quiet, that his blood was dark and his lungs congested as if he had been poisoned with chloral hydrate; that I found chloral hydrate in the empty glass and the empty decanter.

"There's the facts, Lomas. And the opinion to be formed upon them, the only possible opinion, is that a sleeping draft of chloral was put in his whisky so that he should be insensible while his throat was cut."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" Lomas protested. "How can you say so? It's not uncommon for a suicide to take a drug before he kills himself some other way. Landomere may have hoped to kill himself with chloral and found it didn't act quick enough. He may have taken it so that he should die quiet. He may have had the chloral habit. Your murder theory is superfluously improbable."

"Think again, Lomas," said Reggie. "There was chloral in the decanter. Put your mind to it." He smiled and took another cigar. "By the way, Bell, did you find any chloral in the flat? No, I thought not.

"Another little point. The hypothetical suicide gets some chloral without a bottle and mixes it with the whisky in the decanter. That's a very unusual way to take your drugs."

"Your point," Lomas agreed. "Sorry, Reginald. You are very neat. But I don't see my way. If a murderer could drug his whisky, why bother with this dangerous business of cutting his throat?"

"Well, I don't know why Landomere had to die. But I take it there were urgent reasons. The murderer had to make sure. Any poison Landomere wouldn't notice wouldn't kill him quick. A little sleeping draft—then his throat would be cut and everything arranged to look like suicide—and it was all over in one night."

"And if you hadn't happened to see him, sir, the other doctor would have passed it for suicide and we shouldn't have bothered about it," said Bell.

"And they'd have lived happily ever after," said Mr. Fortune. "Perhaps they will now. Are we going to have another verdict against a person or persons unknown, Lomas?"

"Another, sir?" Bell stared. "Oh, you mean that Akers case. I don't see any likeness."

"Both wiping out a man. Both very cleverly managed. Both givin' evidence of organization behind—and some chap with a will."

"It is damnably clever," said Lomas. "Some fellow with a head, yes. Possibly some fellow in a large way of business. He must have had a staff. But why the devil should the same man have to kill both Akers and Landomere?"

"You're coming back to that organizer of crime idea, sir," Bell shook his head. "I don't think it. Except for receivers of stolen goods and selling drugs and the sort of business side, they don't happen. I mean to say, not in murders. There's no money in murders."

"No. No. Murder would be a side line," Reggie murmured.

"What have we got?" Lomas lay back in his chair. "The Akers case has petered out. Landomere was murdered by somebody who knew his ways and could get into his flat. The valet is indicated. Logan's after him. Got his description. Got some of his pals.

"What about Landomere's life? He belonged to several decent clubs. We can't hear of any intimate friends. His bank account's very small. He had no capital to speak of. No visible means of support. His pass book shows money paid in irregularly, nothing suggestive in the checks he drew. They haven't noticed any particular visitors in the flats.

"The only thing worth looking into we get from the telephone exchange is that he rang up a solicitor last week. The girl remembered that because the call lasted so long. A Mr. Howard Fyle. Not known to the police. We'll have a talk with Mr. Howard Fyle. Anything else, Reginald?"

"Well, I was thinking of a quiet day or two in Downshire. I'd like to have Bell. Not necessarily for publication but as a guarantee of good faith. I shouldn't publish anything, Lomas. Get the inquest quietly adjourned. Don't tell Mr. Fyle we're worryin'. And go hard after the valet."

"Logan's a thruster," Lomas smiled. "You can have Bell, but I don't know what you'll do in Downshire."

"Nor do I," Reggie murmured. "Tryin' everything, Lomas. Like the late Mr. Darwin playin' the trombone to his vegetables."

V

THE next morning he arrived in a car at the suburban home of Superintendent Bell, who looked at it critically while the chauffeur stowed his suitcase. "Got a new one, Mr. Fortune?"

"A hireling. You never know, you know. Somebody might recognize mine. And I thought we'd better be incognito. Two gentlemen from Canada having a look round the old country: Mr. French and Mr. Brown."

Bell laughed. "All right, sir. Have you brought any false whiskers?" He looked at Mr. Fortune's pink round face affectionately. "I'd like to see you in whiskers."

"You have a nasty mind, Bell."

"Sorry, sir," Bell chuckled. "I just thought of it. It is a bit odd, you know, taking all this pains to be incog. Any one who knows us well, they'll know us just the same"

"Lots of people who never saw me know my name. I don't want to alarm anybody. We're going into a nice quiet country where strangers will be showy. Somebody might get interested in the car."

"All right, sir." Bell spread himself. "It's like a holiday to me. I don't know what we're doing."

"We're going to see the chief constable first. I always like to keep in with the police—if possible."

The car ran through long miles of suburban country, climbed to the wind on the hills and raced down to orchards and mellowing corn. The sprawling county town of Downshire slumbered between market days.

They put up the car and ordered lunch and walked through yawning streets to the chief constable. But he was brisk enough, a little man with a knowing eye. "I'm not going to say I'm glad to see you, Mr. Fortune. What's the trouble?"

"You know, don't you? But do you know any one called Landomere?"

The chief constable put his head on one side. "That suicide case, eh? I was wondering about it myself. I didn't know there was a Landomere alive."

"Ah, the family's faded right out?"

"Absolutely. Generations ago. Never heard of one in my time. They owned half the seaboard once, but all their land has been sold to other families times out of mind."

"No poor relations about?"

"I never met any one who knew a Landomere. We always think of them as one of the dead medieval names." He turned to a map on the wall. "That was their great place, Castle Counter, on a hill in the marsh by Lythe. They had a big manor here at Ashurst. All around was Landomere country. That's all I know about them.

"If you ask me, I wonder where this chap picked up the name." The chief constable looked more knowing than ever. "Bill Smith calling himself Keith Howard, what?"

"Yes, that is one of the possibilities," said Mr. Fortune.

VI

BUT after lunch the hireling car ran on from the woodland to the marsh, to the knoll of sandstone above the winding, muddy river where Castle Counter stood.

"Nice bit of ruin," said Bell and smiled upon his Mr. Fortune, like a father indulging a spoiled child's fancy. "What were you thinking of doing with it now we are here, sir?"

There was not much of it. The shell of the keep stood stark against the sea wind, the rest was tumbled stones glowing red with valerian. Fortune delivered a short lecture on medieval castles and Bell went on smiling.

Mr. Fortune wandered among the ruins. Bell came up with him where he stood contemplating the door of the keep. "There you are," he said. A coat of arms was carved in the crumbling stone and the lion fish could still be made out. "The home of the Landomeres."

"They don't use it much now," Bell chuckled.

Mr. Fortune glanced at him. "No. No. Well placed, wasn't it? Just over the harbor."

"Harbor?" Bell stared round. Under the hill the narrow river twisted between mud banks. "That's the harbor, isn't it, where the masts are? Must be a mile away."

"Yes. The sea's gone back since the Landomeres built their castle." He made a devious way down the hillside back to the car.

"It's all very jolly, sir," said Bell. "But I don't know what we're doing."

"We're trying everything. Now we're going to try if there's an inn at Lythe that has a conscience. And I don't mind tellin' you it's a desperate adventure."

But they found one, an inn of shocking Victorian structure which defiled the moldering beauty of that ancient port, yet understood comfort and by its teacakes, as Mr. Fortune pointed out, justified faith in human nature.

Thus comforted, he went forth to study the town of Lythe and in its great church discovered a tomb upon which lay Ranulf Landomere and Alys his wife in alabaster with a row of kneeling children beneath.

"Seem to have been plenty of 'em then," Bell said. "When was that, 1470? Our man won't be one these lads." He talked to the verger and was told that the Landomeres were all killed in the wars of the Roses. "Seems to me we're not getting anywhere in particular, Mr. Fortune."

"Let's get on to the telephone," Reggie muttered, and then with emphasis: "Don't forget things, Brown."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, French," Bell grinned.

At the post office Mr. French made a trunk call and Mr. Brown stood with his back to the door of the telephone box. But no one took any interest in them.

Reggie came out and took Bell's arm and turned away out of the town on the lonely road to the harbor. "I got Lomas," he said softly. "He's seen the solicitor. He thinks Mr. Fyle is the safety first, family business kind of lawyer, quite respectable.

"Mr. Fyle says he did some trifling job for Landomere, about a bill, years ago and hadn't heard of him since till last week when Landomere rang him up. Landomere was very confused, but as far as he could make out wanted advice about an attempt at blackmail. He arranged an appointment and Landomere didn't keep it. That's all he knows."

"Sounds straight enough."

"Yes. Yes. They're looking into Mr. Fyle, of course. They haven't got the valet yet, but Logan's close on him."

"Then he's doing more good than we are," said Bell grimly. "We don't get very close to anything, do we?"

"I wonder," Reggie murmured. He stopped and gazed at a topsail schooner, the only ship by the grass grown quay of Lythe. She was unloading deals. "A Swede, is she?"

"I'm no good at flags," Bell shrugged, but he saw Mr. Fortune considering the schooner with a curious attention. "One of these chaps with the timber will know of her."

"Don't worry," Reggie drew him away and they strolled back to the town. After a few hundred yards Bell glanced at him. "Yes, I think so," Reggie murmured. Bell stopped and began to light a pipe. He had trouble with matches.

A man passed them at a swinging pace, a big fellow in plus fours. He vanished among some boat building sheds.

"Looks like it," Bell frowned. "But if we are being followed, somebody's got on to us mighty quick."

"Yes, Brown. That is so," Reggie smiled. "In the home town of the Landomeres, Mr. Brown."

"Do you mind leaving this to me?" said Bell with ferocity. "You go on quick. Back to the pub. And stay there."

So Reggie strode out like a man who had business and left Superintendent Bell smoking his pipe on the harbor road.

VII

IT was two hours later and Reggie was turning over an old gazeteer of Downshire in the smoking room of the White Hart when Bell's head looked in. "Hello, French, what about dinner?" it said loudly, and Bell came in and shut the door. "Well, he was on to us all right. He followed you."

"Yes. I know. He had a drink in the bar and asked who we were, Brown," Reggie smiled.

"That's right. Got some cheek, hasn't he? Then he hustled away to a garage and went off on a motor bike. I've got him ticketed, though. He's been in and out of the town a good deal the last few days. He and another chap, small fellow with one arm.

"They took a bungalow out Ashurst way a week ago. Give out they're artists. Name of Vereker they use. Oh, that ship, by the way. She is a Swede. Been in about a week. They often get timber boats here. Almost the only ones they do get. There it is.

"These chaps came here about the same time as a Swedish schooner. And as soon as we're in the place, they're trailing us. It beats me."

"Yes. Yes. Several unknown factors. Quite a lot of factors. But I don't think we're wasting our time, Bell. As soon as we're in the Landomore country people take an interest in us. That's very stimulating. Come on. There's red mullet for dinner and a little saddle of lamb. They brag about their Madeira."

After dinner Mr. Fortune, who loves not walking at any hour, but then, least of all, was tempted by the curiosity of duty to stroll with his cigar.

But in the silent streets of Lythe no footfall followed theirs. They climbed to the little green by the watch tower that once guarded the harbor. In the faint light of the rising moon the marsh lay dim and misty, but they could make out the winding of the river.

"Look. She's eliminated," said Reggie. A light high in air was moving seaward slowly and they heard the faint heavy beat of a motor engine. The schooner was standing out to sea on the ebb.

"Well, I don't know what she had to do with it anyway," said Bell.

"No. No. I wonder if Mr. Vereker does," Mr. Fortune murmured.

Over the marsh, mist gathered in strange shapes, like giant spirits walking on the wind, silvery in the moonlight, dark in the cloud shadows, and changing form as they moved. "Weird place, isn't it?" Bell muttered.

The sound of another motor was borne up to them, but a sharper sound, a motorcycle driven fast. It drew nearer, it rushed along the harbor road, vanished, stopped. Then they heard the engine started again and at the same high speed it came back.

"I'm afraid somebody's missed the boat," said Mr. Fortune.

"And if you know what that means!" said Bell with emotion.

"I don't. Very complex problem. I'm going to my bed."

"Sleep on it, eh? Good Lord, I shall dream of it."

In the morning Mr. Fortune—this is most unusual—was up early. He found Bell morosely shaving. "Oh, Bell, oh, my Bell," he protested. "This gloom! Hence loathed melancholy! Let us then be up and doing, for the grave is not the goal."

"I don't know what we're going to do," Bell wiped his face with a certain violence. "The more I think of it, the more it beats me."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that!" Reggie sat on the bed and swung his legs. "But it's highly complex. I was going to look for Landomeres in their ancestral haunts."

"Still at that, eh?" Bell said through his shirt.

"And you could look after me. On a push bike. Nice healthy exercise. In case the firm of Vereker might be interested."

So alone in the car Reggie drove to the manor house of Ashurst. A large board in its park informed him that it was for sale by order of executors. He conferred with an old lodge keeper.

The place had been owned by the Fenley family for a century. She didn't know who had it before. Of course, it was the Landomeres' once, like everything round about: lands, churches, everything.

Why, Ashurst churchyard was fair full of Landomeres. But they'd been gone this long time. Old Mrs. Fenley she did love to talk of 'em. Her folks had been something to the Landomeres in the old days. They'd come up when the Landomeres went down. Now they were gone, too.

Old Mrs. Fenley, she'd been dead forty years. The place came to her daughter then. Never married, Miss Fenley didn't, no. Just bided about. There was some talk about her and parson once, but never came to nought. She was a queer one.

Reggie drove on to the house and was led over it by a dragon caretaker and wasted his time. The place was a shapeless patchwork of three centuries furnished in the worst Victorian manner. The awful portraits were all Fenley's. Of departed Landomeres he found no trace.

The hireling car came back to the road and looked for Bell and his push bike, but in vain. Reggie laid a course for Ashurst church which proved hard to find.

Ashurst village consisted of a post office where lanes diverged to farms and scattered cottages. The church was reported a mile and a bit away by road, but there was a path through the woods. Reggie trudged on the footpath way.

Up and down among hornbeam and hazel he came out to the bare slope by which the woodland falls to the marsh and saw a little shingled spire.

Ashurst church stands on the edge of the high ground alone but for a vicarage of brownstone. Reggie climbed a steep path and by a cuckoo gate between ancient yews came into the churchyard. He looked across the marsh to the dim blue distance that was the sea.

In the wide sunlit prospect peewits were flashing and calling. It seemed to him no bad thing to be vicar of Ashurst. He sighed and applied his mind to business.

The churchyard was large and stretched to the very verge of its hill which fell away in a little sandstone cliff to the marsh. But in spite of the old lady at the lodge it was by no means full.

A big eighteenth century grave took his eye; a cubical structure of stone inside a railing, plainly a family vault. He came to it and on the crumbling top made out the Landomere lion fish and the vestiges of a Latin inscription: something about Gerardus eques et domina.

"Yes. Our Gerard's in the mortuary."

he murmured. "And Sir Gerard and his lady are down there."

He stood contemplating that ancient stone and the railing and the steps within it which led to an iron door into the earth. He turned away and wandered back over the close shorn turf to the neath path. Somebody was coming.

"Good day." A little white-haired, rosy-cheeked parson smiled and made him an old world bow. "Did you wish to see the church?"

"I should like to."

"I shall be delighted to show it you. I am always so glad when visitors come to see my little church. We are so out of the world, I'm afraid many good people miss it. Quite a humble place, of course, but I do venture to think ra-ther beautiful, ra-ther beautiful." He unlocked the door.

The church was an austere piece of early English. But the little parson had much more to say about it; of squint and rood loft, aumbry, east window, tower arch he chirruped.

Mr. Fortune said the right things and he beamed. So gratifying to talk to some one who understood; so rarely found them coming to Ashrust. Of course they were quite out of the world.

Mr. Fortune explained that he was just taking a run round the old country. An American, sir? No, no. From Canada. Been having a look at the old house that was on the market. They told him the church was worth seeing.

"Really! Really!" the vicar beamed. "Shall I be having you as one of my parishioners, sir?"

Reggie shook his head. "I didn't take to the place myself. Not what I call old. I heard it was some real old family castle. What was the name? Land-us-here—something like that?"

The little parson looked bewildered. "Miss Fenley was the owner, sir. Quite an old family. The last of her line, poor lady. A sad pity. I expect the name you heard was Landomere. They have been dead and gone for centuries. Dear me, yes. The glory of this world passes away."

He shepherded Reggie to the door. While he was locking it, Reggie strolled across the turf to some of the older graves. "Our little God's acre, sir. A sweet quiet place."

"Yes. Yes," Reggie turned and surveyed it. "Thanks very much. It's been most interesting."

"Oh, not at all, not at all," the little parson beamed. "I should thank you."

"I was wonderin'," Reggie murmured, "which is my best way. I left my car up on the road." He looked at the pebbly track which curved past the vicarage and down under the cliff to run across the marsh. "Where does that go?"

"Oh, you were quite right, sir. That's only a farm track. There is a charming footpath through the woods. I do hope you found it!"

"Yes. Charming. Yes. Many thanks. I'll take that again."

The little parson said good day and left him in the churchyard. He wandered among the graves, but he did not go back to the family vault of the Landomeres. Once, twice, and again he found the name of Akers.

He took the woodland path at speed. But the post office of Ashurst knew nobody called Akers.

VIII

BELL and the bicycle had not appeared to his chauffeur. The hireling car was driven hard back to Lythe and Mr. Fortune, pale and dreamy, filled the void of a lunchless day with a great many tea cakes.

But they brought no peace to his troubled mind. He watched the clock, he watched the street. "Damn Bell," he murmured and sought the post office and the telephone.

"Fortune speaking. Have you got that valet yet? No? Don't tell me Logan's still close on him. I'm tired. I want some Lord High Muckamuck of the telephones to be at the Lythe to-morrow bright and early and do what I tell him. Anything else?

"Yes, thanks. I want three or four good men to report to Mr. French at the White Hart here to-morrow. Better come in a fast car. Who's Mr. French? Me. What's doin? I don't know. But we're close on it.

No, Lomas, dear, not like Logan. Good-by. Pleasant dreams."

He hurried back to the inn and there was relieved by the sight of Superintendent Bell swallowing tea in large gulps.

"Well, well, well," said Reggie, and sank into a chair. "And are we still alive and see each other's face? What have you been doing, Mr. Brown? I was afraid further complications had set in."

Bell looked round the lounge. Bell edged his chair nearer. "You were all right, sir. I've had a line on you all day. Saw you in the churchyard. You didn't see me. Found any more graves?"

"Yes. Yes. I found some Akers graves."

"Akers! He was from down here, too? Good Lord! The more you get, the more it beats you. What is there about that church, Mr. Fortune?"

"I didn't see anything myself," said Mr. Fortune.

"All day long, one of the Verekers has been hanging round. When I followed you past the Vereker's bungalow one of 'em was coming out, but he didn't so much as look after your car.

"He went into the woods. When I got near him, he was away to one side of the church, sitting down. After awhile he moves on a bit, but always keeping close to the church and that house there. Farm, is it?"

"Vicarage."

"Well, that's how I've spent my day. The other one, a little chap with one arm, came along and relieved him just awhile ago. They're up to something there."

"Yes. Yes. That is indicated," Reggie murmured. "I'm tired, Bell. Quite tired." He lay back in his chair gazing with large melancholy eyes at the wall. "One large, long bath," he murmured. "A light but nourishing dinner. And so to bed."

He rose wearily. He vanished, he appeared again only to dine, he was between the sheets before nine.

But Superintendent Bell drawing up his blind in the morning saw the hireling car at the door and came down to find him already in the marmalade stage of breakfast.

"Had a good night, sir?"

"Yes. I think so."

"Going off somewhere?"

"Only round to the post office," said Reggie and went.

A man stood yawning behind the clerks at the counter, surveyed him for a moment and came round to him. Did he want to see anybody?

Reggie was expecting a gentleman from London about the telephone service. He was taken upstairs to a meager room. "I thought I knew you, Mr. Fortune. —My name's Brock. Remember the Sinclair case? Now my instructions are to do anything I can for you. What's the business?"

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if you have one or two people coming in to complain their telephones are out of order. Useful things, wire nippers. Of course, you don't know anything about that." Mr. Brock winked. "Tell your people to be very civil and don't do anything just yet."

"I say, you didn't bring me down from London for that," Mr. Brock grinned. "That's the routine."

"No. I expect some of these people will want to make trunk calls. Take the numbers they ask for and then have 'em told the trunk wires are out of action. See? I want the numbers, but they mustn't get through to-day."

"That's all right. It means nobody will be able to get a trunk call through Lythe till you say the word. But that don't matter much. I dare say they don't get three a day."

Reggie gave him a cigar and they settled down to talk motor cars.

It was some time before a telephone bell disturbed them. Mr. Brock answered it and turned to Reggie. "Here we are. Man complaining his phone's out of order. Name of Vereker."

He sent down a soothing official answer. "They say he seems quite satisfied. Didn't ask for any other number. You haven't got much out of that, Mr. Fortune."

Reggie Fortune smiled a slow benign smile. "You never know, you know," he murmured. "We have to try everything." And he began to talk cricket.

The telephone rang again. Mr. Brock

listened to a long story. He purred out his official reply and turned to Reggie with lifted eyebrows.

"No. 2's rather agitated. Vicar of Ashurst. Cannot understand why his phone should suddenly fail. Wants it put right at once." Again the bell rang. Mr. Brock whistled. "He's asked for trunks. Embankment 1502. Want to know who that is? I can ask Embankment."

"One moment." Reggie turned the pages of the London telephone directory. "Fyle—Mr. Howard Fyle; yes, Embankment 1502. Thanks very much. Tell the vicar the trunk lines are out of order. Looking into it now. Everything will be all right by to-night."

Mr. Brock winked and sent down those comfortable words. "Now get me Embankment 1502." Mr. Brock did so and passed him the telephone. He spoke in a high, chirruping voice. "Is that Mr. Fyle's office? Give me Mr. Fyle, please. Vicar of Ashurst speaking. Yes, Mr. Frant. Mr. David Frant, yes. Hallo! Yes, Frant speaking. I want you down here at once. Come at once.

"What? What? I can't hear you. At once, man. Oh, I can't hear." He rang off. "I say, Brock, tell your people in London no other trunk call must get through to Embankment 1502 to-day. Good-by."

IX

HE came back to the inn and found Superintendent Bell surrounded by four large men. "Good. You fellows got a car? That's all right."

He looked into the office and required that lunch for six should be put in his car. They were going to have a picnic. He returned to Bell and his party and took them upstairs to his room. With a map of large scale upon the bed he demonstrated—

The haze of evening stole over the marsh. Below Ashurst church Reggie and Bell lay in the shade of a clump of alder watching the track which curved round the hill past the vicarage gate.

The long shadows fell faintly, the western sky was lavender and gold. The last edge of the sun passed into a gray bank of darkening cloud and the horizon closed upon them, the world was smaller and dim.

They heard a car and Bell rose and walked away. A closed car came into sight, swung round to the vicarage and stopped.

One man got out quickly and found the door open to receive him. There was a murmur of voices and the door slammed behind him. In the silence Reggie stood up and came to the cliff below the church. He thrust into the bushes at its base, waited a moment listening and strolled on.

Bell was knocking at the vicarage door. After awhile a manservant opened it. "I'm a police officer, Superintendent Bell," he put in his foot. "I want to see Mr. Howard Fyle."

"I don't know the gentleman, sir."

"The gentleman that's just come."

"I couldn't say, I'm sure. I'll ask the vicar. Will you come in, sir?"

Bell was shut into a little room which looked out upon the woods. He heard faint movements, he waited awhile, opened the door again and found the manservant just outside. "The vicar will be with you in a moment, sir."

Bell flung open the hall door. Mr. Fyle's car was still there. He saw two men vanish out of the gate into the dusk. He chuckled and blew his whistle and shouted: "Two. Two on foot," and ran after them and bumped into Mr. Fortune. "Hello, sir. Both of them bolted. Left the car, too. That's a queer start. Lost their heads, eh? Did you see 'em?"

"Yes. They went into the churchyard."

Bell hurried on. He met a small man, gripped at him and gasped, for his hand closed on an armless side. "What the devil are you doing here?"

"And the same to you," he was answered crisply.

"I've had this man under observation all the time, sir," one of the detectives loomed up. "He's been watching the house."

"Now, my man, what's your little game? We're police officers. Out with it."

"You're after the vicar? Praise God. I'm with you. My name's Vereker. Major Vereker. Come on. He cut off into the churchyard."

"Run away, Bell," said Reggie. "I want to talk to Major Vereker. My name's Fortune, sir."

X

BELL ran on with his satellite. Reggie took Major Vereker's one arm and followed slowly.

"I say, Mr. Fortune, this parson is pretty hot stuff. We'd better be after him, too."

"Don't worry. There's men all round us, major."

"He's for it, is he? I mean to say, you've got a line on him?"

"Yes. I think so. There's only one thing that's always beat me; and that's where Major Vereker comes in."

"Well, you see, I knew Landomere."

"Yes. Yes. I thought you might." Reggie sat down on the railing of the Landomere grave. "But how much did you know?"

"I'd known him off and on since he was a kid. My people knew his father in Jersey. Gerry wasn't much of a chap, poor devil. Weak, you know. This damned parson was his tutor. Gerry's father got the people who had the old Landomere estate to give the parson this living. Had to stop his mouth about some scandal with poor old Gerry.

"Well, Gerry had a good streak in him. He did have some decent pals once. A few weeks ago he wrote to me there was dirty work doing about a woman. It was the daughter of a pal of his who was killed in the war. She had a little bit of a past, she's just got married and he said he heard some fellows were going to blackmail her. Well, I only knew one fellow besides Gerry who was wise to her affair and that was an old servant of his, George Akers.

"It looked to me like a plant of Gerry's to draw a little safe blackmail himself. I warned her and nothing happened. Then I read about the inquest on George Akers and on top of that came Gerry cutting his throat. Well, that made me think.

"I had nothing to go on, but I always used to fancy Gerry might have been a decent chap without Parson Frant. Frant was the only chap likely to have a pull on Gerry. I thought it was up to me to see if I could place Parson Frant in it.

"So I came down here with my brother to have a look at him. And I've got this, Mr. Fortune: Frant's doing some queer business. We trailed him to an inn in the marshes and the chaps he met there were off a foreign timber ship in Lythe harbor. We watched her—"

"You watched me, didn't you?" Reggie smiled. "I'm afraid I rather confused you, major. You confused me."

"Sorry, sir. Yes, my brother followed you. Thought you might be in the game. But what is the game? What's a country parson—"

Bell lumbered up. "They're hiding somewhere, sir. How about trying the church?"

Mr. Fortune rose. "No, I don't think they're in the church," he said. "Come on." He stepped over the railing and went down the steps to the door of the vault. "Got your torches?"

"In there?" Bell flashed a light on the iron door.

"That's where they went."

"Good Lord, why didn't you tell me?"

"Well, I thought they'd better have time to think things over."

"But there may be a way out, sir."

"Oh, yes. Yes. There is. But they won't use it. I wedged the other door."

"My God!" Bell muttered and breathed hard. "This one," he felt it, "this one's locked, eh? Come on, Porter." He turned his light on the door, he took out an automatic pistol.

Porter began to force the lock; it yielded and the door slid back and the torch light revealed wide spaces of gloom; turned this way and that, it fell upon rough hewn stone, coffins thrust into a corner, set one upon another and in the midst metal chests which bore some bottles and scraps of food.

But no one was to be seen. "Come on out of it," Bell shouted, and no one answered.

He stooped and strode in. "You stand by the door, Porter." The beam of his torch searched the vault again and found a passage leading out of it on the far side.

Into that he marched, throwing the light before him.

"What the devil!" The light came upon a fallen motorcycle. Beyond it were men: a man sitting on the ground bowed together, a man standing smoking a cigarette, a man lying between them, his white hair dabbled with blood.

"Three of you, eh?" said Bell.

"All here, officer," the unshaven face of the smoker grinned. "That's nice, isn't it?"

"Mr. Landomere's valet, I presume," said Reggie.

"You know a lot, don't you? And Mr. Howard Fyle. And the Rev. blooming Frant. All present and correct."

"You put up your hands," said Bell. "Mr. Fortune, will you have a look at the parson? Porter! Call the other men and come along."

Reggie bent over the little parson. "Yes, you look at him," the valet growled. "I've done him proud."

Reggie stood up. "He's almost gone," he said quietly. "He can't live very much longer, Bell."

"Take my oath he can't," the valet laughed, and kicked at the body.

"You've done enough!" Bell dragged him away. "This is murder."

"I don't think. Not half. And what about those Mr. blooming Frant put away, George Akers and Landomere? What about me, keeping me down here in the grave to have me trapped like a blooming rat at last? Well, I smashed him like a rat. I've got back on him anyway."

"Come on with you," Bell hustled him off. "Take that man, Porter," he pointed to the wretched Mr. Fyle. "Send the others along for the parson."

XI

INTO the room of the chief of the criminal investigation department Mr. Fortune came to find Lomas with Superintendent Bell. "Well, well! How doth the little busy bee! This industry is very gratifying. Any little thing you haven't got that you want?"

"It was cocaine in those boxes in the vault, Mr. Fortune," said Bell.

"Oh, yes, yes, of course. From the timber ships. Not a nice man, the late Mr. Frant. Recreations, drug-running and blackmail. Do you find anything of interest in the papers of Mr. Frant and Mr. Fyle?"

"They didn't put much on paper," Lomas shrugged. "But it was big business. I always said that, you know."

"Yes, Lomas," said Mr. Fortune quite meekly.

"And a little country parson at the head of it!" said Bell.

"One of the world's great brains," Mr. Fortune smiled.

"I thought there was a good brain behind all this business," Lomas announced. "Well, we're going to clear up a lot of mess, Reginald. Fyle's been talking. That business in the vault seems to have broken him right open."

"Fancy!"

"Akers was an old servant of Landomere's; faithful retainer. Frant had been using them both for years. They shied at blackmailing this girl. Frant thought they meant to give him away. He had Akers murdered to stop his mouth and frightened Landomere.

"Landomere was badly rattled, but the way it took him was to swear he'd have no more to do with Frant. So Frant and the valet put him away. When Logan got going, the valet bolted down to the vicarage. Frant tried to ship him off—"

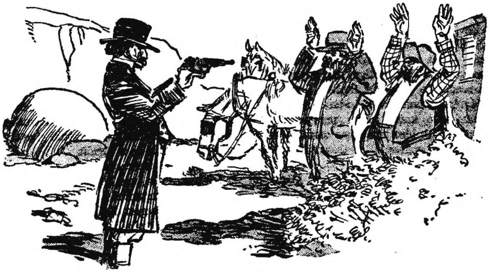
"Yes. Yes. We saw that. They just missed the boat. A bit of luck. The only bit of luck. The rest was simply research work."

"Mr. Fortune," said Bell, "when did you feel sure Frant used that vault?"

"The first time I saw it. There was a smell of tobacco coming up. And Mr. Frant was so interested in me."

Bell gazed at him. "Would you mind telling me—after you wedged that other door—when you kept talking—did you fancy they'd quarrel down there in the grave?"

"Yes. Yes." Reggie looked at him with large, solemn eyes. "I thought they might have trouble. I hoped they would. Yes. One of my neater cases, Bell."



When he barked his suggestion, it was followed without argument

"OLD BILL" MINER

By Frank Price

THE STORY OF ONE OF THE WEST'S OLDEST BAD MEN AND THE ONE TO ORIGINATE THAT FAMOUS CRY "HANDS UP!" IS TOLD HERE BRIEFLY

A Story of Fact

AN examination of the records of American outlawry since the first of the desperadoes swung into action against organized society reveals no more picturesque bad man than was "Old Bill" Miner, road agent and train robber, whose proudest boast when he lay on his death bed was that he had never knowingly killed a man.

Here was the story book bandit done to real life. Starting in life with all the advantages a boy could desire, going bad in early youth and staying that way until the end, Old Bill established a reputation for courtesy and meticulous attention to his personal appearance that was eclipsed only by his almost unfailing success in getting money the easiest way.

It was a discussion between two veteran detectives that inspired the writer to sally forth in search of information about Old Bill. They recounted some of his exploits but frankly confessed they had lost sight of him while he still was a comparatively young man.

"I can tell you this, though," one said. "Miner was the first outlaw to give the command 'Hands up!' That was in his early days out in the gold fields, and believe me, son, when he barked this suggestion it was followed without argument."

This was interesting! Who among all of us had not at one time or another speculated on this phase of banditry? True, the formula has been revised, amended and parodied in various ways—such as "Stick 'em up!" "Reach high!" and "H'ist 'em!"—but the general thought underlying each of these commands is the same. It is "Hands up!" and the reason is obvious. It renders signally impotent the real owner of such hands.

So Old Bill was the first outlaw to reason thus. That being true, then, his record must be worth recounting, and I leave it to the reader to judge of that.

My informant is a veteran of the Secret Service who knew Miner personally and who was with him just a few months before his death. Let him tell of this rarity among bad men.

" Miner," he says, " was not Miner at all. His name was William Anderson, and he was the promising son of a prominent Kentucky banker. When the gold rush of '49 was on, this youth joined the thousands of others who made the long trek overland to the California hills.

" No one ever discovered what it was that made him go bad. The theory has been advanced that he was perfectly honest when he reached the West Coast and that after repeated failure at prospecting, he decided to find his gold in a different way—to steal it after others had mined it.

" At any rate, whatever the motivation, he prospered, until one day in 1869 he selected the wrong stage to stick up. A guard beat him in an exchange and he was trussed up and delivered to the sheriff. A term in San Quentin followed.

" He was released in 1879 and almost before the ink was dry on his parole he had swung into action again as a road agent.

" Miner joined up with a gang and attacked the Del Norte stage in Colorado. The booty was three thousand, six hundred dollars and, although one of Old Bill's pals was captured and hanged by Vigilantes, the Kentuckian escaped with the loot.

" He made directly for Chicago and after a short time there, posing as a California capitalist, he visited in Michigan. He was waiting for the excitement of the Del Norte robbery to die down.

" After a fairly successful series of stagecoach holdups in Colorado, when he had returned there a few months later, he again invaded California and enlisted with a band which included Jim Crum, Bill Miller and a third man named Jones.

" This gang stopped a stage between Sonora and Milton in 1881, and in the mêlée which followed, Jones was the only one to escape. Crum later confessed and got a twelve-year term, while Miner and Miller, because of their obstinacy, were given twenty-five-year sentences.

" On June 17, 1901, Miner was released from San Quentin. He must have been at least sixty years old then and the authorities were convinced that he would give them no more trouble as a bandit.

" But they were optimists. Just about two years later, on September 23, 1903, with two companions, he held up and robbed the Oregon Railway and Navigation passenger train No. 6, at Mile Post 21, near Corbett, Oregon.

" One of Bill's companions was badly wounded on this job and the other was picked up later and sent away for a long prison term. Miner, for whom a reward of one thousand, five hundred dollars had been offered, escaped.

" Less than a year later, on September 10, 1904, Miner, then perhaps sixty-three years old and possibly older, became a lone bandit and held up the Canadian Pacific Railroad's Trancontinental Express at Mission Junction, British Columbia.

" This raid netted him ten thousand dollars in gold dust and currency and for the first time he earned the high but questionable honor of having a worth while price put on his head.

" The Canadian Government and the Dominion Express Company each offered a reward of five thousand dollars for his apprehension and the Province of British Columbia appropriated one thousand, five hundred dollars to the same worthy purpose.

" It is assumed that Old Bill took the proceeds of this job back to the States with him and lived comfortably for more than a year and a half, for he was not heard from again until May 9, 1906, when he and two others again attacked a Canadian Pacific train, this time at Furrer, British Columbia. This job was unproductive, however.

" He had compelled the engineer of the train to uncouple the locomotive and mail car and run them to a point a mile away, where he went through the registerd post. It is believed that he expected to find a valuable registered package and when this failed to materialize he lost his nerve and escaped, temporarily.

"Miner was out of luck now. He had wished the Northwest Mounted Police on his trail, and on May 14, five days later, the chase ended in a pitched battle.

"Miner and his two companions—Louis Colquhoun and Thomas Dunn—were captured after they had seriously wounded one of the 'Mounties.' All three were sentenced to life imprisonment and placed in the New Westminster jail, near Vancouver, British Columbia."

Here the Secret Service veteran's narrative was interrupted for several moments, as he sat staring dreamingly into space.

"I'm not through the story of Miner yet," he apologized. "I was just wondering how famous such a man would become if we could harness his cunning and courage and have him go straight."

I ventured a question.

"Why," I queried, "was Miner so smart and brave?"

The veteran smiled.

"You haven't heard anything yet," he replied. "Listen to this." He proceeded.

"Miner must have a constitutional objection to prison bars by this time, because it was only a little more than a year after receiving the life sentence that he engineered one of the most sanguinary jailbreaks in Canada's history.

"With five other convicts he made a dash for freedom on August 8, 1907. Three of his co-conspirators were shot and killed by guards. Miner's luck had returned. He got away without a scratch.

"The next place in which Old Bill was seen was Chicago. He apparently had retrieved a cache up in Canada, because he had money when he hit the Middle West and, posing as a coast capitalist again, he almost married a wealthy woman to whom he paid ardent court despite his years.

"His funds exhausted, Old Bill now turned to new fields for his outlawry and selected far-off Georgia. Again he was working alone."

The Secret Service man smiled as I gasped.

"Sure," he nodded understandingly, "I know he was a pretty old man for such a thing, but he did it. The records prove it.

"He held up a Southern Railway express and robbed it of twenty thousand dollars and he must have been all of seventy years old by that time. But he was not as fast on the getaway as he had been and he was captured later and sent to prison.

"In 1912, when Miner was about seventy-one, he was in the Milledgeville prison camp, Georgia, and I was assigned to go down there after a prisoner who was to be given over to the custody of the Government. When I arrived the warden greeted me.

"'You're a little late,' he said, 'your man escaped last night.'

"I asked for the details. My prisoner and an expreacher serving a minor sentence had been influenced by a desperate convict to join him in a jail break.

"'Who was this desperate man who coaxed them to go?" I asked the warden.

"'Old Bill Miner,' he said, 'a hard-boiled bandit.'

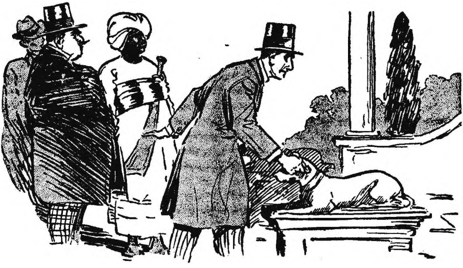
"I was astounded. It was unbelievable that Old Bill would take such a long chance at his age! But he had and he was to regret it.

"My man escaped but Miner and the ex-parson were picked up four days later in the Oconee swamps. They were half-starved and suffering from exposure.

"Miner died as the result of this experience, but not until a year later. His vitality was amazing. I talked with him just before he passed out. He told me then of his career, and it was then that he boasted that he had never knowingly killed any person.

"So passed Old Bill Miner, first outlaw to command 'Hands up!' first road agent to affect the long black coat, black boots and black sombrero and first to affect the flowing black mustache. Even now, as he lay dying, the mustache was there, but it was snow-white and scraggly."

And when my friend of the Secret Service finished his recital, I felt, despite a desire not to, a sort of sympathy for this pathetic old man who found it necessary to stick up a train single-handed after he had turned seventy.



He tightened his grip on the marble ear and turned and—

THE BUS THAT VANISHED

By Leon Groc

A COMMONPLACE OMNIBUS BECOMES THE VEHICLE OF INTRIGUE AND MYSTERY, AS EIGHT CITIZENS DISAPPEAR IN THE MAW OF PARIS

CHAPTER XXX

THE PAST GRIPS THE PRESENT

THE attitude adopted by the escaped victims of Bus 519 left Henri Henry without any theory. His clear intelligence and rare faculties of intuition were, for the first time perhaps, utterly helpless before a problem. He did not know what to believe, and dared not let his imagination take flight.

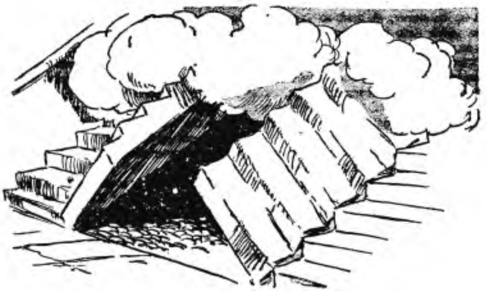
A single gleam of hope shone through this mystery; a single clew which promised some day to uncover the truth he so ardently sought. Hence, abandoning all the other aspects of the situation, he came back time after time to the question which had so deeply moved Gilbert and Muret: " What was the object with the rectangular base stolen from the Villa Cécile?"

He felt sure that the answer to that question would of itself give him the key to the enigma, but he found no hypothesis which could explain the relation between this theft and the impudent security which the thief seemed to enjoy.

" This ' object with a rectangular base,' " he remarked to Brunnel, " is evidently in Brancion's hands. The visit to his house, which we are going to make tomorrow, with the help of our negro, is therefore more important than ever. It may not only give us the secret to the prison where that scoundrel held his captives, but also reveal the nature of this object which is the source of his power.

" On the success of this expedition depends the success of our investigation. Consequently we must leave nothing to chance, and take every possible precaution. We

This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for October 22



—an explosion sounded and the stairs swung outward

both of us know the man we have to deal with, and that he holds human life cheap.

"The more advance information we can get about the lair we are going to explore, the more chance we will have of escaping any traps he may set for us."

"That is no doubt true," agreed Brunnel, "but what are the precautions you speak of, and where can you expect to get any advance information?"

"From the one man who knows more than anybody else about the secrets of the old buildings of Paris. The house where Brancion has his headquarters is far from being modern; certain parts of it, at any rate, date from the fifteenth century.

"I happen to be acquainted with a learned decipherer of old manuscripts, who may not know anything about contemporary life, but certainly knows a great deal about Paris as it was during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I've had the honor and the pleasure of interviewing him several times—for it is an honor and a pleasure to talk with him.

"He is a member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, and is publishing a series of volumes on 'Parisians in the Fifteenth Century.' Last year he brought out a volume on 'their costumes;' this year it is to be 'their houses.'"

"You mean Mr. Martin du Pont," interrupted Brunnel, who prided himself on keeping up with the current books as they appeared.

"Exactly. And if, as certain indications lead me to believe, the secret part of Brancion's house was constructed at the same time as the building itself, our friend the academician will certainly know all about it."

"But will he be willing to share the results of his studies with us?"

The reporter smiled and answered:

"Your point is well taken, for any one who knows that Martin du Pont has no liking for reporters and hates to tell them all about his affairs. Generally speaking, he never even receives them.

"But he makes an exception for me, since I undertook a campaign one time—and carried it through successfully—after one of his communications to the Academy, to preserve one of the oldest corners in Paris.

"In spite of the fact that he never reads the papers, he knew how much help my articles had been in getting the old buildings that were precious to him, classed as historical monuments. And at present his door is always open to me. Now I will wager that he knows Brancion's house as well as its owner, at least so far as the parts which date from past centuries are concerned."

Strong in this conviction, the journalist presented himself, a few hours after his talk with Brunnel, at the learned academician's house.

As he had foreseen, he was received at once in the scholar's study.

Martin du Pont was about sixty years old; the front part of his head was bald and lined with deep wrinkles, while a bushy little beard flourished on his chin and cheeks. His blinking eyes were sheltered behind spectacles tinted a faint yellow, which gave his face a strange expression.

He was so careless of his clothes that his old valet, who had been his only servant for thirty years, had to drive him at intervals to have a new suit made. The bow-knot of the Legion of Honor, which he wore in his buttonhole, had grown faded and dingy. His coat pockets had been stretched out of shape by the many books he had stuffed into them, and he had even been known to attend meetings of the Academy without a tie.

His absent-mindedness was proverbial, and there were many anecdotes about it. It was he who came home soaked to the skin one rainy day, holding his umbrella carefully rolled up in its case. His faithful servant exclaimed: " Why didn't you open it up?" And Mr. du Pont answered: " You're right! I never thought of it."

His study was as curious as himself. Piles of dusty papers stood about in a picturesque disorder. The scholar had given strict orders that they should never be disturbed.

" If you straighten things up," he explained, " I'll never be able to find anything." And in fact, thanks to a sort of intuition, he could put his hand at once on any document he needed, among the hundreds which were stacked on the tables, the chairs, and even the floor.

When Henri Henry reached this sanctuary, Martin du Pont quickly cleared a chair of the folios which covered it, and said as hospitably as he knew how:

" Sit down, young man, sit down and tell me what brings you here. I don't suppose you have come into my den just for the pleasure of seeing me?"

" Your time is too valuable, sir, for me to disturb you without a serious reason. I have come to ask the aid of your learning in a most important matter."

" What!" exclaimed Martin du Pont. " Are the few vestiges of old Paris threatened again by vandals?"

The reporter smiled and hastened to reassure him.

" This time it is a very different sort of question," he said. " You probably have not heard, since you don't read the papers—"

" I haven't time for it," interrupted Martin du Pont, as if to excuse himself.

" Oh, I am not reproaching you, sir," answered Henry. " But in order to explain the cause of my visit I must tell you about a certain affair which at present is very much in the public mind."

And he told the story of the misadventures of Bus 519, to which the historian listened with a noticeable politeness and with a lack of interest that was equally noticeable. " How can this business," he seemed to be thinking, " possibly have anything to do with my work?"

But when Henri Henry reached the description of Brancion's house, explained precisely where it was, and what took place there, Martin du Pont's face lighted up with understanding.

" I know that house well," he exclaimed, " and I'm giving it a prominent place in the book I'm preparing for the printer now!

" It was built in the year 1464 for a certain Lord Crespinoy, who had lived for a long time among the Turks, and had established a harem for himself at a time when polygamy was a hanging offense. This harem was concealed in a mysterious part of the building, which was large and ingeniously protected.

" I even have a manuscript, written in Latin by Lord Crespinoy himself, in which his harem's quarters are described in detail, as well as the mechanism which works the entrance to this subterranean part of his house. I'll read you the translation I've made of it. It's somewhere in this pile of papers."

With these words he pointed to a mountain of documents on a stand in the corner. Then he arose, upset the mountain with a single push of his hand and, after looking through the débris for a few moments, extracted a large sheet of school paper, covered with scribblings in a mousetrack handwriting, which was that of Martin du Pont himself.

He cleared his throat with a cough and began:

" This is a letter which Lord Crespinoy wrote to a friend in the provinces, who had formerly lived at the Turkish Court with him.

" Lord Crespinoy wrote half jokingly:

> I have great fear that the elaborate precautions I have taken to avoid the punishment meted out to the polygamous may expose me to the persecution visited on those wretches who practice magic. The danger lies in the cleverness of the device I learned in the Orient, which has made it possible for me to fit out a secret apartment, underneath my house, between the ground floor and the cellars, somewhat like the boxes with false bottoms that jugglers use to deceive their public.
>
> There is no apparent communication between this apartment and the rest of the house, and nothing to betray its existence to any one outside. The barred windows, which give it light and air, opening on the rear, look like vent holes, and do not attract any curiosity.
>
> The only thing that might seem strange to an observant visitor is the length of the stairway leading from the ground floor into the cellar, which is not in proportion to the height of the cellar itself. But, aside from the fact that I receive few visitors anyway, those who do come have no reason to go down into the cellar. As for my servants, I brought them back from the East, as you know, and their faithfulness has been proved.
>
> Nevertheless, the great ingenuity of the construction has almost got me the reputation of having dealings with the devil. The engineer who worked the thing out for me included a great interior vestibule, before coming into the secret apartment itself. large enough so that I can drive in with a carriage and four!
>
> It's done as follows: The marble landing by which you reach the main entrance to the house, is very high and hollow. It opens in the middle, with one of those complicated systems of pivots they have in Oriental palaces, revealing a passage, wide enough for the carriage to enter, down a gentle slope.
>
> As the carriage goes down, the marble steps swing silently back into place behind it, so that the visitors—and some of them are charming!—have got out of the carriage before they realize that they are my prisoners.
>
> But there they are, and if they don't know the secret of the mechanism, it's as impossible for them to get out as it would be for them to fly to the moon. Now, the machinery that opens and shuts the entrance makes use of that strange substance recently brought back from Germany which has spread terror on the battle-fields. It is a blackish stuff called *powder*, which when it is ignited, causes a sudden expansion of gases.
>
> The use my engineer made of this expansive property is especially clever. The door is so delicately balanced on its pivots that a push with the little finger, from within and at the right point, is enough to open it. But without this push, it is impossible to open it. There is nothing you can do from the outside which will take the place of that push, even if you know the secret.
>
> On the inside, however, running along the upper interior partition, is a narrow tube of stone, which leads to the movable part of the stonework. In this tube a charge of powder can be set off, not strong enough to destroy the tube, but with enough power to drive gases down it with considerable force of expansion. The pressure of these gases, when the powder has been ignited, is the only thing which will open the door on its pivots.
>
> The door, as it closes by its own weight, works a mechanism, which drops into the tube a fresh charge of powder, exactly the same size as before. Consequently at each opening of the door there is an explosion and a cloud of smoke, which has aroused great curiosity among the peasants of the neighborhood.

At this point Mr. Martin du Pont looked up from his manuscript. " I don't need to remind you, Mr. Henry," he interjected, " that at the time this letter was written the house you are interested in, and which now stands in the midst of Paris, was surrounded by open fields, and that the city limits were still some distance away."

After this commentary, the historian continued his reading:

> As a result of this the peasants have already accused me of diabolical practices, and if weren't for certain friends I have at the court, I should probably have suffered persecution.
>
> At any rate, in case anything should happen to me, I don't want my secret to die with me and the treasures hidden under my house to be lost. That is why I am confid-

ing to you in this letter, which I shall send by a trustworthy messenger, how it is possible to enter my secret apartment. Read what follows and learn it by heart, for you must burn this when you have read it.

"Fortunately for us," added Martin du Pont, "Lord Crespinoy's friend did not burn the letter, for its contents are as thrilling as the most marvelous of the 'Thousand and One Nights.' I intend, moreover, to read it at one of the approaching sessions of the Academy."

Henri Henry nodded. His throat drawn, his eyes dilated, he listened eagerly to this revelation, the author of which had been dead for more than four centuries, but who now, with magnificent poetic justice, was supplying a powerful weapon against the scoundrel who was using—to carry out his crimes—the very chamber where Lord Crespinoy had concealed his pleasures.

After a moment's pause the academician began again:

> At each side of the main entrance, on the marble landing, are two small dogs carved in stone, which seem to be merely ornaments. To open the passage in the stonework, you take hold of the right-hand side dog's left ear and turn it from left to right until the explosion occurs.
>
> This ear is attached to a wire, which operates a flint lighter, placed so as to ignite the charge of powder in the stone tube. The passage will open, and you can enter. To get out, you merely have to apply a lighted torch to the powder.

Mr. Martin du Pont stopped once more, and looked up.

"After that," he said, "there are various protestations of friendship that don't interest either you or me. But what do you think of this amazing manuscript? I had neglected it a little until now, because it seemed so far fetched; the story you have just told me of the house located precisely where Lord Crespinoy's was reminded me of it."

"And I'm glad it did," said Henry, "for now there can be no doubt of the guilt of the man I'm after, and you have shown me how to get into the room he thinks is impenetrable. Once there, I hope I shall uncover his other secret, which is even more terrifying than the first: that of the 'object with a rectangular base.'"

"It isn't mentioned in my manuscript," said the scholar naïvely.

"That is not surprising," answered Henry, repressing a smile, "for it's a question of an infinitely more modern and extraordinary discovery than that of the use of stones on pivots of the 'blackish stuff called powder,' as Lord Crespinoy says.

"I can only thank you, sir, for your invaluable aid. Without your help I should not have known how to get into this bandit's cave nor how to get out, which might be more serious. I suppose you have no intention of making this astonishing document public at once?"

"You needn't worry about that," said Mr. du Pont. "I shan't read it before the Academy for another fortnight. In the meantime you can take any action you see fit."

When he came out of the scholar's study into twentieth century Paris, with its taxis and subways, Henri Henry wondered if he was not the victim of a dream. The revelations of this old document were jumbled in his brain with thoughts of motor buses and the most modern experiments of physics.

The linking of such a representative symbol of modern life as a bus with the naïve inventions of the fifteenth century literally dazed him. To clear his mind he discussed the matter with Brunnel, who found all of that quite natural, and prepared Henry for a good night's sleep by giving him a long lecture on the inventive genius of Oriental architects.

CHAPTER XXXI

AMID EXPLODING GUN POWDER

THE next morning, promptly at eleven o'clock, Henry and Brunnel kept their appointment with the negro doorman and rang the bell at Brancion's gate. This time Hector Mainfroy was with them.

The former commissioner had repeated to him, with many comments of his own, all that Henry had learned from Mr. Martin du Pont and so aroused the young man's curiosity that Hector, knowing his fiancée to be in safety and believing her protected from Brancion's diabolical machinations, had asked permission to join the expedition. The presence of a third person in this dangerous exploit was not to be scorned.

Henri Henry, moreover, had recognized Hector's level-headedness on the occasion when Brunnel had received a note from his former secretary, putting the two detectives on guard against the trap their enemy had set for them. Hence the journalist made no objection to accepting this volunteer reenforcement.

The three companions, it must be admitted, felt some uneasiness as to the outcome of their strange undertaking. The slightest incident might turn it into disaster. Suppose Brancion had stayed home instead of going out, as the negro expected? Or suppose the latter had been replaced by another servant? Or suppose—

There were so many " supposes " in this matter that Henry regretted now that he had not taken more precautions; that he had not asked his negro ally, for example, to let him know by some prearranged signal if the coast was clear. But it was too late now. They had gone too far to retreat. They must follow through to the end.

This uneasiness, however, did not last long. The negro who came to open the door was the same one who had offered himself to Henry, and the broad smile which revealed his white teeth showed that conditions were as favorable as he had promised, and as his new masters hoped.

As soon as the gate had closed behind them, Henry asked in a low tone:

" Brancion has gone out?"

The negro nodded his head.

" Good! Don't let any one come in, not even Brancion himself, until we have gone."

The slave made a sign that he had understood, and dropped an iron bar in place across the door, which was fastened by two padlocks. He then handed over the keys of the padlocks to the reporter.

" Perfect," said Henry. " Now how many men are there in the house?"

The slave raised six fingers.

" Six?"

" Yes."

" That must be right," said Brunnel. " There were ten in all. Two have probably gone out with Brancion: the chauffeur and the footman. A third was killed the other night, in falling off the roof. Our friend here is the fourth. That leaves six blacks in the house."

The slave had nodded his agreement as the former commissioner made the count.

" Well," said Mainfroy, " if there's a fight, we're pretty evenly matched."

But the dumb slave, with a malicious smile, pointed toward the house, then raised five fingers and made the gesture of turning a key in a lock.

At first Henry, Brunnel, and Mainfroy did not understand this pantomime, which the negro repeated patiently. Then the reporter exclaimed:

" You mean you have locked five of them up in the house?"

" Yes, yes," nodded the African.

"'Good for you!" said Brunnel enthusiastically. " My compliments!"

" And the sixth?" asked Henry.

The slave pointed toward the flight of marble steps.

" He is in the subterranean passage?"

" Yes."

" That's all right. We'll take care of him."

And Henry started toward the steps. The slave stopped him.

" What else?" asked the journalist.

A series of gestures constituted the answer. They indicated that the negro did not know how to operate the mechanism.

Henry smiled and asked:

" Is it always Brancion himself who makes the steps open?"

" Yes."

" But the night he came in with the bus?"

The negro pointed toward the steps, and lifted one finger.

" Ah! The man who is in there knows the secret?"

" Yes."

" And you have never seen how it works?"

" No." The negro shook his head, and closed his eyes tightly.

" You all have orders to shut your eyes when your master wants the passage opened?"

"Yes."

"And you always obey?"

In reply the slave pointed to Henry's revolver, and imitated an expression of fear.

"So disobedience is punished with death?"

"Yes."

"This Brancion," said the newspaper man to his companions, "seems to inspire his servants with an unholy fear. But we are losing time. We have talked too much; or at least, I have. Don't worry," he continued, addressing the slave again. "I am as strong as Brancion and I shall open the passage without even making you close your eyes."

He ran lightly up the seventeen steps.

On each side of the large door which gave entrance to the house two marble dogs crouched like guardians. In accordance with the instructions in the manuscript deciphered by Martin du Pont, Henry took hold of the left ear of the dog on the right hand side.

The journalist's heart was beating fast. At the moment when he was about to reach the goal of his efforts, he could not escape a sudden flare of emotion. What was going to happen? Would the mechanism work? Had there been no change in all these years?

Suddenly he tightened his grip on the marble ear and turned. He immediately experienced an intense joy. A muffled explosion sounded, like a shot fired in the distance, and the central part of the flight of steps swung slowly outward, opening the passage, large enough—as the manuscript said—"for a carriage and four." At the same time, a thick cloud of smoke filled the courtyard as far up as the second story.

Henry ran quickly down the steps of the movable part, which had carried him with it in its opening, and was the first to enter the passage. Brunnel and Mainfroy followed him.

The slave, trembling with terror, had remained in the courtyard. Behind the three men the stone door closed silently.

At the same moment, however, electric lights flashed on along the ceiling, lighting up a vast room, with a gently sloping floor, about ten yards wide and twenty long.

"The rascal has put in some modern improvements," said Mainfroy, "at least as far as the lighting is concerned."

"And also for opening the door," answered Brunnel, pointing to a long stone tube built solidly into the wall. Attached to it was an electric wire, which ended in a switch.

"He's replaced the old flint with an electric spark."

"Look out!" interrupted Henri Henry. "Drop!"

He had thrown himself flat on his stomach and his two companions followed his example. They were none too soon. A man had just appeared at the opposite end of the room, and six shots reverberated in rapid succession within the closed walls. The bullets whistled over the prostrate bodies.

"That's the guard," murmured Henry. "Hard luck for him. You take him, Brunnel. You're the marksman."

Brunnel sighted his man carefully and fired. The negro fell.

"Case of legitimate self-defense," said Mainfroy as they rose from the floor.

"Oh, I haven't killed him," the ex-commissioner assured, hurrying toward the man he had just brought down. After examining him, he added:

"He has a ball in the thigh and has fainted. The shock of our coming in must have contributed as much as the wound to the fainting. At any rate, he can't do us any harm."

"That's all we want," said Henry. "Now let's look for the 'object with a rectangular base!'"

Four luxuriously furnished rooms opened off the subterranean vestibule. Small windows, near the ceiling and heavily barred, let in a dim light. A white wall could be vaguely seen rising beyond the windows, so that any prisoners kept here would be completely isolated from the street. The doors of these rooms, hung on the inside with sumptuous tapestries, were equipped on the outside with enormous locks.

"The ideal prison," murmured Hector.

But among all the rare and precious works of art which furnished the four rooms, there was nothing corresponding to the " object with a rectangular base," which the reporter was seeking.

A long, careful search brought no result and Henry felt a cold rage spread through his veins.

" The scoundrel!" he exclaimed. " Did he get wind of what we were up to? It looks as if he were making fun of us by letting us get in here, after he had taken away this mysterious thing I'm looking for without even knowing what it is!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THREE MUSKETEERS AND A HELPER

AIDED by Brunnel and Mainfroy, he set to work turning over and examining the furniture. In vain. Then they sounded the walls with their canes, from one end of subterranean quarters to the other, hoping to find a fifth secret room. In vain.

At length Henri Henry, moved by a new idea, approached the wounded slave lying upon the floor, to whom he had paid no attention until now.

" Another African," grumbled Brunnel.

" And dumb," added Mainfroy, who guessed the journalist's intention, had opened the wounded man's mouth to pour a few drops of brandy down his throat, and had seen that his tongue, too, was cut down to a stump.

The negro gave a long sigh, opened his eyes, and looked about him in terror.

" If you refuse to answer, or if you lie," said Henry showing him his revolver, " I shall kill you."

The wrinkled black face contracted in fear.

" Is there another room besides these four?"

" No," the negro shook his head.

" Good. Did your master take something away from here this morning?"

" Yes."

" A box?"

" Yes."

" About as long as that and as wide as that?"

While speaking Henry spread his arms apart to indicate the approximate dimensions of the object he was hunting.

" Yes."

" That settles it," said the reporter bitterly. " We're out of luck."

" Why not simply denounce this Brancion to the police?" asked Brunnel, returning to an idea that was dear to him.

" No, I want to be the first to understand this sinister enigma, and I will be!" answered Henry vigorously. " But we must get out of here now—empty-handed, too, damn it!"

" Not entirely," interjected Mainfroy, with his usual calm.

" What do you mean?"

" I found this between two cushions on one of the divans."

He handed the reporter a dainty little notebook bound in Florentine leather, adding:

" You were hypnotized by the idea of looking exclusively for the ' object with a rectangular base,' and that kept you from noticing anything else. I merely acted as though I were making an ordinary search, and as a result found this notebook, which I think will have some interest for us since the first lines indicate that it is a diary kept by Cécile Muret during her captivity."

Henry took the notebook eagerly.

" I congratulate myself now," he said, " on having brought along as valuable a man as you are, Mr. Mainfroy."

And Brunnel, with a note of pride in his voice, exclaimed:

" He's the result of my training!"

Mainfroy did not point out the exaggeration in this, but contented himself with a smile.

After a moment's reflection, Henry continued:

" When we get home, we can read Cécile Muret's diary at our leisure. For the present our problem is to get away from here in safety."

The exit was made as easily as the entrance, thanks to the electric attachment which had been added to the fifteenth century mechanism. The journalist had merely to turn the switch; the explosion followed, then the movable part of the stone steps swung open.

When they came out once more into the fresh air and sunlight, the three men experienced an immediate feeling of security. Without admitting it to themselves, they had been subject, as long as they were locked in the subterranean prison, to an indefinible uneasiness.

The slave was awaiting them by the door.

" Nothing new?" Henry asked him.

" No."

" All right. We're leaving now."

The journalist handed the padlock keys to the negro. The latter opened the door, and then stretched out both hands in supplication to Henry.

" You want us to take you with us?"

" Yes."

" Good! Come along."

CHAPTER XXXIII

AN ASTOUNDING ATTACK

FLANKED by Brunnel, Mainfroy, and the faithful negro, Henri Henry left the courtyard of Brancion's house and covered the short distance to the building where the supposed Antoine Lisbourdun had rented his studio. As they approached, they noticed a young woman at the door, who came toward them.

When she was still a little way from them, Hector Mainfroy realized with astonishment that it was Germaine Praline.

She was as pale as a corpse, and her large eyes shone in her white face with a feverish gleam. She was advancing toward them with the stiff movements of an automaton or a somnambulist, and like a somnambulist, too, she seemed to look about her without seeing.

The four men stopped, speechless, as if fascinated with horror at this strange apparition.

Hector was the first to recover himself, and stepped forward to the young girl, who had also stopped and was watching him with that expressionless stare which made him shudder.

" What are you doing here, Germaine?" he asked gently.

Germaine did not answer. She did not even seem to have heard the question her fiancé had asked. She was obviously struggling against some internal force. Her mouth contracted, her nose grew taut. At length in a voice which was devoid of any life, a voice which seemed to come from beyond the tomb, she said:

" Which of you is named Henri Henry?"

On hearing his name spoken, the journalist stepped forward.

The scene which followed was unfolded with the swiftness of a flash of lightning against a black sky.

Drawing a tiny revolver from her sleeve, Germaine fired three times at the reporter. Then collapsing suddenly in a nervous crisis, she dropped her weapon and fell on the sidewalk, which was reddened by the blood of her victim.

But the victim was not Henri Henry. Some one had thrown himself between the journalist and Germaine at the very moment she was aiming her revolver; it was the poor negro, who now lay at their feet, his black skin pierced by the three bullets.

He had been faithful unto death to the master to whom he had voluntarily given himself.

The police, attracted by the noise, quickly carried the wounded man and the sick girl into a near-by drug store. There, while the two patients received the necessary attention, Henry described the event in terms which considerably distorted the truth.

The negro, according to his story, had himself fired the three shots, and the girl had fainted in terror at witnessing the suicide.

As Brunnel and Mainfroy confirmed Henry's words and as there had been no other witnesses to the attack, the police, who recognized their former superiors, did not for a second doubt the truth of this account.

The negro was too seriously wounded to be questioned himself. The doctor who examined him announced that he must be taken at once to the hospital, where Henry resolved to visit him.

In the depths of his heart the journalist was ashamed of the lies he had told about the loyal black. But the police must not be allowed to take charge of Germaine Praline. In the interests of the investigation he was carrying out, the young girl must remain at Henry's disposition. She had certainly been nothing but an instrument in this matter, in Brancion's hands, a marionette of which Brancion held the strings.

The reporter must know by what devilish means the scoundrel exercised this almost supernatural power. Germaine alone could tell him.

The formalities were completed in quick order, thanks to the good relations Brunnel had maintained with his successor, the commissioner in the Military School District. The latter even promised to see that the press did not get hold of this " painful incident."

Germaine, who had returned to her senses, allowed herself to be led to the studio without seeming to understand where she was going. As the janitress watched her with a malevolent eye, Henry explained her presence, with a little embarrassment, by saying: " She's the model for a new picture."

This seemed plausible to his stern guardian, and she did not press the matter. Fortunately this Cerberus in petticoats had been busy upstairs when the tragic scene had taken place in the street, and had heard nothing.

As soon as the young girl, still somewhat under the influence of the nervous disturbance which had overcome her, was settled as comfortably as possible on the couch, Hector Mainfroy said to her with emotion:

" What has happened to you, Germaine?"

" I don't remember."

" What! You mean to say that after seriously — perhaps mortally — wounding that poor slave who threw himself between you and the man you tried kill, and you pretend not to remember anything about it?"

Germaine looked at him silently with troubled eyes.

" Germaine, darling, please say something in your own defense! At least tell me that this man who exerts a fatal influence over you, drove you to this crime! Tell me that you are sorry. Speak to me."

The girl seemed to be still in a trance.

" I can't stand this silence," groaned the young lover. " Germaine, please! If you still have the slightest bit of affection for your fiancé, if you care at all what I think of you, tell me this: Why did you want to kill Henry?"

" I don't know."

Mainfroy pressed his hands to his temples in despair. His mind was swirling dizzily. With a great effort, however, he steadied himself. Never before had he allowed himself to betray publicly such strong signs of emotion.

Forcing his features to resume their impassive air once more, he reacted against his anger and his grief. He controlled his gestures, lowered his voice, and spoke calmly. Turning toward the two others, he said with apparent self-possession:

" I'm afraid she won't be any use to us, at least so far as the information we want is concerned. Her inexplicable attack only complicates the matter more than ever, and Heaven knows it was complicated enough before."

" Nevertheless I should like to know," interrupted Henry, " why she wanted to kill me."

Addressing himself to Germaine, he began to question her gently.

" You have no motive for hatred against me, have you, Miss Praline?" he asked.

" Oh, no! Of course, not!"

" Good. It was then out of obedience to some one else, who has power over you, that you tried to kill me?"

" I don't know."

" Very well. Are you allowed to tell me how you have spent the morning?"

" Certainly. I—I—oh, it's terrible! I don't remember anything!"

And she burst into sobs.

" Can't you see, gentlemen," interrupted Brunnel, " that this poor girl had no responsibility in what she did? She acted undoubtedly in a state of absolute unconsciousness, and at the suggestion of some one who exercises an unlimited domination over her mind.

" This is not the first time that dabblers in the occult sciences have made use of their knowledge to accomplish crimes. You don't have to go back to the magicians of the Middle Ages, for examples; if you remember—"

Brunnel was off now on a stream of eloquence where it was hard to stop him. This was a favorite hobby of his, and he was ready to explain all the crimes that had hitherto defied explanation, by hypnotism.

He was convinced that this was one more example. Brancion, from his point of view, had the power to put Germaine under the influence of a hypnotic sleep and make her carry out, while in that condition, the most outrageous commands.

It must be said for Brunnel that he had never made a more successful speech in his life. No one interrupted him—which was in itself a triumph—and his audience listened with acute interest.

Germaine, whose magnificent eyes were fixed upon his face, did not miss a syllable of what he said; her expression revealed an effort to understand which was so intense that it gave her a deeply pathetic air.

Hector nodded his head in agreement as his former chief developed his ideas. The theory put forth by Brunnel and the arguments which supported it brought a great sense of relief to the young man. The sadness which had darkened his face gradually lifted. The conviction that Germaine, in spite of all appearances, was really innocent took root in his mind and filled him with joy.

Henri Henry himself at intervals gave signs of approving Brunnel's words. When the latter had finished his speech—everything has to end!—he turned toward Germaine and asked:

" Is that right?"

Hector's fiancée made a gesture of exhaustion. Her face took on again its dulled and indifferent expression, and she replied:

" How do I know?"

But Mainfroy exclaimed:

" Yes! That's certainly what happened. It couldn't be more obvious or more logical!"

" I don't entirely agree with you," said Henry slowly, and as courteously as possible.

In spite of his friendly tone, the remark irritated Brunnel, who answered sharply:

" If you have a more reasonable hypothesis, let's hear it!"

" Your theory is very ingenious and tempting," said the reporter. " Now, why doesn't it satisfy me completely?

" I had already thought of it several times, even before this unfortunate girl attacked me. But it doesn't seem enough to me to explain the strange attitude in which *all of the passengers* of Bus 519 have persisted.

" I admit that experiences of a psychic nature, known as occult phenomena, are not well understood. Nevertheless it seems hardly believable to me that one man should exercise over seven people of different social situations and different mentalities the same, invariable influence, merely by his own strength.

" Besides—you'll probably say that this is a mania with me—isn't it worth pointing out that Brancion's mysterious power dates from the day when the rascal got possession of that ' object with a rectangular base '? Everything leads me to think that there is some close relation between that power, and the possession of that object.

" It's perfectly true that the results may be similar to those obtained by simple hypnotism. But I am convinced that these results are obtained by different means than those employed in the past, and that the ' object with a rectangular base,' which was stolen from the Villa Cécile, is one of them."

Brunnel had already opened his mouth to deliver his reply when Mainfroy cut in with a different suggestion:

" Suppose, instead of arguing in the air, we read Cécile Muret's diary. We may find something definite there to base an argument on."

" You are right," agreed Henry, " but first I am going to take a necessary precaution.

" I hope you will allow us," he continued, turning to Germaine, " to protect you against yourself by keeping you here for awhile. This studio has a small room opening off it, which we will fix up as comfortably as possible with this couch and a few cushions. For the time being that will be your home, and we shall be your very respectful guardians.

"I trust that your captivity here will not last long, but I am sure you will understand the feeling which leads us to keep you."

Hector made a gesture as if to oppose this decision, but Germaine stopped him with a glance and said, in a tired voice:

"Do whatever you wish with me."

She was quickly settled in the small room, and Henry asked if she would like any books to read. She shook her head, however.

"All I want," she said, "is to rest. If I can only sleep. But please tell my sister, because if I stay away long, she will worry."

When the three friends were once more alone in the studio, Henry apologized to Mainfroy.

"It is not only in our interest, but also—and especially—in her own that I am doing this," he explained. "At any cost she must be rescued, even by force, from this hideous domination.

"But that is not all. We must fool our enemy now into thinking that the attack succeeded. It's the only way of getting him to stop hunting me down—for I am always the one at whom he aims. It is also the only way of giving him a false security, which may perhaps make him careless. And if he is once careless, we will be ready to take advantage of it."

He scribbled a few lines, and then read them aloud:

He scribbled a few lines, and then read them aloud:

> "*A mysterious attack.* Our colleague, Henri Henry, has just fallen victim to a mysterious attack. He was fired upon three times, in the public streets to-day at noon, by a woman whose identity is unknown and who escaped arrest. He is at present being cared for at his home, where it is believed, unfortunately, that there is little hope for his life.

"That will start some rumors," he added smiling. "I shall ask you, Mainfroy, to take written instructions to my house, so that the servants will know what to do in case of visits. Everybody must be deceived in this matter. And I trust to you, Brumel, to arrange it at the prefecture of police, where I suppose you still have friends, so that they will pretend to believe the news.

"At the same time, will you send off a telegram in code for me? I'll write it out now, to my wife, and put her mind at rest. When you come back, we'll all read Cécile Muret's diary together."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DIARY OF CÉCILE MURET

JANUARY 14, 19—. What's the use of my writing in this diary? Probably no one will ever read it. But I must prove to myself that I am still sane, and fight against this bewilderment which settles down over me at times. For three days and three nights I have been alone in this luxurious room, which is really a prison.

Alone! I never knew before what the word meant. The only human face I have seen is that of the horrible negro, with his tongue cut out, who is my jailer. No one has spoken a word to me. My sleep is broken with terrible nightmares.

But the worst torment is that I have no idea of the fate of those I love. Are they dead, or are they prisoners like myself? I may never know. Even if they are alive and free, they must be suffering anguish over my disappearance.

Who is taking care of papa? Who ties his tie for him in the morning and knows what he likes for his meals? The absence of his Cécile will be hard on him!

And poor André, who came to Paris in triumph, to receive "the reward for all his work," as he wrote papa! The very first evening he lost the promised reward. Almost the eve of our marriage, and we were separated.

The more I study what has happened, the more Robert Brancion's name sticks in my mind as that of the only person who could have kidnaped me in this brutal way. Only he, with his infernal genius and his unbelievable recklessness, could have planned and carried out such a scheme. As for his purpose? I know it only too well.

But if, by any chance, some one should read these lines, I must try to explain why I suspect this man. The story of my life will throw some light on the matter.

I was born at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea in a house which belonged to my parents, and which they named in my honor: *Villa Cécile.*

My father was at that time professor of physics at the University of Caen. Although he was still comparatively a young man, he was considered a remarkable physicist. The studies he had published had made him almost famous in the scientific world.

My birth meant little to him, and he didn't begin to be interested in me until I was old enough to ask endless questions about the strange instruments in his laboratory.

It was about that time that he became obsessed with his one idea; all his work was directed toward a single aim, and he struggled to realize a dream which had been haunting him for years.

Allowed to grow up almost without any supervision, with an invalid mother and an absent-minded father, my whims were the only laws I knew. My father was the only teacher I had. Sometimes he neglected my education, and at other times during spells of paternal care, he stuffed my young mind with science.

The result was that at thirteen I had never heard of Corneille, Shakespeare, or Julius Cæsar; but on the other hand Mariotte's law and Archimedes' principle were old stories to me.

Since then I have read a great deal, but I have always been more interested in science than in literature.

I was fourteen when my mother died, in the same Villa Cécile where I had been born. Papa, who adored her, without fully realizing while she was alive how deep his love was, became nearly mad for a time with grief. He began to detest Saint Julien and Caen, asked to be retired, and brought me to Paris, where it was our misfortune to meet Robert Brancion again.

The latter had been one of papa's best pupils at the University of Caen. He had a prodigious aptitude for the physical sciences, and assimiliated the most complicated theories without effort. His facility, his memory, his intelligence and his passion for science aroused a great enthusiasm in papa, who said that "if it hadn't been for André Gilbert, Robert Brancion would be the most brilliant pupil he had ever had."

André was the beloved disciple to whom papa confided all his secrets, even his mistakes and discouragements. André's serious, handsome face frightened me a little when I was a child, and I used to wonder what he could possibly be doing when he would be shut up for hours in the laboratory.

Having devoured innumerable novels in secret, my imagination, in spite of my precocious scientific training, was thoroughly romantic. And I supposed that papa and André, like the alchemists in the past, were trying to make gold. But their ambition was much greater than that of the alchemists! And their discovery was more extraordinary and more marvelous than that of the transformation of metals would have been!

But I must come back to Brancion.

When we landed in Paris, papa and I felt lost in the roar and tumult of the city, and looking for an apartment seemed almost an impossible task. For several days we wandered around in different parts of town on the left bank, where papa enjoyed the comparative quiet.

Finally we settled on a place in the Avenue de Suffren, and as we were coming out, after having signed the lease, a man with a thick beard bumped into us, apologized, and then looked at us in astonishment.

"Professor!"

"Robert!"

It was Brancion who had stumbled on us. By chance—which he said was providential—it happened that he was living in the same neighborhood, in an old house dating from the fifteenth century, and which I have heard is an architectural marvel.

His former pupil quickly won papa over completely; though this wasn't hard, as he had already been well disposed toward him. In a little while Brancion was a daily visitor at the apartment. As he was very rich, he tried to gain at least a sort of benevolent neutrality out of me by overwhelming me with presents.

Papa, who couldn't conceive of any bad intentions in any one he liked, couldn't get along without him. But I felt an instinctive and unreasoned distrust toward him which the future justified.

I shall never forget the terrible evening when his baseness was revealed, in a scene which was horrible for me. André had come to Paris to spend a few days. He brought with him a model on a reduced scale of the wonderful apparatus papa had conceived and he had worked out.

They were shut up together in the study until dinner-time. When they came out, they seemed very pleased. André's handsome face was lighted up with a smile, and when his eyes met mine, I discovered an intense expression of tenderness in them. At that time I was only sixteen, but I was tall and quite matured. My mirror told me that I was not homely, and that I could hope to be loved.

Was it possible that this dazzling young man, whom I had always thought of purely as a scientist, could be in love with me? When I asked myself that question, a feeling of happiness stirred in my heart; and my eyes, instead of avoiding André's, turned toward him to find again that light which had moved me so deeply.

After dinner I said that I should like to hear some music. It seemed to me that only music would be appropriate to the mood I felt rising in me. Papa, of course, always yielded to my whims, so he agreed and we all three went to a concert hall on the left bank where the best music is played by a marvelous orchestra.

But we were so unsophisticated in Paris that we didn't know the hall was closed for the season. We joked about our ignorance, and started back home on foot.

From the sidewalk in front of the house we noticed that the windows in the study were lighted. "You forgot to put out the light again," I said to papa teasingly. Our surprise turned into fear, however, when we came upstairs and found the door to the apartment standing open. It was fortunate for us that André was with us. He bounded toward the study door and entered, a revolver in his hand.

"So it's you, you sneak thief!" he cried.

Papa and I were both fixed with horror at what we saw.

Robert Brancion, motionless before the threat of the revolver, stood with trembling hands and anxious eyes, beside the bookcase, which had been broken open. There were slivers of glass on the floor.

On the table the small model, which he had stolen from the bookcase, had been taken apart, and each piece carefully wrapped in tissue paper. There could be no doubt that the scoundrel was getting ready to carry them off with him.

Papa trembled with indignation and grief.

André began to speak slowly in a dry, clipped tone.

"I could take my choice," he said, "between turning you over to the police and putting a bullet in your head. But I haven't forgotten that we used to be friends. So here are your orders."

Brancion made a gesture of rebellion. But André went on:

"*Here are your orders!* You are rich; there is no necessity for you to stay in France, and you are going to leave the country at once. I forbid you ever to come back, and to forestall any notion you might have of returning, you are going to write and sign what I dictate. Sit down at that table, take a sheet of paper and a pen."

Brancion obeyed. The shining barrel of the revolver, aimed steadily at his breast, checked any desire for resistance. After thinking a few moments, André dictated:

> "I hereby confess that on this date I effected an illegal entrance into the apartment of Professor Muret, at 76 Avenue de Suffren; that I broke open his bookcase and the drawers of his desk; that the purpose of my action was to commit theft.

"Now the date and your signature."

"I refuse to sign that," said Brancion in a low, hoarse voice.

"Very well then," said André. "You can choose between the police and the revolver."

Brancion growled like a wild beast caught in a trap. Then he dated and signed the paper.

"Am I free now?" he asked.

"You are free. But if, day after to-morrow, you have not started for abroad, or if you ever come back, this paper will at once be put in the hands of the police."

His head down, Brancion walked heavily out of the room, trembling with rage.

When he had left, André asked:

"Did I do right, sir."

"You acted well, my boy," papa answered.

Then turning toward me, he said.

"Let's forget this scoundrel who betrayed my confidence, and talk of something else. André has asked me for your hand this evening, and—"

Dear papa didn't like to beat about the bush. André, who had turned crimson, tried to signal to him to drop the matter for the time, but he went calmly on.

"—and I said 'Yes,' provided of course that you are willing. What is your answer?"

I gave André a teasing glance.

"A young girl," I murmured, "must obey her father."

"That means she agrees!" exclaimed papa. "And I'm very happy for you both, my children. As soon as André finishes the work he is starting now, you shall be married. You are still too young at present, Cécile, and André must devote all his time and money to the task he has undertaken."

He took both our hands and concluded:

"It will not be more than four or five years."

At this I felt suddenly disappointed. I had already been picturing myself as André's wife, and here I was being told to wait four or five years!

But I see now that under all his eccentricity papa was more wise than I realized. I was much too young then to appreciate André's loyalty and fineness and distinction. It is only now that I love him as he deserves to be loved, and as he loves me.

I learned later that the four or five years were essential for André to carry out papa's great invention, which Brancion had wanted to steal.

For a long time after that, we had no news of Brancion. A sign: *House For Sale,* was hung out over his door, and that reassured us that he had really gone.

Only a few months ago I read in the papers that "the explorer, Robert Brancion, was about to return to France." There was a long article full of praise of "the famous explorer," who had been on long expeditions in India, Tibet, and Central Africa. Not wanting to worry papa, I didn't say anything to him about it.

But one evening I thought I recognized Robert, in the shadow of his gate, watching me go by with gleaming eyes that terrified me. I told papa at once, and then wrote to André. It seemed to me that if André could be with me, I'd have nothing to fear.

His work, moreover, was finished. Papa's marvelous discovery had been applied in the apparatus his favorite pupil had constructed. Their experiments had been more than satisfactory.

In his first answer, André tried to calm my fears. But when I wrote again, he replied by announcing the result of his researches and said that he was coming to Paris at once.

It was then that this strange drama took place, in which I am the victim or one of the victims, and which I cannot help believing is the work of Robert Brancion.

In the brief case he carried André had his most important papers relating to papa's discovery and its application. They were calculations, formulas, designs, *et cetera.* After our first greetings, at the Hall des Pas Perdus, we decided to take the bus that goes by our house.

While we were standing there chatting, I felt a shudder suddenly go over me. It seemed to me that in the crowd of faces about us, I had suddenly met Brancion's eyes. "Nothing but my imagination," I thought.

Nevertheless, in the bus I looked anxiously at the faces of all the passengers. Robert was certainly not one of them, and that gave me a sense of relief.

We had passed the Military School and were preparing to get off at the next stop, when I happened to look up mechanically at the window which separated us from the driver's seat. The driver had turned around, and with his face close to the glass, was looking down at us.

He turned his head away quickly, but I had had time to recognize that metallic glance; they were Robert's eyes.

This time I was seriously alarmed and gripped André's arm to tell him what I had seen. But I had hardly opened my mouth when the bus swerved terribly, and made a sharp turn which nearly crushed us against the wall. Everything went dark, and I lost consciousness.

When I came to, I was in this room, where materially I lack nothing, but spiritually I lack everything.

January 15, 19— To-day I have had a piece of great good fortune. I am no longer alone; I have a companion. She is charming. Eighteen years old; named Germaine Praline. I am fond of her.

She tells me that she was in the same bus we were in Tuesday evening. I remember noticing her large eyes, her complexion, and her simple, stylish good taste. It appears that she was with her older sister. She underwent the same sensations I did: shock, fainting, and reawakening in a room not so luxurious as this one but very comfortable.

Of course she doesn't understand what has happened to her at all, but she resigns herself more easily than I do. The thing that worries her is to be separated from her sister.

As for me, the sound of a human voice and especially her lovely, sympathetic voice, is sweeter than music. I make Germaine talk as much as I can, just for the pleasure of listening to her.

This morning the negro, who is her jailer, too, came into her room and signaled to her to follow him. She hoped that she was going to see her sister and was disappointed to find a stranger; but the delight at escaping from solitude was greater than her disappointment. We get along very well together.

January 16, 19— Germaine works at present in a millinery shop, but she received an excellent education. Her parents died, and she had to go to work.

She is loved by a young man, whom she loves in return and who belongs to the police. She is ardently in hope that her lover will rescue her, and me at the same time. " If you only knew how intelligent he is," she says, " and how distinguished looking." I only hope his intelligence will put him on the right track in looking for us!

January 17, 19— It is too horrible for me to think about! The hideous offer that man has made me! My head is dizzy, and I can hardly collect my thoughts.

It is Robert Brancion who kidnaped me, and papa and André, too. He came to my prison this morning and boasted of his exploit.

He tries to justify it by saying that he was also working along the lines of papa's discovery at one time, and that papa merely applied the ideas Brancion developed. Consequently he claims that he is merely taking back his own property when he steals what it has cost papa and André years of labor to create. For the apparatus is actually in his possession now.

That is the most terrible part of it. And he offers to set us all at liberty if I will consent *to undergo the radiations of the apparatus and thus forfeit my own freedom of will.* What a mocking and incomplete liberty that would be!

Of course I would see my dear ones again, and the light of day. If it only increased the size of my prison, it might at least be better than my present fate.

Germaine will consent to anything to be set free. And Brancion tells me that papa, André, and the other passengers in the bus have already accepted the offer.

I am the only one who is still holding out. The freedom of all the rest depends on me. What shall I do?

Cécile's manuscript was interrupted at these words, and remained unfinished. No doubt she had eventually accepted this mysterious offer which gave her a " mocking and incomplete liberty," and had submitted to the radiations of the apparatus.

When he had finished reading, Henri Henry reflected deeply for a long time. Cécile's diary seemed to confirm his suppositions as to the rôle played by the " object with a rectangular base," which was obviously the same as the strange " apparatus " the young girl mentioned so frequently.

At length he said to his friends:

" This Brancion is an egotist and a man of pride above everything else. If he believed that he was rid of us, he would not hesitate to announce Muret's marvelous invention to the world as his own, and take the glory for it. We must make him think that he is rid of us; I shall see to that myself."

The next day the *Gazette de Paris* announced that its " brilliant colleague, Henri Henry," had been forced to undergo an operation of laparotomy, and had died three hours later.

CHAPTER XXXV

P-RAYS

As soon as the *Gazette de Paris* had announced the death of Henri Henry, articles began to appear at once in all the Paris papers, detailing his career and expressing the regret of the profession which had lost him.

The reporter's most brilliant scoops were recalled and Henri himself, reading the articles in the seclusion of Antoine Lisbourdun's studio, learned of several remarkable exploits in his life of which he had never heard before. His mysterious and tragic end was eloquently regretted, and respectful condolences were offered the young widow.

The latter, reassured by the telegrams in code which Henry sent her every night, read the articles about the living dead man with eager curiosity, and enjoyed the " good press " he was getting.

As one prominent journalist remarked, however, " the first fact about a daily paper is that it must come out every day." And in order to appear every day, the subjects of information must be infinitely varied. It was inevitable that Henri Henry's death should be quickly forgotten and replaced by the first novelty that offered any prospect of interest.

This, in fact, was what happened when the Academy of Science received the famous report on the newly discovered P-rays, a report which was destined to overthrow most of the ideas previously held as to " occult " phenomena.

An article in the *Gazette de Paris* explained the matter as follows:

> It is commonly recognized to-day that all physical phenomena—light, heat, electricity, *et cetera*—are in reality the result of movement and are produced by vibrations traveling like waves through ether, the invisible substance which permeates everything else. If we consider the visible rays of light, we observe that the frequency of the vibrations varies in inverse ratio to the wave-length; that is to say, for example, that red, whose wave-length is the longest of the seven colors of the spectrum, vibrates less rapidly than violet, whose wave-length is the shortest.
>
> This law may also be extended to other radiations, which affect our senses in different ways. Thus, the electric waves which are made use of in wireless telegraphy and are very long, vibrate relatively slowly.
>
> Now, between the rays of light, whose wave lengths are calculated in terms of thousandths of a millimeter, and electrical rays, whose wave length varies from four millimeters to infinity, there is an enormous field which science has barely touched in its studies of the infra-red rays.
>
> What are these various rays whose wave-lengths are longer than those of infra-red and shorter than those of electricity?
>
> This was the problem set by the distinguished physicist, Mr. Robert Brancion, who is also, as every one knows, a world traveler, and who has studied the occult sciences of the East as well as the theories of our Western laboratories. After many years he found the solution of the problem, and it is this solution which he explained yesterday before the Academy of Science.
>
> The linking of these words, " Academy of Science," " distinguished physicist," and " infra-red rays," with the words " occult sciences " may seem strange to many readers. It will be understood, however, when it is explained that the rays discovered and studied by Mr. Brancion, whose wave-lengths lie between those of infra-red and those of electricity, though named by Mr. Brancion *P-rays*, are as a matter of fact, *psychic rays*.
>
> The tremendous implications of this new concept will be clear to every one. Mr. Brancion, by placing the field of psychic phenomena alongside those of light and electricity as subjects of scientific experiment, has demonstrated that cases of telepathy, thought transmission, suggestion, *et cetera*, which have been hitherto inexplicable, occur between persons whose psychic rays are strictly identical; that is to say, where the wave-lengths are exactly the same—which, he adds, is extremely rare.
>
> This is the scientific explanation of phenomena known under the name of " occult," whose apparent supernatural nature has troubled so many minds in the past.
>
> The Academy of Science received Mr. Brancion's account of his studies at first with a certain skepticism. The clearness and accuracy of this demonstrations, however, eventually overcame this attitude, which was re-

placed by one of sincere and ardent enthusiasm.

The writer of the article added that he had been informed on good authority that the minister of public instruction had proposed Robert Brancion's name for the Legion of Honor.

This was followed by an interview with the great man himself, and Brancion's words were of such a sensational nature that the interview appeared in heavy type.

"Have you searched for a practical application of your discovery?" the reporter had asked.

"Yes, I have invented an apparatus, capable in the first place, of measuring the wave-lengths of the P-rays given out by any person willing to take part in the experiment and, secondly, of modifying the characteristic wave-length of that person to any length desired. Thus the latter may, if he wishes, make his own P-ray identical with those of any other individual.

"The two persons who have performed this experiment then enter into permanent mental communication. They are in what I have called 'psychic resonance'; and just as a musical instrument, which can give forth a certain sound, vibrates when that sound is produced by a different instrument at a little distance from it, so the second person will vibrate in unison when the first gives forth a P-ray; that is to say, when he thinks.

"We have therefore abolished all separation, and attained union in spite of distance, through voluntary and continuous telepathy."

"Can the possessor of your apparatus put himself in this way in resonance with several individuals at the same time?"

"Certainly. And he can transmit at will certain thoughts to one, and different thoughts to others."

"What is your apparatus constructed of, and how is it made?"

"You will see that for yourself if you come to the public lecture I am going to give next Tuesday in the main hall at the Sorbonne. There will be questions and answers, and I shall be ready to meet any objections which may be brought forward against my conclusions. The apparatus will be there, and I shall make practical demonstrations."

In the studio under the roof the three allies, Henry, Brunnel, and Mainfroy, had read Brancion's interview with intense emotion. In the light of what they had learned from Cécile Muret's diary, the truth was now unmistakable.

"I thought the news of my death would bring the rascal out of his cautious silence," said Henry reflectively.

"His pride will be his ruin," declared Brunnel, and would gladly have expressed a few prime truths on the danger of pride if his companions had permitted.

But Henry continued reflecting out loud:

"What is our next step? We know that the apparatus was invented by Muret, perfected by André Gilbert, and stolen by this scoundrel; shall we denounce him as a thief? We also know that he caused the deaths of the old woman at Saint-Julien-by-the-Sea and the unlucky bus-driver; shall we denounce him as a murderer? Or shall we unmask him in public, since he has the impudence to invite the public to his own triumph?"

"Let's wait until Tuesday," suggested Hector. "We can be among the crowd at his lecture and see if there is a chance to take a hand in the performance."

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE "OBJECT WITH A RECTANGULAR BASE"

A VAST crowd was already filing into the main hall at the Sorbonne, the day Brancion was to give his lecture, an hour before the time which had been announced.

The first rows of seats had been reserved for members of the Academy of Science, prominent statesmen, and well known figures of the intellectual and social world. The Minister of Public Instruction, who had promised to come, had sent his excuses at the last moment, saying that he had been taken suddenly ill.

It was whispered, in well-informed quarters, that the minister had received a visit that morning from a mysterious person, and that it was after his conversation with this person that the statesman had decided he was not well.

In spite of his absence, the audience was unusually brilliant. A large number of police supervised the preparations, and tried to prevent the inevitable pushing which takes place when a hundred people wish to get through a door barely large enough for four at the same time. In fact, the police were so numerous that one would have thought orders had been given to guard all the exits.

"You'd think they were trying to arrest a criminal instead of holding a scientific lecture," said one little man with large spectacles and an umbrella, who found himself uncomfortable under the gaze of so many policemen.

Henri Henry, who was concealed among the crowd at the right hand side of the hall, not far from the platform, and rendered unrecognizable by a false beard, overheard this comment. He could not repress a faintly malicious smile and, turning to Brunnel and Mainfroy, exchanged glances of understanding with them.

Brunnel had had a long conference that same morning with the prefect of police, and Mainfroy was none other than the unknown caller who had seemed to influence the Minister of Public Instruction's health. Neither of them was surprised, therefore, by the unusual presence of police or the absence of the official.

Not far away from the three men and also near the platform, seven people were sitting together, the passengers and conductor of Bus 519. Professor Muret and his daughter sat side by side, with André Gilbert directly behind them. On his left was Charron, the printer, and on his right the conductor, Chalgrin. The two Praline sisters sat with the scientist and his daughter; Germaine's hand rested in Cécile's.

How did it happen that these seven persons, of such different occupations and education, found themselves once more united? This question might perhaps have been answered by Henri Henry, who was keeping a close watch over them.

Suddenly the fluttering of papers and the murmur of conversation in the hall ceased. Two negroes, dressed in livery, had appeared upon the platform, carrying a good-sized box shaped like a small coffin, which appeared to be heavy.

They placed it carefully on the table in the center of the platform, drew out the screws at the corners, and lifted off the lid and sides. Henri Henry murmured in Brunnel's ear: "The object with a rectangular base."

The seven escaped victims of Bus 519 had trembled when the box was opened. A realization ran through the whole audience that this was Brancion's famous "apparatus." It consisted of a glass case, from which a dozen glass tubes projected. Strange, greenish lights flickered in the tubes and around them. In the walls of the case were several openings large enough for a man to pass his head through them.

A wave of applause swept across the room. Brancion had entered. He was in full dress, and his black beard stood out sharply against the white bosom of his shirt. He glanced over the rows of heads, and his dominating personality at once took command of the audience. In a strong, ringing voice he began his lecture.

But suddenly his voice faltered; he seemed troubled. He had met Muret's gaze, and the old professor's eyes expressed such a deep contempt that in spite of his unparalleled effrontery, Robert Brancion was embarrassed.

The presence of those seven persons, whom he had not invited, surprised and alarmed him. He made an instinctive gesture of his hand toward them as if to brush them away. Henry rose halfway from his seat, ready to intervene.

Brancion, however, seemed to have mastered his uneasiness. What did he have to fear from those whose freedom of will he had annihilated? He shrugged his shoulders, smiled scornfully, and continued the explanation of his theory. His embarrassment had been so brief that the public had not been aware of it; Henri Henry settled back in his seat.

The lecturer explained the principles on which he had worked, in a clear, understandable form. The main line of his search and the results obtained had already been suggested in the interview he had given to the *Gazette de Paris*. He now traced the steps by which he had arrived at his astounding discovery, and even brought up himself the objections that might be made to his reasoning.

The exposition was so logical and precise, and his arguments so firmly dove-tailed that he was given an ovation at the close of the theoretical part of the program. There was a burst of applause, accompanied by a pounding of canes on the floor, and several people stood up in their enthusiasm.

Brancion rested a few minutes before passing to the second part of the program, which was to consist of practical experiments. Henri Henry slipped off the false beard which disguised him, and appeared to be waiting for the proper moment to go into action.

When the acclamations had at length died down, Brancion began the description of his apparatus:

" This glass cage," he said, " contains in its base several particles of a substance hitherto unknown, which appears to be an element in itself—that is to say, it cannot be broken down by chemical means—and which I brought back with me from Africa. This metal, for it has all the properties of a metal and several others besides, is radioactive. I have named it—as I believe was my privilege—' brancium.' "

A low murmur of anger interrupted the distinguished scientist's words at this moment. Professor Muret had risen, and seemed ready to leap upon the platform. His face flushed and his eyes protruding, he opened his mouth, but could not utter any sound except this rumbling of wrath, which drew the curious attention of the crowd.

" The man's crazy," said a voice.

" He's having a fit."

" Take him out!"

Brancion, however, gazed fixedly at Muret, and made a slight gesture. The old man dropped back into his seat, as if under a control stronger than his own.

When the disturbance caused by this incident had calmed down, the lecturer took up the thread of his speech at the point where it had been broken:

" This ' brancium,' as I said, is radioactive, and the rays which it gives out are the *P-rays*, whose wave-length may be modified, within certain limits, by means of the apparatus which I have constructed. These are the *P-rays* which we substitute for those emitted by a subject who wishes to transmit his thought to another subject.

" The latter enters into psychic resonance as soon as the ' brancium ' is released; that is to say, as soon as I have removed the special covering of vegetable tissue, the only substance which is opaque to the brancic rays.

" The twelve glass tubes which you see correspond to twelve radiations of slightly different wave-lengths, which allow me, if I wish, to enter into psychic resonance with twelve different individuals.

" Is there any one present in the audience who would care to come up on the platform and place his head, for a few seconds, in one of the openings, so that one of the tubes may be put in psychic resonance with him?"

It was at this moment that the dramatic event which was later to be the subject of so much discussion, took place.

Before any other member of the audience had had time to answer Brancion's invitation, Henri Henry had leaped on the platform, and announced:

" I will!"

At the sight of the enemy he believed dead, Brancion's swarthy face turned pale. Instinctively he glanced about him, as if looking for a means of flight. Then making an effort of will, he controlled his features, and addressing the public, continued:

" Since this gentleman is willing, I shall now perform the experiment I have described to you." Turning to Henry, he added: " Will you be so kind as to place your head in one of these openings?"

The audience, which was breathless with impatience, waited for " the gentleman who was willing " to stick his head through the hole in the glass. The latter, however, did not seem to be in a hurry.

" I am waiting, sir," said Brancion.

But Henri Henry, standing erect, his hands in his pockets, and his cane under his arm, declared in a truculent voice, loud enough to be heard throughout the entire auditorium:

" One moment, please. It was announced that the lecture would be open to the public, and that there would be questions and answers. Now before offering my head for your experiments, I would like to ask one or two questions."

A booing broke out in the audience and drowned his words. There was a chorus of whistling and insults.

Henry, self-possessed and quiet, waited for the noise to die down. Brancion seemed far more disturbed than the reporter. In a few moments a party began to form which took Henry's side: "Let him speak. He's right. There were to be questions and answers."

Thanks to those sudden changes of mood which overtake crowds without any one knowing just how or why, there came an abrupt lull in the shouting, and in the dead silence which followed, Henry continued:

"I am Henri Henry, one of the editors of the *Gazette de Paris*. I was supposed to be dead, and if I ask you to listen to me, it's because I have something to say."

This romantic appearance of a man who was believed to be in the grave produced a change in the public attitude. The party which had taken Henry's side now gained adherents until it was almost unanimous. The same people who a moment ago had shouted, "Put him out!" now called, "Let him speak! Let him speak!"

Brancion shrugged his shoulders and pretended to appear indifferent, though a secret fear was beginning to grip him. What did this accursed newspaper man know, and what was he going to reveal?

Henry did not keep them waiting.

"The learned discoverer of 'brancium'," he began in a clear, pleasing voice, "has concealed from you, with inconceivable modesty, one of the properties of his excellent apparatus. It is that property, since I know about it, which makes me hesitate to stick my head in one of those holes as much as if they were the guillotine.

"For my personality would be beheaded as surely as the public executioner could behead my body. I shan't talk in parables, however. I am going to ask you, the public, to act as judge in a strange case."

Henri Henry's mysterious words produced a state of bewildered astonishment in the audience. There was a murmur of approval, however, when he called upon those present to act as judges. The public was obviously flattered by this appeal. Brancion, who was determined to play his rôle to the end, forced a smile:

Henry continued:

"The unknown property of this apparatus, to which I have just referred, is as follows: any person, who subjects himself to the activity of the brancic rays, loses, as long as he under their influence, his own freedom of will. In other words, his brain acts merely as a resonator.

"He is incapable of giving out psychic rays himself, and can vibrate only under the influence of those given out by the apparatus. That is to say, the possessor of the apparatus cannot only communicate his thought to those whose psychic wavelengths he has measured, but can also impose his own will upon them. Is that not true, Mr. Brancion?"

Brancion made a gesture of denial, but Henri Henry went on:

"Now, in the light of that, ladies and gentlemen, suppose for a moment—merely as a hypothesis!—that some unscrupulous rascal were to steal Mr. Brancion's marvelous apparatus.

"Suppose he were to force Robert Brancion himself to submit to its activity, and be measured psychically. Suppose, in short, that the true inventor were under the domination of a scoundrel, who claimed all the merit of the discovery, and reaped all the profits! If all of that were the case, what do you think: Should one save the invention, or the inventor?"

From all sides, voices responded:

"The inventor! The inventor!"

A few elderly scientists in the front row of seats, and the seven escaped victims of Bus 519 were the only ones to shout:

"The invention!"

Their voices, however, were lost in the uproar. Henri Henry raised his hand for silence, and when a hush fell, he continued:

"So you believe as I do that a human life, a human personality is worth all the machines in the world, even the most marvelous?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Then I act according to your judgment."

And with one blow of his cane the reporter shattered the twelve glass tubes of the "object with a rectangular base."

Seven persons at once climbed upon the platform. They were the escaped victims of Bus 519, at last delivered from the domination of Brancion. Professor Muret sobbed as he groped on the floor among the wreckage of the apparatus. André and Cécile helped him in his task. Germaine and Juliette cried out against the scoundrel who had made a criminal of Germaine.

Brancion dashed toward the rear of the platform, hunting in terror for a way to flee. But Charron, the printer, leaped upon him and, catching him by the shoulders, threw him to the floor. Chalgrin gripped him in a blind fury, and sank his fingers into his throat.

In a moment a realization of Brancion's crime spread through the audience. There was a rush toward the stage, and Charron, Brancion, and Chalgrin were buried beneath a mass of attacking bodies.

When the police had reached the spot and dragged off those on top, Robert Brancion was dead.

EPILOGUE

The shock of the tragic events in which he had taken part proved too great for Professor Muret, who had already been weakened by years of work, grief, and anxiety. He was carried from the hall in a fainting condition, and died the following morning without having regained consciousness. With him perished the secret for extracting the metal which gave out the psychic rays, the only part of his great labors which had been accomplished before André became his pupil.

André Gilbert, now the husband of Cécile, is seeking in vain to rediscover, from the memory of talks on the subject with the professor, the first steps of this work which had made possible his own extraordinary application of the principles involved.

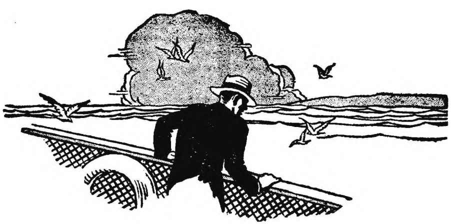
Mainfroy and Germaine were married quietly soon after the wedding of André and Cécile; and Brunnel, while honoring the young couple with many lectures on the advantage of being a bachelor, has asked Juliette Praline, so it is said, to become Mrs. Brunnel.

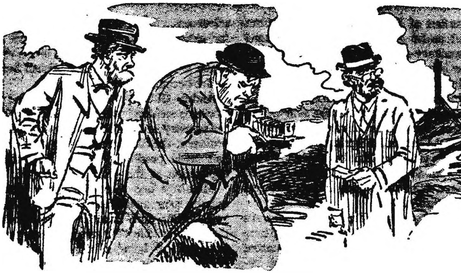
Henri Henry carried on in the *Gazette de Paris* a campaign to raise a fund for the purchase and preservation of the old house in the Avenue de Suffren. The name of Martin du Pont appeared among those of the first subscribers, and to-day the building has been turned into a public museum.

The faithful negro who saved the journalist's life, survived his wounds, and has remained the devoted servant of Henry.

The fate of Brancion's other slaves has never been known.

THE END





The folks of Noel's Landing still talk about that hectic photographic spree

WHITCHER TAKES PICTURES

By Harold de Polo

"WOT 'N TARNATION Y' TRYIN' T' DO?" DEL DEMANDED OF WHITCHER. "ALL THIS PICTUR' TAKIN' O' Y'RS LAT'LY 'AS TURNED INTO CUSSED SERIOUS BUSINESS!"

IT was after sunrise before the men of Noel's Landing were fully satisfied that the final spark had been stamped out around the charred remains of Augustus Borden's barn.

Perhaps all this scrupulous care had not actually been necessary, yet in a section where growing pine is king—where the greater majority gain their livelihood by the marketing of it, in fact—fire is a mighty serious problem. A gust of wind may take a single burning ember and ruin thousands of acres of valuable timber.

Now that the danger in this particular case was past, however, every one breathed easier—breathed easier as well as did their laughing with that forced gayety that invariably follows acute relief. Naturally, too, Borden was again asked to tell precisely how the unfortunate business had started.

" Up in m' bedroom sleepin' when the first crack o' thunder woke me," explained Gus Borden. " Well, I says t' m'self, I says, I guess we're in for another o' them durn lightnin' storms.

" Allus hated 'em, I have, ever since I see Ben Gedney's home over t' Hallowell struck 'bout five-six year ago.

" I—I dunno, but I kept gettin' afraid an' *more* afraid that some time it 'ud burn *me* out, especially since I been havin' a streak o' bad luck these last few year. Cows a-dyin'—m' best horse a-breaking his leg—that frost o' two falls ago killin' m' corn—"

He paused, did this middle-aged man with a soured, sullen face, and gave a bitter laugh:

" Honest," he went on, " I come t' feel so scairy, when that storm started, that I woke Myra and says t' her we'd better be ready t' git out if that lightnin' hit us.

" Yes, sir—yes, sir, boys—an' it wa'n't one-two minutes later, so help me, that there comes that crack an' crash that lit up the whole sky. I—well, when I look out I see why it's lit up so redlike. The barn was blazin'—blazin' right up t' the east end, at the top where the hayloft is!"

He hesitated again. His laugh, this time, came so bitterly that it stabbed. He turned to the tired-faced, hurt-eyed woman beside him:

"Ain't that right, Myra?"

"Yes—yes, that's how it happened, Augustus," she responded with a sigh, pulling a rather dilapidated wrapper closer about her throat.

"Nope, you can't beat luck," stated Borden, seeming to almost take satisfaction in his belief. "You just *can't* beat luck, boys!"

One or two of his audience began to cheerfully tell, as men have the habit of doing in all calamities, of other fires they had known—of bigger and better fires, as it were.

Before any single individual could dominate the stage, however, Whitcher Bemis had waddled up with his two hundred and sixty-odd pounds and solemnly confronted Gus:

"No 'nsurance, huh?"

"Why—why, o' *course* I got insurance," Borden almost snarled, "but what in hell good does a' eight-hundred-dollar insurance do when it comes t' buildin' a new barn? My, sheriff, with the price o' lumber an' labor at four t' five a day—"

He threw up his hands and left the answer to the imagination, and Whitcher nodded gravely:

"That's right, that's right. Mos' gen-'rally a feller *do* hanker t' build up a burned barn! That's right, that's right. Eight hundred dollars *wouldn'* go s' fur! Y'—y' aim t' build her up agin, then—that wot y' mean?"

"Seein' as I didn't lose m' stock I'd sort o' like t' put a roof over 'em, with winter comin' on," retorted Borden with what was presumed to be deep sarcasm. "On top o' that, I reckon I got t' have a place t' put me some hay an'—"

"Y' got t' excuse our Mr. Bemis f'r his lack o' knowledge when it comes t' farmin' an' sech things. Y' see, seein' y' only been in this neighborhood five-six months, Mr. Borden, y' don't know that W'itcher's a mighty dummed good sheriff.

"That—well, that is, y' see I mean, when he ain't a-busy birdin' 'r troutin', 'n taken up with this here philat'ly—this here business o' c'lectin' postage stamps from furrin countries an' sech. Ain't that right, Boyce?"

It was Chet Thomas who had spoken—spoken in his exaggeratedly solicitous drawl. He was indefatigable, he and Boyce Hutchins—indefatigable and fiendishly ingenuous, almost—in running down Bemis stock and boosting that of Ned Hutchins, defeated opposition candidate for the office of sheriff. Young Boyce, now, proved that he and his running mate worked in perfect accord.

"Yeah, yeah," he said, reflectively rubbing his jaw as several titters went through the crowd, "W'itcher's a plumb *cussed* dummed good sheriff, when he can spare the time t' *work* at it. He's—why, shucks, he's right what y 'might call *phenom'nal*, he is.

"Say—say, Borden, he can do the best *dee-tective* work y' ever saw; he can allus find a myst'ry where they almost *ain't* none; he can—"

He broke off suddenly. His face lengthened thoughtfully as he surveyed the ring of amused watchers—and then his eyes lit up and he doubled his right fist and crashed it down into his other palm like a man who is highly excited about having just made a remarkable discovery.

"Dammit—dammit, Chet," he cried, "but I'll bet y' he can find a myst'ry right 'n this here fire!"

They rested on their oars, after that one. Augustus Borden looked questioningly about at the men who had helped him to futilely fight the fire.

Most of them, indeed, also seemed a trifle put out, their faces plainly saying that this was no time to make a jest. They gave their attention, however, to Whitcher Bemis, as they usually did in any crisis.

He, though, went even further in unkindness than the smart young pair of squirts, for he certainly appeared to be deliberately and most unnecessarily hitting a man when he was down.

"Yeah," he said, pulling out his lip and letting it snap back with a loud plop, "I cal'late y' *sh'u'd* ought t' have a roof over y'r live stock, Borden. Cal'late it's plumb—plumb 'mperative, like y' might put it. Ol' Gid Loomis hankers t' have goods he's got a mortgage on pr'tected, I be'lieve. Loaned y' two hundred on y'r cattle, didn' he?"

II

AUGUSTUS BORDEN, consensus of opinion later seemed to have it, had been pretty close to the point of actually attacking Whitcher Bemis. A few of the old timers, however—notably Jeff Mosebv and Walt Trowbridge—had stepped in and expertly changed the conversation.

They gravely started in on a discussion of the best type of barn for Borden to build, insisting that the one just burned down had been too big, too unhandy, for modern use, and the owner of the ruins agreed with them.

But the sun was getting well up, by now, and men started drifting away. One fellow, as he walked off, averred that the fire they had witnessed had been as exciting as one they had seeen in a news reel down to the Landing last week:

"Noos reel, eh? Pictures, eh? Hmmm—hmmm!"

It was Bemis who had spoken, for the words of the retreating young chap had apparently been heard by him as he had stood there seemingly lost in thought.

He continued, after he had delivered himself, to still appear to be in a mental haze, except that now he was ever so gently caressing his ponderous lower lip as he gazed at the blackened timbers that lay scattered on the ground.

"Pictures, eh?" he said again. "Remin's me, that do. Feller up here last year, salmon fishin', sold some pictures—some o' them kodak photygraphs, that's all they was—t' one o' them Boston daily papers that's got a page o' pictures sort o' called Int'restin' Happenin's.

"Tol'—shucks tol' me, he did, that any time I saw me somethin' on-usual t' snap it with m' camery 'n' send it t' him. Noospaper feller, he were—said he c'd sell 'em f'r me. Got his address some'eres—in m' desk t' home.

"Won'er how much they pay? Won'er c'd I—Judas Priest," he ended up, his eyes widening and shining, "I won'er 'f I c'd git me 'nough t' buy that there early Bermuda stamp 'r that Internal Revenoo I been wantin', 'r p'r'aps mebbe—"

His voice trailed off into an unintelligible mumble, at that, and both Mr. and Mrs. Borden, who had lived in the region a mere six or seven months, looked at him as the average person does when they have suddenly concluded that they are in the company of a half-wit.

The natives who had lingered on, though, planted their feet solidly and tried for comfortable positions, for when the sheriff started off on either stamps or birds or trout there was no telling what he would do or say. They waited eagerly—but at least they learned nothing more about philately.

"Say, Jeff. Help a feller out, will y'? 'Fraid 'f I leave here, m'self, I'll—well, I'll f'rgit me jest how these pictures sh'u'd ought t' be took. I—shucks, Jeff, hop 'n m' flivver 'n' chug her down t' m' house 'n' git me m' camery, will y'? Top o' m' desk, it be. Right here's the keys!"

Yes, he was a good friend, was Jeff Moseby—one of the rare type who do a favor without asking why or wherefore or trying to tell of a better way in which it might be accomplished.

This being so, he took the keys without a word, and in another moment he had cranked up the flivver and departed.

"Gosh—gosh," mused Bemis, blinking after the car, "dunno 's I sh'u'd 'a' 'lowed Jeff t' git me that picture-box, at that. Noofangled one, she be. Takes more things—more objec's, I mean—th'n any other camerys. Noo invention, sort o'. Neg'tive 'n' lens 's—"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing, however, broke off. He seemed to be flushing—flushing as a man does who is angry because he has realized he has possibly spoken too much about private matters. And again, rather odd to relate, he took out his anger—or his spleen, at least—on Augustus Borden.

"Ain't got no objections t' m' takin' a few pictures, I s'pose, have y'?" he asked. He did not, however, put the query in a natural and pleasant tone; his voice, instead, was decidedly belligerent, and so was the glare in his eyes.

The farmer originally from down Hallowell way seemed puzzled—very much puzzled. The little frown on his brow and the slightly worried look in his eyes plainly told that he didn't know what it was all about, just as the sudden grim set of his lips explained that he had made his decision not to be angered into a fuss. His words came with restraint:

"Reckon *I* can't stop y' takin' pictures, sheriff; reckon I don't care if y' do or not!"

"Hmmm—hmmm. Sure o' that?"

"Yeah, I'm sure, all right," replied Borden, looking tired of the whole business.

"Hmmm—hmmm!"

Bemis, this time, got that far-away expression in his eyes, after grunting, and allowed the thumb and index finger of his right hand to go to his huge lip with his characteristic gesture. Fondling it, he turned and faced the wan-featured Myra Borden, and when he yanked it out and let it go hurriedly back with a sharp report he snapped out an equally sharp question at the woman:

"*You* got any objections t' havin' me take pictures?"

She seemed frightened at that, and jumped back with a little gasp, her eyes turning to her husband. He, his sullen face further darkening, again looked as if he might try to attack the sheriff.

This time, however, he regained control of himself without any outside aid, and he spoke with what was close to a petulant whine:

"Aw—aw, cripes, sheriff, what *is* this durned fool picture thing? I mean—I mean ain't I *said* I ain't got no objections?"

"'Gustus Borden," replied Whitcher, using his most official and pompous tone, "I got t' remin' y' I wa'n't speakin' t' *you*—speakin' t' y'r *wife,* I were! Got t' remin' y', too, that I got me a 'ficial priv'lege, do I hanker t' use it, t' ask *any* question o' any *one!*"

Finishing, he turned his back on the farmer from Hallowell and again faced the woman. His voice was quite stern:

"*You* got any objections, m'am?"

"I—I—no, Mr. Sheriff, I—I guess I ain't, just like Gus says," she managed to get out, her hurt eyes looking more hurt as she clutched her shabby wrap more tightly about her throat.

"Hmmm—hmmm! Well—"

"Great Scott, W'itcher, what's all this a pesterin' a woman about takin' a fool picture mean, anyways?" cut in one of the younger element who had probably had a sudden touch of chivalry.

But before Bemis could answer—or before Chet and Boyce could get going on some bright repartee it was apparent they had been on the verge of commencing—Jeff Moseby clattered noisily up in the flivver and came to a grinding halt.

III

THE folk of Noel's Landing still talk —oh, and they undoubtedly will for a long time—about that hectic photographic spree on which Bemis went.

They say that he used up precisely four packs of film, again having to call on Jeff Moseby to take the flivver and go down to Del's store at the Landing.

He took numerous views, from every possible angle, of the one remaining wall of the barn, although nobody could fathom what sort of news value this jagged, charred thing could have; he insisted, too, on getting various exposures of the house itself, always snapping them from the ruins of the fire.

Indeed, he even went to the length of carefully procuring a negative of the trodden path that led from the dwelling to the barn—and when twitted about the why of this it was the only question he deigned to answer:

"Shucks, boys," he said aggrievedly, "ain't y' seen in them picture pages 'n the papers, sometimes, a' arrow pointin' down mebbe t' a path, 'n' havin' 'xplainin' words like—aw, like: 'This Here Path 'S the One Took by the Crim'nal W'en He—'"

The sheriff, however, broke off—broke off and looked apologetically at Augustus Borden.

"I—I mean, Borden, I—shucks, *you* know w'ot I mean, I guess, Borden. Heap livelier place, Hallowell were. Seen more papers w'en y' was there, I cal'late. *You* know how they put them—them—I guess w'ot y' call them *captions* under noos pictures. I—yessir, I got t' git me every *pos'ble* view them fellers might want!"

Without waiting for an answer, he had gone back to more clicking of the camera, nor did he leave the premises until he had used up the very last exposure on his very last roll of film.

He refused to pay any more attention whatsoever to the quizzing his audience gave him—refused, even, to defend himself against the jibes of Chet and Boyce—but when he drove up to Del Noel's general store and post office at the Landing he found it impossible to escape.

Del, being his oldest and best friend in the world, simply insisted on getting the sheriff up to the living quarters above the store and putting matters plainly to him.

"Lookit here, W'itcher—lookit here. I been gittin' the durndest talk 'bout y'r actions 'n' words, up t' the Borden fire, I ever heered tell.

"W'ot 'n tarnation y' tryin' t' do, anyways? I don't mean this comes fr'm jest Chet 'n' Boyce, neither—I mean Jeff 'n' Walt 'n' a couple other o' the boys has went 'n' mentioned it.

"Say y' hinted like y' thought they were suthin' queer 'bout that fire; says y' achally went 'n' dumned near *accused* Gus Borden o' havin' committed ar—ar—what they call arson, ain't it, a settin' his own place up 'n flames? I—Judas Priest, W'itcher, that's cussed serious business!"

Mr. Bemis looked solemn. He blinked, and then his eyes went very wide as he nursed his nether lip.

"Blamed *right* it's serious business t' go 'n' accuse a man o' arson, Del. But, shucks—shuckes, Del—w'ot y' talkin' 'bout. *I* didn' say nuthin' like that; *I* didn'—"

"Dammit, W'itcher," cut in his old crony testily, "y' might not 'a' *said* it 'n so many words, but y'—aw, y' sure more'n hinted it 'n that way y' got o' sayin' things. Like—like askin' their p'rmission t' take some photys—'n' a tellin' 'bout that caption under pictures o' Here's W'ere the Criminal Walked—'n'—"

"Gosh—*gosh!*"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing put so much vim into the words, so much utter surprise, that it caused the postmaster, it appeared, to almost feel that he was on the wrong track:

"W'y—w'y," went on Bemis, looking like a hurt child, "y' ain't—y' ain't 'ntimatin' I—I had me w'ot they term ulterior motives 'n takin' them pictures, are y'? I—lawsy, Del, cussed 'f I ain't the mos' *wrong on*-derstood feller I ever knowed! Judas Priest, but can't I snap me a couple o' *snapshots* 'thout folks thinkin' I got suthin' up m' sleeve?"

Mr. Noel, for an instant—oh, for the barest fraction of a second, explicitly—seemed as if he were practically convinced; immediately, however, the experience of many long years came along and got the better of him.

"No, sir. No, sirree, *Bob*," he vigorously shook his head, "I ain't aimin' t' be tricked *this* time, Mr. W'itcher Bemis. I know me 'n' Jeff 'n' Walt 'n' some o' the boys has stood with y' f'r years, but cussed 'f y' ain't a mighty hard trial sometimes.

"Gittin' harder 'n' harder t' git votes ag'in' that dummed Ned Hutchins, it be, with all the fellers he's got workin' f'r him, 'n' w'en y' act this way like y're a tryin' t' find a crime w'ere no crime be, it—well, it sure don't do y' no good 'roun' 'lection. 'F y' can't think o' y'rself, y' might try t' think o' the *party!*"

He paused and looked exceedingly righteous and loyal and dignified, did the honest Del—but Bemis shook his head and uttered a most lugubrious sigh.

"Trouble with bein' a good *dee*-tective, that is. Every one allus thinks a body can't do nuthin' else but think o' solvin' crimes 'n' all sech things.

"Lawsy, tried t' git me some pictures, I was, t' sell t' them daily events sheets 'n the noospapers. Hankerin' t' pick me up 'nough money, I were, t' buy me p'r-'aps mebbe that there early Bermuda stamp t' c'mplete a' issue, 'r else—"

"Dammit, W'itcher," the other spat out

in exasperation, "I won't stand f'r none o' this hedgin' 'n' hedgin'. I'm a sayin' y're hurtin' y'rself 'n' y're hurtin' the *party.* They wa'n't no call f'r t' act that funny way up there, jest t' be smart.

"Poor Gus Borden may be a newcomer t' these parts, managin' t' sort o' struggle 'long—but folks don't like t' see a man hit w'en he's down, 'specially w'en they ain't no *reason* f'r t' go 'n'—

"Who said they wa'n't no reason?" asked Bemis quietly, rubbing at his lip as he gazed up at the ceiling with that aimless, wandering stare he so frequently assumed.

"Y'—*y' mean y' know suthin' 'bout that fire?*" Del Noel got out hoarsely.

His old friend came down to earth, although a trifle slowly. His face clouded with annoyance, but then this expression was immediately followed by one of good-natured, beaming whimsicality.

"Sakes alive, Del, w'ot d' y' mean 'bout a *fire?*" he chuckled heartily. "Shucks, I meaned they was a reason f'r m' takin' them *pictures,* I did.

"*You* 'member that noospaper feller was here fr'm Boston f'r the salmon fishin' last spring—God—Goddard, yeah, that were his name. Well, *he* tol' me any time I seen anythin' int'restin' t' snap it 'n' let him have it. Well, strikes me that fire 'ud make a good 'un.

"Farmer's Barn Striked by Lightnin' Razed t' the Groun'—'r suthin' like that. Anyways, I'd be thankful t' git me 'nough f'r that Bermuda stamp, 'r that Internal Revenue, p'r'aps mebbe a Turks Island I—"

"Aw, gosh, W'itcher, stop that nonsense 'n'—"

"Nonsense? Sh'u'd say it *be* nonsense—the way all *you* fellers a pester 'n' a pester a body. Judas Priest, do I go me troutin' some'un allus has t' up 'n' c'mplain, 'n' w'en I traipse me out f'r birdin', gosh knows, it's even *wuss,* 'n' now w'en I try t' git me int'rested 'n pictures y—"

He hesitated for a moment, his round face with his big china blue eyes looking almost pathetic:

"Gosh, trout season's over, ain't it? Bird season ain't here yet, be it? *Damn* this middle o' September time, anyways—ain't not a *thing* f'r a feller t' do. 'N' w'en I try t' pick me up a new hobby—a hobby that might be w'ot they term lu—lucrative, too, y' begin t' pick 'n me 'n'—"

But what's the use? When the sheriff of Noel's Landing did not desire to lay bare his soul, as the phrase has it, no living human being could make him do it. He talked on about troutin' 'n' birdin', 'n' philat'ly 'n' photography, until poor Del himself was forced to beat a retreat down to the store.

IV

IF Whitcher Bemis occasionally drove his stanchest friends and firmest political adherents nearly mad, it is likewise true that he not infrequently exercised this same deplorable effect on various other people with whom he came in contact.

In this case, specifically, it seemed as if Myra and Augustus Borden were to be what is quite universally known as the goats.

He was back at their place, again surveying the ruins of the old barn, shortly after sunup the next morning—at just about the same hour, to be exact, when he had taken the pictures on the previous day.

He wanted, he rather sheepishly confessed, to see if in the excitement of the fire he had failed to take his snapshots from the best possible angles.

Mighty careful he intended to be, he confided to both Myra and Augustus Borden, about all little details—all minute details, p'r'aps mebbe he should say.

Yep, now that he was thinking of taking up this picture business for the papers he wasn't going to let no mistake trip him up. Glad he'd come back, he was. See, he did, where he'd forgot a view he'd ought to of took yesterday.

There was, oddly and happily enough for all, a decided change in the attitude of the folks from Hallowell—or a decided change, it would be better to say, in Gus himself.

Myra seemed the same patient, tired-faced, hurt-eyed woman as always—more so, perhaps—who always looked to her husband for initiative; Borden, however, had lost some of his sullenness and belligerency, actually conveying the impression that he was glad to have Whitcher about.

Certainly, at least, he put himself out to be agreeable, even going to the trouble of insisting that the sheriff come inside and have some coffee when Bemis had merely gone to the kitchen door and asked for a tumbler of water. Yes, he positively smiled a few times, did Borden, and when Bemis left the property the two appeared to be quite friendly.

Mr. Bemis indeed, was so friendly that he dropped around to the Borden farm again the very next A.M. He did not, this time, come alone, but brought along a keen-faced, keen-eyed man whose city clothes stamped him as not being a native

Gus, Mrs. Borden hastened to tell them, was not at home; he was, at the moment, off helping a neighbor mend some rail fence a few miles up the road.

"Yeah, I knowed that," Whitcher gravely nodded, his eyes wide and solemn. "Jest wanted t' show m' fr'en' that there burned barn 'n' that there path leadin' t' it fr'm the house. Y'—y' know, them same spots w'ere I took me them pictures!"

They idled around, after that, for a good thirty or forty minutes, Whitcher seeming to take a ridiculous sort of interest among the charred pieces of timber that lay scattered about the one portion of wall that was still standing.

He explained this to Mrs. Borden as he was about to leave, although he certainly appeared to be rather ill at ease.

"I—well, I got me a sort o' hobby, I have," he said, with much flushing, as he stood in her doorway, and held out his blackened hands with a sheepish laugh. "Like t' c'lect me ol' hinges 'n' pieces o' iron, the way y' mebbe heered some o' them antique bugs do.

"I—shucks, p'r'aps y' think me sort o' crazy, but I 'membered that this were a-built 'long time ago, 'n' that they might be some o' them hinges—"

He broke off voluntarily, palpably trying to change the subject with a chuckle:

"Say, got a mite o' kerosene, Mis' Borden? Han's be a sight. Like t' wash 'em off!"

She looked vague and blank, did Myra Borden—vague and blank and yet dazedly worried. Although she had nothing about her throat, her hand went there with the same sort of frightened gesture she had used on the first morning when pulling her wrapper about her. She shook her head negatively, and her voice came after a little gulp:

"No—no, I got gasoline, though, sheriff. Or soap an' hot water, if you'll step insi—"

"No kerosene, huh?" Bemis interrupted in a monotonous drawl. "No—no, thanks, Mis' Borden. On'y like kerosene t' wash up m' han's with w'en I git 'em blacked with burned wood. Thanks—thanks. G'-by!"

"G-good-by, sheriff," answered the woman, although her voice was a trifle hoarse and her fingers, this time, dug into her throat almost convulsively.

But, when the sheriff of Noel's Landing had covered about half the distance to his waiting flivver, he suddenly stopped. He and his companion, then, seemed to go into some deep discussion, during which there was much pointing at the barn, at the house itself, even at the path between the two spots.

Finally they must have reached some decision, for they walked back to the dwelling.

"Say, Mis' Borden," said Bemis slowly, "tell y'r husban' w'en he gits back, will y', that I sh'u'd have me them films back fr'm East Chat'am by to-morrer, all developed 'n' printed. Tell him—well, tell him I'll be 'roun' t' see him with 'em, will y', ma'am?"

"Ye—"

This tired-faced, hurt-eyed woman, however, couldn't even complete that single affirmative; she could, only, sink her fingers deeper into her throat and jerkily nod her head.

The keen-eyed man in the city clothes, at that, spoke for the first time. His voice was crisp:

"Very good. Tell Mr. Borden that I'll be along with Mr. Bemis, too. My name's Graham—Graham, adjuster for the East Chatham Mutual Insurance Company. Liked to have seen him to-day, but I haven't the time to wait.

"Still, I'd prefer to see those photographs first, to make sure, although I don't think there's any doubt about—"

A kick on the ankle from the sheriff, which was plainly visible to Myra Borden, made him wince and catch his breath. He glared at Whitcher for an instant, but then he turned back to the woman:

"I mean that I don't think there will be any difficulty about—hmmm, any difficulty about the adjustment, I should have said. Tell Mr. Borden to surely be here, please. Good 'day, madam!"

She couldn't even nod her head, now, as Graham and the sheriff walked away.

V

MR. BEMIS had to take a lot more punishment, that Indian summery A.M. That is, it might have been painful to almost any one else, but it slid off the sheriff's back as water is professed to do from that part of the duck.

It was the women of Noel's Landing, on this occasion, who got after him. It was, they claimed, a right mean shame for a grown man—although sometimes they *didn't* think him grown, a few spitefully averred—to pick on a lone female who was having troubles enough of her own to make both ends meet.

He seemed to forget, they hinted, that women to-day meant something in the vote. It was all right, they stated, to let him go ahead with his fishing and hunting and pesky stamp collecting—*they* weren't as fool particular as some of the men folks—but when it came to bothering a woman who was already worried enough, just to take a few pictures, it was going too far.

Ned Hutchins, they intimated with raised eyebrows, wouldn't most probably do such things if he were in office. And—well, and it looked as if maybe he *were* going to be in office, next election.

But Bemis, even with the ladies, had the same answer—more or less—that he had had for the men:

Shucks, he wa'n't allus thinkin' o' votes, he wa'n't, like mos' folk seemed t' think. Judas Priest, no, let Ned Hutchins ponder on *them* things. W'y, he couldn't trout now, could he? Wa'n't no birdin' t' be did, jest yet, were they? 'N' these here pictures—well, these here pictures, he were a-hopin', might 'low him t' go 'n' git hisself some stamps that 'ud enable him t' git back t' the peaceful pursuit o' philat'ly. Shucks—shucks. W'y was they allus a-thinkin' o' *votes?*

Along toward noon, although his amiable face gave no hint of it, he really must have become a trifle fatigued with all this pestering and pestering. Anyway, for one of the very few times in his life he avoided passing the store at the Landing, taking a much longer and roundabout way to flivver to his home on the east shore of Cranberry Lake.

He sat down with a huge sigh of contentment, in his cozy kitchen and living room combined, and dragged the beloved album in which he so neatly kept his cherished collection of stamps.

"Allus soothe a feller's nerves, y' do," he said, perhaps speaking aloud unconsciously as men who have dwelt much alone have the habit of occasionally doing.

For an hour—or a trifle over, rather—the sheriff of Noel's Landing literally lost himself in the joys of his collection. He gazed at certain rare specimens almost lovingly, in some cases actually rubbing his pudgy fingers over the surfaces with tender affection.

Longingly, too, he would look at various blank spaces on some pages, his face plainly telling that he was wishing he had the wherewithal to purchase the bits of paper that would fill them in.

But, as the clock over the mantel struck one thirty, he closed up his album with a little sigh and carefully replaced it in his desk.

"Sh'u'd ought t' be 'long 'bout now," he mused aloud, a slight frown on his brow as he ruminatively rubbed at his ponderously hanging lip that also seemed to so consistently soothe him.

She was. She was, that is, if he had meant Myra Borden. She came in without knocking at the door, did this tired-faced woman from down Hallowell way—came in with a rush, with an hysterical little gasp, with a purplish-red bruise, that had not been there in the morning, showing on a wan cheek.

"Didn' think he'd go s' fur 's t' strike y'," said Whitcher, his face softening with pity as he rose to take her arm and assist her to a chair. "Hit y' w'en y' kept on insistin' he sh'u'd ought t' go 'n' c'nfess, didn' he?"

"Oh—oh! He hit me *so* hard! He knocked me down an' I thought he was goin' to *kill*—"

"There, there. Sot down 'n' rest 'n' take a mite o' this," he said, pouring a tumbler of cool, sweet cider from an earthen pitcher.

She drank it gratefully, and then she rambled out her story—rambled out the story that Bemis had known would not be a particularly pleasant one:

It was not the first beating she had had, she assured him. She had suffered many, many of them during all of the more than twenty years they had been married. She had got most of them, too, for just the same reason she had got this blow to-day.

He was *always* trying something dishonest, and she was always trying to dissuade him from doing it. This—well, this was only the third time he had set a place on *fire*, but there were so many *other* tricks he had done.

He had stolen from stores where he had occasionally worked; he had slyly cheated in every deal into which he had ever entered; he had even descended to breaking into the homes of neighbors, once in awhile, and pilfering such petty things as food.

He had—oh, he had done so much, so much, all through the years, and she came of an honest and upright and God-fearing family, she did, and it nearly killed her to think of it all—had nearly driven her crazy with worry all through those terrible years.

It was too much for her, this time. She knew that Mr. Bemis knew; she hadn't been fooled by his taking those pictures; she had been certain from the beginning that the Mr. Graham who had called that morning had been some man from the insurance company.

She could see that Augustus at last had jail staring him in the face, and she didn't want Mr. Bemis or any of the other kind neighbors to think that she had had anything to do with it.

She didn't care what became of her—she didn't know, God help her, what *was* going to become of her—but she'd just come to the end with all this dishonesty, with all those beatings, with—with—

Whitcher Bemis let her go on and on until she had hysterically sobbed herself into a state of exhaustion. Then, with genuinely moist eyes and gentle voice, he promised her that he would see that she found some pleasant means of occupation where life would be kinder to her.

VI

THE sheriff of Noel's Landing kept his word to Myra Borden—and in doing so, ironically, he temporarily annoyed various and sundry of his adherents.

He would not divulge how he had first become suspicious of Gus Borden, in fact, until he had found the wife of the man who was now in the East Chatham jail a congenial position as housekeeper to an aged and comfortably fixed couple. And when he finally *did* spill his story, he—well, politics is politics, after all, as has been so constantly declaimed by so many humans.

He chose a Wednesday evening chicken supper down at the Landing church, where he knew beyond the vestige of a doubt every woman for miles around would be in attendance.

"Cal'late I got a lot o' you ladies right—oh, sort o' right down 'n me f'r a spell, didn' I?" he asked genially as they started to remove the dishes.

"Awful sorry, I were, but I couldn't help it. A ne'ssary evil, y' might call it, 'n order t' do ult'mate good. Do ult'mate good f'r one o' what some fellers still designates 's the gentler sex, too, at that!"

Mr. Bemis paused, for a moment, paused and beamed at his audience and winked one eye slowly. It drew a laugh, this did—drew it, mostly, from precisely those from whom he desired it most. The ladies.

"Yep," he went on, "I reckon I might 'a' seemed a mite hard 'n Myra Borden, but I knowed it were the on'y thing t' do so 's t' git her t' up 'n' c'nfess 'n' furnish the rest o' the ev'dence I needed t' go with m' own b'liefs.

" Be f'r her ult'mate good, like I said, though I guess she must 'a' suffered some w'en I were a takin' them pictures, 'n' a askin' fool questions, 'n' a mentionin' that kerosene 'n'—aw, 'n' three-four more things 'r so. Reckon—reckon she's purty nigh more conten'ed now 'an she has been 'n years, hey?"

" Thanks to you she *is*, Whitcher," came in Mrs. Eli Price strongly, with the decisive tone she used when addressing a meeting of the Ladies Aid Society.

" Thanks—thanks!"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing received and acknowledged the compliment with becoming blushes.

" Yep, it seemed the on'y thing t' do," he continued, " 'specially after I'd made me 'nquiries, the day o' the fire, 'n' went 'n' discovered me the life he'd led her down t' Hallowell.

" Yep, I sure figgered that poor woman 'ud crack under the strain, sort o', like y' might put it, w'en she realized that her Gus were a facin' jail at last. I—"

" But how did you *know*—we mean how did you *first* come to suspect anything about him setting the fire himself?"

It was not a male who asked this question; it was, instead, a rather excited young girl—a girl who wouldn't reach the voting age, possibly, for another couple of years.

Whitcher Bemis allowed his thumb and index finger to go to his great lip, and he pulled it out and let it go back softly. He spoke with a certain tender reminiscence:

" One o' y'r gentler sex, agin, comes t' be sort o' responsible. Had a grammy once, I did, w'en I were a little shaver. She had one o' these here axioms—one o' them proverbs—she usta keep a sayin' 'n' a sayin' t' me: ' W'itcher,' she say, ' allus remember t' give a minute regard t' detail with a' apparent absence o' zeal!' "

He hesitated for the mere fraction of a second, coughing slightly, brushing a hand across his eyes.

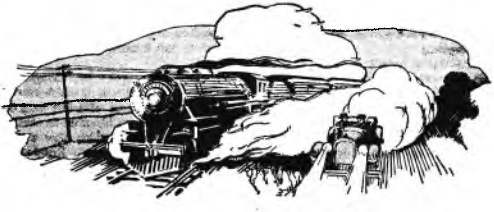
" Ain't never went 'n' f'rgot them words, I ain't, 'n' w'en I see a couple o' bits o' excelsior 'n the path leadin' fr'm Borden's house t' his barn, that mornin' o' the fire, suthin' come t' me that 'ud been puzzlin' me a heap—suthin' I'd stored me up 'n w'ot I term m' card cat'logue brain.

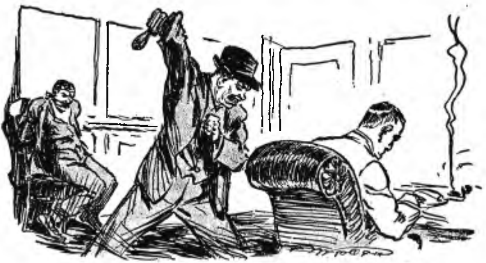
" It was that one day 'bout a week back, y' see, I'd meeted Borden 'n the road, 'n' they was a strong smell o' kerosene comin' from his truck. Glanced 'nside w'en he went past, I did, 'n' see two five-gallon cans o' the stuff. Well, I thinks, w'ot 'n all sin does a man that burns *wood* f'r cookin' 'n' *gasoline* f'r lightin' his lamps want with *ten* gallons o' *kerosene?*"

Bemis, again, hesitated for a mere flash of a second in order to allow an admiring gasp to go through the crowd—and then he went on with a hearty chuckle:

" Yessir, I sure got t' han' it t' the ladies, ain't I every way? Judas Priest, yep, 'f it hadn' been f'r m' grammy, 'n' thinkin' o' that proverb, I'd never 'a' foun' me out a thing 'bout there bein' not a drop o' kerosene 'n the house right after the fire!"

Briefly, the applause that came made it a darn good bet that Ned Hutchins wouldn't get a single female vote from Noel's Landing, at least, when election came around.





Far from crying out to warn Stannistreet, I could not make a sound

THE LIFTED VEIL

By Walter Archer Frost

RUGGLES'S DUBIOUS PAST, BURIED AND HIDDEN UNDER TEN YEARS OF STRAIGHT LIVING, COMES TO LIFE AGAIN

CHAPTER I

THE HOLDUP

"LOOK in there," Ruggles whispered in my ear; "but don't make a sound at what you see!"

"I won't," I whispered back. Then I looked through our secret peep-hole which gave Ruggles and me a clear view of the unexpected things that were taking place in the living room of our snug little first floor apartment; lighted now by the last tag end of the daylight.

There was a man in there, a hatchet-faced, gray-skinned man of about my own height and build, a man with thick, closely cut gray hair and a tigerish kind of slouch and crouch about him as he moved.

And move he did. He kept moving, moving, moving as if it were an impossibility for him not to move; for an instant, he would crouch against the wall, staring at the door into the vestibule; and the front windows seemed to give him the same anxiety, for, after studying the front door, he would study them with what looked to be nearly a mad intensity.

And all the time his chest rose and fell noticeably, like that of a fugitive who has spent himself in a desperate rush for liberty.

All at once then he became motionless as if turned into stone; even his coarse, heavy hands became motionless; it was as if every sense he had had suddenly concentrated on something, concentrated to its uppermost, and it came to me that he was listening.

That did not prepare me, though, for the long, swift, catlike leap which carried him to our front door; with one hand he flung it open and with his other he covered us with an automatic, which after a staring moment he lowered. To Ruggles, he said:

"Get in here, Garrison. I've been waiting near an hour for you!"

It was he who closed the door after us and made sure that the lock was turned. It was he who led us into our living room as if the place were his.

"If you got any other doors any one can come in through, block 'em up," was his next command.

That was it: this man did not come here to beg our help as our other clients had done—he gave his orders with the confidence of one certain that he should be obeyed. I looked at him resentfully, but he met me with a leer on his hard lips and a cold glitter in his baleful eyes.

"Wipe it off," he said in a voice with a rasp like a file. "Wipe it off an' keep it off! You don't know me, man, and you don't know what I know!"

Leaving me as if sure he had disposed of me for the time, as indeed he had, he turned on Ruggles and said: "You call yourself Ruggles now, huh? Well, you've got some taller an' you've grown up to yer bones; but I don't see you've changed much except fer that name and th' side yer working on."

I looked at Ruggles and forgot, on the instant, the unexplainable things I had just heard; for Ruggles sat fixed as a statue, watching the other man as if those two had been alone in that suddenly silent room.

Then, in a voice I should not have recognized if I had not been in that room with him, Ruggles said slowly: "Yes, Markley, I've changed my name and the side I'm working on."

"The name part of it, I can get," the man, Markley, said hoarsely; "I've changed mine a good dozen times! But your leaving us and siding in with the harness-bulls—no, that's too much! Did you get caught—do a stretch—and get converted?"

"No," the man I had known for four years as Ruggles said in a dead voice, "I simply made a choice."

"A clever one, likely," Markley jeered. "You always were the wise guy, Garr—I mean Ruggles. You can tell me about it later. Just now I'm glad you did sign up with the bulls, for you've got to help me now from th' inside."

"What?"

"Sure—th' inside; it was me croaked Dorgan, last week; one o' my gloves split, and your friend, Stannistreet, th' detective, found my finger-prints. Now you got to block Stannistreet off somehow an' git me out o' this town an' out of this State—you got to do it an' do it quick, for it's th' chair if Stannistreet gets me!"

The telephone rang. At the sound, Markley glared at the instrument like a hunted animal; his dirty, talonlike fingers closed on the arm of his chair, and the perspiration stood out on his brow.

"If that's one of Stannistreet's men and he's traced me here—"

Ruggles cut Markley short with a gesture and lifted the receiver.

"Yes," my companion said over the wire, "this is Ruggles. Oh, how are you? What? You say you want to give me a description? Go ahead! I'll repeat it after you so as to get it straight. Now go ahead!"

There was a pause during which Ruggles looked over the top of the instrument at Markley. "All right. Five feet ten and a half. Weighs about one hundred and sixty pounds. Hair gray and cut close to the head. Eyes light blue? Yes, all right—light blue, with a squint. Cheek bones rather prominent. Complexion gray. An inch-long scar under right eye, becomes purple when man is angered. Desperate character, will not be taken alive, dead shot with each hand. Name is—"

With a snarl of fury, Markley, whom the description had fitted in every detail like a glove, tore the instrument from Ruggles's hand and listened breathlessly, that forbidding scar under his right eye, burning an ever angrier and more ferocious purple.

Then Markley forced the instrument back into Ruggles's hand, saying savagely the instant Ruggles hung up: "Stannistreet himself, that was. I thought first you were giving me away. If you had I'd have croaked you where you stood!"

Markley's hoarse voice shook with passion, and he fixed on Ruggles's wrist a hand on which the cords stood out like roots.

"Steady, Markley," Ruggles said evenly. "Steady!"

"Steady, yes," the fugitive said. "But, if you're thinking you can tip Stannistreet off that I'm here, think again, for all I've got to do is slip him the word that you and I worked in the same gang, once—"

"Yes, I know," Ruggles broke in. "I know that only too well, Markley."

Markley's hard face took on an acid grin. "Oh, I get you," he said significantly; "your friend here don't know about what you used to be."

"There is no need of his knowing," Ruggles said; "Mr. Crane is my friend as well as my assistant who helps me on all my cases."

"Then," Markley kept on, "as I look at it he ought to know—ought to know what gang you travelled with up to ten years ago; he ought to know what you are an' what me an' the other four have got on you. He ought to get hep to that an' I'm goin' to tell him."

"No," Ruggles said slowly.

"Who's going to stop me? Not you, Mr.—Ruggles! Who then?"

"Stannistreet, the detective. You heard what he said to me; the description he gave me; you recognized his voice on the telephone. But you didn't get the whole thing."

"What didn't I get?" Markley's ice-colored eyes narrowed to slits.

"He's on his way up here now," Ruggles said steadily. "I'm playing this fair with you, Markley. He's on his way up here now. If you want to get away before he comes, you'd better be starting.

"If you don't want to get away before he comes, you've got to get out of sight. Go into that room there," indicating our extra bedroom. "Shut the door and lock it on your side; but listen, if you like, through the keyhole."

"He's coming here to ask you to take my trail, is he?" Markley asked.

"Yes," Ruggles replied. "I'm the only one who can get you out of the fix you're in now, and I'm going to do it. I tell you this, and you know I keep my word."

"You always did in the old days," Markley said grudgingly; "but how do I know you will now? You've gone back on the old gang an' probably squealed—"

"You know I didn't squeal, Markley!"

"How do I know that?"

"Why, if I had, you and Cottrell and Branley and Hilliard and Mueller would have been picked up long ago, wouldn't you?"

"I never could match up with you when it come to reasoning a thing out," Markley said skeptically. Then, with that grudging surrender which he had shown before: "But what you say's right enough: you'd have sent us all to the pen, if you'd squealed. I just got out from a long stretch myself, but I know who put me there, an' it wasn't you. What?"

Ruggles had suddenly caught Markley's arm in a warning grip.

"That's Stannistreet's step, there in the vestibule," Ruggles said in a scarcely audible whisper. "Here's the key to the door of that bedroom. Go in there, now. No shooting! Know why? Because, though you may get Stannistreet, I'm the only one who can get you clear of the bulls and detectives that are after you, and I won't lift a finger for you unless you do as I say."

CHAPTER II

AN URGENT CALL

EVEN at that critical moment, when Markley knew that his very life hung in the balance, he had the hardihood and reckless daring to wait.

"Think you can give me orders, do you?" he demanded in that hushed, hoarse whisper of his: "I've only got to open my mouth once and your friend, Stannistreet, would be the first to arrest you."

"To a certain point, you can force me to go," Ruggles flung back; "but, beyond that, whether you tell one man or all men, I will not go. I have promised to save you if you do what I tell you to. Will you do it?"

For a moment, the two men glared at each other. Then Markley snatched the key from Ruggles's outstretched hand and darted noiselessly into the bedroom. We heard him close the door, heard the key turn in the lock. Then silence, broken only by our own heavy breathing.

All this had taken place in little more than an instant. It had been Stannistreet's step which we had heard in our vestibule, and it was his ring which we heard now. Ruggles loosened his collar a little, breathed deeply, stood for an instant irresolute, then went to the front door and opened it.

" Hi, Ruggles," Stannistreet said. " How are you, Crane? Been so busy, I haven't seen either of you lately." The detective, who had said this from the doorway, now came with springy step into our living room, and I closed the front door after him.

He took off his hat, threw it on our center table, and stood looking at us, smiling. A fine-looking man, Stannistreet was, a tall, erect, vigorous man still in his early thirties, with the rather casual air of a successful business man who, when outside of his office, was not given to letting his responsibilities bother him.

The only thing about Stannistreet that gave away the secret of the profession he belonged to, was the fact that he always spoke in a carefully lowered voice, as if he suspected that some hidden person was always listening, listening, listening

Stannistreet not only gave that impression; it was, to my knowledge, an absolute conviction of his; and, if this conviction were a delusion, it was one which had saved his life a good hundred times.

" I just phoned you about Markley," he said to Ruggles. " Markley's a particularly bad actor—he croaked Dorgan, the policeman, who had come on Markley holding up a cigar store; Markley escaped, circled the block, then came up behind Dorgan and crushed his skull with a blackjack."

Ruggles nodded. " The newspapers told how Dorgan had been killed, but they didn't say who killed him."

" No, they didn't know. As a matter of fact, I'm the only one that has got this on Markley," Stannistreet said eagerly. " I had had lunch on McDougal Street and was coming up and happened to see Markley—you know—no, you don't; but he's got a face like a man's last night on earth.

" Markley was bending over Dorgan; when he saw me, he turned and ran, gave me the slip, but I got his finger-print on a pocketbook he'd got halfway out of Dorgan's pocket. Markley don't know it, but I'm the only one who can send him to the chair and I'm going to do it."

" Well," Ruggles said almost impatiently, " what do you want me to do, Stannistreet? Better take your hat and go out and take Markley now!" Ruggles actually handed Stannistreet's hat to him and was leading him to the door. " You're not wanting to lose any time, of course," said Ruggles.

" Oh, look here," the detective remonstrated, " I'm not in such a rush as all this. You don't get the point, Ruggles; I want *you* to take Markley. You know the mug of every crook in the country, or in the world, I've heard men say, so it won't be anything hard for you to pick up Markley."

It was a tribute to Ruggles's photographic memory, that Stannistreet did not ask this as a question, but simply took it as a fact that Markley, the holdup man and murderer had been " mugged " already in Ruggles's mental Rogues' Gallery.

" Yes," Ruggles said, " I've seen him."

" Well," Stannistreet went on, " that's all you need—you've seen him. Say, what's your hurry? Never saw you in such a tear before, Ruggles." Ruggles was working him toward the door again.

" I tell you Stannistreet, I've got a dozen things to do—"

" But will you take on Markley? You will, won't you?"

" Why should I?" Ruggles asked " You can get him yourself?" Ruggles put his hand on the doorknob.

" Yes, I can get him myself," Stannistreet said. " I've got him bottled up in this town —every exit watched by men who have his description down pat."

" Then you'd better go through with it." Ruggles opened the door.

" No," Stannistreet said; " you are the man to do that." He stood in the doorway, nodding his head as he spoke. " It will be simpler and better in many ways if you do it; he knows me, and he don't know you."

" What makes you think he doesn't know me?" Ruggles asked.

" This," Stannistreet said, blocking the doorway with his big shoulders: " Markley's just out from doing a ten-year stretch in the Columbus pen.

"It was ten years ago that you came here to New York and started the work you've been doing ever since—rounding up crooks we detectives hadn't been able to catch—that's the truth of it, and I think I'm catching honesty from you, Ruggles.

"You and I know that the crooks, who are doing time, have ways of keeping posted on what's happening outside; but you've always worked on your own; not hooked up with any detective agency; and that's why I'll gamble Markley's never heard of you. I tell you, Ruggles, if Markley stepped into this room now, he wouldn't know you from Henry Ford or Luther Burbank!"

"Burbank is dead," Ruggles said absently, "and I don't want to be."

Stannistreet looked at Ruggles in surprise. "This is the first time I ever heard you say anything like that. You've never seemed afraid—"

"I'm not afraid now."

"I know that. I'll tell you something: I know where he hangs out at night, and I'll show you and you can walk in there and pick him up easy as—"

"I tell you, I'm not afraid!"

"And I tell you, I know that. My gad, I saw you take 'Red' Moran single-handed, didn't I? There's another reason why you're the logical one to take Markley: before he was captured, convicted, and sent for that ten-year stretch in the Columbus pen, he worked somewhere in the West with four or five men, all of them bad actors.

"See if you can't get a line on who they are and where they are now. If they're anything like Markley, there's big rewards out for them. You'll take on the job, won't you?"

"Yes," Ruggles said, "I'll take on the job of getting Markley." Ruggles was actually crowding Stannistreet out into the vestibule.

"Yes, I'm going," Stannistreet said, "but there's one thing more: I told you I've got the bird caged—bottled up in this town; every road, ferry, subway, waterway, everything watched.

"The moment he tries to get through, he'll be nabbed by one of our men, and word 'll be sent to me. But you ought to know the place he hangs out nights in. 17 Christopher Street—it's where he sleeps, if he ever does sleep."

"17 Christopher Street," Ruggles said reflectively; "that's Luigi's joint, isn't it?"

"Yes, that back room on the second floor—place where you caught Pendler, the drug vendor last March. Markley is there. Going after him to-night?"

"To-night or to-morrow—can't say, exactly, Stannistreet."

"Phone me as soon as you've nailed him, or have some one phone me. I've moved to 144 Perry Street. The landlord and janitor know me as Henry Fowler. Anything more? Then I'll get out," Stannistreet said with a flash of his white teeth under his black mustache. "And," he said over his shoulder as he walked down the steps, "get all the dope on the four or five men Markley used to work with—they're probably in touch with him here."

It was not until I had heard Stannistreet's footsteps die away on the sidewalk that I looked at Ruggles, and then it was to see Ruggles, dull-eyed and weary, as I had never seen him look before, go to the door of the extra bedroom and say huskily through it:

"All right, Markley, he's gone."

The door opened and Markley came out to us, his body crouched, his eyes hard and glistening, his automatic ready in his hand.

"I'll get that ——" he said, applying to Stannistreet a term of horrible indecency. "I'll get that —— He's the only one can prove I croaked Dorgan. Both o' you heard him say that yourself!"

"Yes," Ruggles said, "we heard him. But you're not going to kill Stannistreet."

"Why not? With him knocked off, I'll be safe as if I had a pardon from the President!"

"You won't croak him, though," Ruggles said, "for you're not a fool—at least, you weren't one in the old days. You've just croaked one man, and you won't make yourself safe by croaking another."

"What other way is there?"

"This way," Ruggles said; "we heard Stannistreet say he has blocked every exit from this city. He knows where you've been hanging out, Luigi's place on Christopher Street—he knows the room you sleep in, down there, at night."

"Much sleep *I* get," Markley said with ghastly irony. "I don't need much. *You* know how little I can get along on. But I've got to have some, for I'm ten years older than I was when the five of us worked, back in Chicago.

"But you always found some way of getting us out of a hole, as long as we did what you said. If I'd took your advice, I guess I'd never have done that ten-year stretch in the pen at Columbus."

"No, I don't think you would, Markley."

"But what scheme you got now?"

"One that will work," Ruggles replied; "you and Crane, my assistant, here, are about the same height and build; I'll make him up as you; then he will go to your hang-out on Christopher Street. to-night.

"I'll see that a cop is tipped off to go there and arrest him; the word will go to Stannistreet that you have been taken; Stannistreet will believe it and call off his men who now are blocking the exits of the city, and you and I, Markley, can slip safely out through any one of a dozen different ways. See?"

"You mean," Markley asked, "before the harness bulls and the detectives find the bird they've arrested is Crane instead o' me?"

"Yes," Ruggles said. "I can fix Crane up in ten minutes so you'll think, when you stand face to face with him, you're looking into a mirror."

"I'd forgot," Markley said with a wolfish grin. "It's like one of our old games, Garrison! Remember the time you went to see Cottrell, in jail, and made him up as the district attorney, who had gone in ahead to see one of the other prisoners?

"They let Cottrell out and the district attorney's chauffeur took Cottrell to the railroad station and saw him off on the train—and that district attorney never did see Cottrell again! Guess that's an old story, though, to you, Crane—it was back, twelve years ago in Kansas City, as Garrison, I mean Ruggles, has told you."

"No," Ruggles said slowly, "I've never told Crane that story, and there's no time to tell it to him now, for I've got to get making Crane up for you. There's no time to lose."

Ruggles rose quickly to his feet, got his make-up box and, with Markley sitting at my side, was making me up in another moment.

CHAPTER III

A STARTLING TRANSFORMATION

BEFORE this, many times, I had seen Ruggles transform himself and me, and I had thought that I was familiar with his skill.

But never, in all my four years of closest association with him as his friend and his assistant, had I seen him work so swiftly and with such startling effect as now.

In an incredibly short time, Ruggles had kept his word to Markley—when Ruggles was done and, at his command, Markley and I stood face to face, Markley stared at me for a long, incredulous moment, then moistened his lips and said huskily:

"By ——, you're right, Garrison; it's like lookin' into a—mirror!"

"We can match Markley's clothes in the collection we keep," Ruggles said to me.

There was nothing that I could say, for I had happened to catch sight of my reflection in the mirror over the fireplace, and—well, Markley probably was so used to his own appearance that he did not mind it.

But I was *not* used to it—what I saw in the mirror was a coarse, vicious, squint-eyed brute leaning over and taking a cigar from my private humidor—and I knew that that coarse, vicious, squint-eyed brute was I.

"There's one thing you must keep in your mind, Markley," Ruggles went on: "from now on until I give you the word to go out with me, you must stay here under cover in these rooms. Crane will go out, to-night, as your substitute; he will be arrested in your place, and, for the time being, take the search off from you."

"That suits me," Markley said with a coarse laugh. He helped himself to a cigar and settled himself on the couch.

"No, that won't do," Ruggles said; "any one may come in here. You must go back into the bedroom and stay there!"

Markley rose to his feet. "That bedroom would be a nice trap," he ground out. "How do I know you're not going to double cross me?"

"I have given you my word to get you out of this," my companion said. "Lock the door on the inside. You've got your gun."

"I guess I have. And, Mr. Ruggles, if I go down, you go down with me."

"I know that. Have a shot of brandy? Crane and I are going to have one."

"Why, sure, if you don't mind, then I'll get some sleep. That's a good bed—I'll say that for you!"

"And good brandy, too," Ruggles said, a moment later when he came back from our little kitchenette with three glasses loaded.

"Right again," Markley said, as he tossed his off. He looked eagerly at the bottle; then, seeing Ruggles remained oblivious, Markley stalked into our extra bedroom and closed and locked the door.

For what seemed to me a long time, but probably was only a few moments, the bedroom was as silent as the living room in which Ruggles and I sat. Then, from the bedroom, came the sound of heavy snores.

"Asleep," I said, "asleep already. He must have been exhausted."

"He was exhausted," Ruggles replied, "and, in addition to that, I put enough stuff in his brand to make him sleep even if he had been the least exhausted man in the world."

Ruggles looked at his watch. "It is eight o'clock now. Markley will sleep until midnight at least. He will wake refreshed and clear-headed then, ready for our escape from the city."

Ruggles got to his feet. "I'll see what we've got in the ice box," he went on. "You can't go out to dinner anywhere made up as you are now—Markley's description is all over the city, and you'd be picked up by the first policeman who saw you. Dorgan was a very popular police officer, and the Policemen's Association has offered a reward of two thousand dollars for Markley's arrest. Stannistreet didn't mention that, but I heard about it."

Ruggles went into the rear of our little apartment, and soon returned with a camp supper that was sufficient and satisfying.

When we had finished, and we had carried the dishes into the butler's pantry and left them for Mrs. Watts, our excellent housekeeper, to wash in the morning, Ruggles telephoned downstairs to her that we were very busy and under no circumstances could see any one during the evening.

Mrs. Watts, the janitor's wife, had looked after us for four years, and her promise that we should not be disturbed meant that, to all intents and purposes, the telephone was taken out and the front doorbell removed instantly from our apartment.

Ruggles stood near the locked door of the bedroom and listened to Markley's snoring. Then, to make doubly sure that Markley was asleep, Ruggles dropped from one of the back windows into the court, and entered the bedroom through a hidden panel which, on more than one occasion, had served us well as both entrance and exit.

At Ruggles's request, I had followed him now, and in a moment his flash light showed Markley's dreadful face, more forbidding, it seemed to me, in slumber than during his waking hours.

Markley snored, but for all that he was as unconscious as a dead man. Nothing short of the last trumpet, which in his case would summon him to the blackest corner of Hades, could have wakened Markley.

We retraced our steps, and this time Ruggles settled himself in his accustomed chair in our living room.

"You can see how it is," he said; "it's come—the thing I've been afraid of every moment of the ten years since I turned straight."

"You mean that that devil in there, Markley, has got something on you?"

"Yes, something real. I've told you more than once, Dan, that I was a near-crook; but I wore better. I thought I did, when I told you that."

"Is there anything we can do?"

"I'm glad you said *we,*" Ruggles said. He put his hand on my shoulder with a quick, eloquent pressure. Then he got to his feet wearily.

"I think I'll stretch out on that couch, Dan. I'm tired for what I believe is the first time in my life; and I've got to do some thinking. I'll just lie down there, close my eyes, and work this thing out somehow; and maybe after that I can get some sleep."

His face, as I looked at it as he turned, seemed to me to have aged incredibly; his wide shoulders, which I never had seen slump before, were slumped now; his head, which I had always seen him carry as erect as a stag's, was bowed on his breast.

"If I do go to sleep—and I need to—wake me in a couple of hours, will you. It will be half past ten then, and time for us to get started for Christopher Street."

He lay down on the couch then, snapped off the light near its head, and closed his eyes.

I had not asked him any details of the sudden trouble which now racked him. I knew as much as I ever wanted to know: Ruggles was fighting a battle which not even I, his best friend, could help him with.

That dubious past, which he had buried and hidden under ten years of straight living and marvelous service in the suppression of crime, had come to life again.

Markley knew about it—knew all of it; so did his four companions; the five had constituted a gang with which Ruggles had worked; in just what capacity, was not clear yet; but it must have been definite enough, for Markley had come, now, given his orders, and Ruggles had not even made an attempt to disobey.

His association with this gang of criminals had been definite; he had known them long and known them only too well.

And I saw in this the answer to a question which had come back and back to me: how had Ruggles come to know so well the working of the criminal mind? Yes, I knew the answer to that question now—he knew the criminal because he had once—

Not even now, could I bring myself to finish that statement. But my thoughts raced on: it was because he had lived with them, that he was able now to anticipate the workings of the criminal mind.

For he did know the underworld so marvelously well; he knew all the organizations of crime in America, Europe, and the Far East, as well as Mexico and South America.

But he knew best New York's great underworld, this vast, teeming Manhattan where, of all the world, perhaps, were the most highly specialized, best organized, and best financed syndicates of crime whose chiefs, lieutenants, and sub-lieutenants he had dedicated himself, his life, and all his extraordinary abilities to fight.

He knew them all, the whole rank and file, from the carefully shrouded backers, whose names never appeared, down to those conscienceless, desperate, mentally undeveloped creatures who ferociously executed their chiefs' commands and so formed what might be called the cutting edge.

Ruggles knew them all, and they knew him—knew that his death was the only thing that could spell safety for them. He had them all on his list, and he was steadily working down it. Many he had convicted already and placed in the chair or behind the bars. The rest he would reach as soon as their turns came.

For those new recruits of the underworld, those who had not realized until too late that the net was closing in on them, Ruggles felt only the profoundest pity, and for them he did all he could.

But to those who came out, nightly, like the predatory animals they were, to roam the jungles of the greatest city in the world, he showed no mercy; for well he knew that they would show him none when the final show-down came.

Bribes, threats, attacks on his life—all had been tried, time after time, and would be tried, we both knew, until the end.

This continuous hazard was inseparable from the work he did; and for this work he was peculiarly well equipped: his restless and eager mind was a veritable storehouse of information on every subject under the sun, and all of this limitless mass of fact and detail was ever ready at the call of his photographic memory.

Added to this was his extraordinary ability as an actor; and this, and his recently demonstrated power as a master in the art of makeup, had saved us in many desperate crises. And he was able as readily to detect another's masquerade.

Physically he was quite the finest human animal I have ever seen: something over six feet in height, weighing nearly two hundred stripped, an extremely proficient boxer, he combined with the terrific hitting power of the best heavyweights, that catlike activity and speed which is as a rule associated only with the best of the lightweights.

CHAPTER IV

AN UNHOLY CONFERENCE

IF, I say, Ruggles had ever lived less than straight, he was doing his best to atone for it now. It was enough for me that, from the first day of our association, I had found him the unfailing, effective, and sympathetic refuge of the terrified, the helpless, and the oppressed who, though innocent, were too terrified even to attempt to prove their innocence.

If, during the four years I had known him, he had broken the law—and most certainly I had known him to break it—it was never for his own gain, but always to right a wrong. Ruggles's sins were always benevolent.

How successful he had been, until now! Until now, it had seemed to me that he must always succeed—as if nothing could check his successful advance against these predatory animals he opposed. But I knew, in my heart, that I should have anticipated the present moment when his buried past had risen up to thwart him and defy him.

What could I do to help him? Closing my eyes and letting my head rest on my hand, I tried, for what seemed weary hours, to work some way out of it for Ruggles, some escape for him from Markley and those four other members of the band.

The realization of what it seemed to me must be Ruggles's unescapable fate: his arrest, disgrace, and conviction, had wearied me—made me want to sleep until the end of the world.

It was absolutely still in the room. Markley's snores still penetrated the door of the bedroom, but Ruggles, I was thankful to see, was sleeping as peacefully as a child.

Sleep called to me. I wanted nothing in the world so much as sleep. Rising, I went to the wall switch, turned it, and felt grateful for the soothing darkness which instantly settled on the room. Feeling my way back to my chair, I settled myself in it again, closed my eyes, and, as before, rested my head on my hand.

I must have slept—it might have been for moments only, or it might have been for hours; then a strong hand roused me.

" Yes," I said. " All right. Only don't turn your flash light right in my eyes, Ruggles."

I sat up, only to be thrown down and pinned to the back of my chair. The gun I had snatched for and found was torn from my fingers. The wall switch was turned, and the flooding electric glare showed me a sight which bewildered me:

Ruggles was not on the couch and he was not in the room; instead, were Markley and four other men, one of whom relaxed his inexorable grip on me as another covered me with his gun.

" Garrison did a good piece of work on 'im, I'll say that, anyway, fer 'im," one of them said, after examining my face with patient and searching scrutiny. " Garrison was always good at this. You know yourself, Cottrell."

" Sure, I know," the man addressed as Cottrell said. " If it wasn't fer those clothes o' yours, Markley, I'd feel like asking this bird here to pay me that bunch of bucks you owe me."

There was a grim laugh; then they began to talk among themselves of some job they were scheming out. No one spoke to me; they regarded me, from time to time, just as their eyes happened to fall on me; but it was clear that, for the time, they regarded me merely as a piece of furniture.

This gave me an opportunity of studying them in detail; and little by little, from their talk, I became able to place them: the lanky, black-haired man of perhaps forty was Cottrell; Mueller was light-haired and blue-eyed, younger and stouter, a very powerful man, I set him down.

Hilliard, stooping and small of build, and quick as a cat in his nervous movements, was blue-eyed, too, a much older man, probably in his late fifties—an English crook, I judged, from his general cut and accent.

Branley I was sure was a Frenchman, for all his Saxon name: he was fat and bearded, without a trace of color in his sallow cheeks, and with deep-set furtive eyes which told of a treacherous, brooding nature.

Fortune, or fate, rather, had placed me where I could identify now all the five members of the band with which, in what capacity only Ruggles and they knew, my friend and companion of so many thrilling and dangerous hours, had been associated.

This was the dubious crew on whom Stannistreet had urged Ruggles to " get the dope "; and, even at this dangerous moment, when I was powerless in their hands, I thought of the singularity of this fate.

Stannistreet had asked Ruggles to get the dope; but it was I, the less famous and clever of the two of us, who, by my own ill luck, had been enabled to secure it.

Their talk ran on. I could not get the thread of their plan, but it was evidently clear enough to them. Markley left the engineering of it to Mueller, who seemed to be the brains of the five.

Then Markley helped himself to another cigar from my humidor and said to his pals: " You all might as well fill your pockets with these. No one will smoke them if we don't." And as they acted on his suggestion, he looked about the room reflectively, and went on: " It's no wonder Ruggles took a shine to this place. He'll think of it, now he's left it."

" I wonder where he'll show up next," Hilliard said.

" He'll keep under cover awhile," Mueller said slowly, " then come out with a moniker and in a business as far away as he can get from the one we ran him out of."

" But we'll run into him, some time or other," Branley said, " and, when we do, we'll know what to do with him."

" You said it," Markley agreed with savage emphasis. " We'll find him, one of these days, and then make sure of it. He can't give us away to the bulls without giving himself away, but we'll all feel safer, once he's knocked off."

That seemed to them all to sum the situation up as far as Ruggles was concerned. And the first part of it fitted in with the conclusion which suddenly had come to me: Ruggles had decided on flight as the only way out of his predicament.

And I agreed with him: here were five men, all of whom could, and would, in an extremity, bring Ruggles's freedom to an end by telling his story to the police. Not all of Ruggles's long and extraordinary service in suppressing crime would help him then. It would be merely a matter of innocent or guilty, and the law would decide what my friend's fate would be.

Yes, flight had been the only course for him. For, if he stayed, he would have to aid Markley, the murderer, in escaping; and that in itself would have made Ruggles guilty of a felony.

" Yes, your friend, Mr. Ruggles, has gone," Markley said, reading my thoughts with his heavy-lidded eyes. " I woke up in there," jerking his head toward our extra bedroom, " after one of the best little naps I ever had; and when I came in here with these pals o' mine waiting at the front door as they'd agreed to be, your light was turned off and you were asleep in that chair you're in now; and your friend, Ruggles, had gone."

" Out the back window," Hiliard said; " we'd have nailed 'im if he'd come out the front!"

" Front or back," Markley went on evenly, " he's gone; and he's left you in a fix he didn't figure on. It's time you knew what your job is, Crane," he went on with that savage humor which, already, I had come to associate with him.

" You're going to knock off Stannistreet to-night—Mr. Stannistreet, the detective, who's known as Henry Fowler, at the apartment he rents at 144 Perry Street.

" You're going to knock off Stannistreet before the world's an hour older, Crane; and these pals o' mine, who the bulls *don't* know, are going to come in and catch you red-handed, and give you up to the bulls, then make their getaway to where I'll be waiting—and the five of us will just naturally pull our freight out of this nice little town you got here."

That was it, then—a plan so hideous that it made my blood run cold—a plan, too, which from its very boldness and shrewdness bid fair to succeed.

They had more brains than I had given them credit for, these devils who now leered so triumphantly at me; they had seen their chance to use the trump card which Ruggles unsuspectingly had placed in their hands: his having made me up so exactly to resemble Markley.

The facts came over me with a numbing force; made-up as I now was, Stannistreet and his men would simply laugh at me if I went to them and told them that I was *not* Markley.

And, even after I had washed my make-up off in their presence and they recognized me as Ruggles's assistant, I should find myself only in a new predicament.

They would ask me how I came to be made up as Markley and who had done it; and I could not answer those questions without revealing Ruggles's part in the business.

Because I could see nothing but a blank wall in that direction—for I swore to myself that, come what might, I should never give Ruggles away—I turned my thoughts to another section of the problem: Markley had told me that I was to kill Stannistreet, the detective.

The reason why Markley wanted Stannistreet killed was clear enough: Stannistreet was the only man living who could prove that Markley had killed Dorgan, the policeman.

Gradually, what I was sure was Markley's real plan, began to become clear to me: Markley did not mean that I was to kill Stannistreet.

Markley would do that himself; but the thing was going to be done in a way which would throw the guilt on me and I was to be taken and held for the killing.

Markley, I realized, had spoken the truth when he said that the police and detectives did not know his pals. Stannistreet himself, had admitted this to Ruggles and had driven the admission home by urging on Ruggles the imperative need of his "getting the dope" on who Markley's pals were and where they were.

The police not knowing them and not having anything on them yet, there was nothing I could see to prevent the thing working out exactly as Markley had said.

Any one of these pals of his could deliver me to the police for the murder of Stannistreet; that would relax the search for the real Markley and he and his gang would be able to slip safely out of the city before I could establish my real identity.

Once Markley and his men had got me that far, I could see no way of balking them. And yet there was a way, if I could put it into execution: if I could get the make-up off now, they might do to me what they would; but I knew that this was the only way and that this was the last moment I could attempt it.

CHAPTER V

DANGER IN THE DARK

THE bathroom was just behind me; if I could reach that, slam and lock the door, I could get the make-up off before they could batter the door down.

Ruggles's example had taught me the value of instant action; with one spring I was out of my chair and at the bathroom door before any one of my captors could stop me.

But my wild rush was my ruin. The rug at the door slipped under my flying feet; I went down in a heap on the hardwood and waxed floor, and in a twinkling Markley and Hilliard and Branley were holding me.

"None o' that," Markley said with frightful calm: "we know your game—going to clean yourself up and spoil it. But we won't stand for that!"

In an instant, I was flung back into the chair I had just left, and my hands and ankles were lashed in a way to make further hope of my plan impossible.

"It's time we were starting," Mueller said impassively. He had not moved a muscle, and now looked at me only reflectively. "Call a taxi, Cottrell!"

Then, when Cottrell had left: "Don't

tie his feet! Get that stuff off his ankles, Markley—he's got to walk down the steps to the taxi, hasn't he? You'll find his coat and hat in that closet, probably, Hilliard.

"Put them on him, just fold the coat over his shoulders and button it in front at the top, when Cottrell comes with the taxi. Wait; I've got a better way—free his hands, too, Branley!"

"What, you think you're doing," Markley demanded. "Don't touch those cords on his wrists, Branley!"

Mueller still did not move, except to the extent of shifting from one corner of his mouth to the other the cigar he was idly smoking.

"Markley, who's running this thing? You or I?"

"Well," Markley replied, "you're running it, I guess; but I don't like the idea of his hands being free."

"If I'm running it, I'm running it," Mueller said. "I'm going to take him, I mean we're going to take him, to Luigi's place on Christopher Street, and—" The rest of the sentence was whispered by Mueller into Markley's ear.

"Say, that's *too* much," Markley ground out from between his clenched teeth. "The first thing he'll do will be to—" He, in his turn, whispered something to Mueller.

"No, he won't—not that first," Mueller replied. "I'll tell you what he'll do first, and it's just what we want him to do." Again he whispered something to Markley.

"If he does, it's what we want, as you say," Markley replied; "but how can you be so sure?"

"Wait and see," Mueller said.

Then Cottrell came in, saying that the taxi was at the door.

Mueller had his way: my wrists were freed, and I was told to stand up. Then Hilliard gave me my hat and overcoat.

"You're going to walk down the steps to the taxi with us," Mueller said, standing close by me. "You're going to ride with us and not say a word or make a sign to any one, no matter who you see or what he says to you.

"Try anything, Mr. Crane, and whatever happens to us as a result, you'll be as dead as Dorgan is now and as Stannistreet soon will be!" He showed me an automatic ready in a hand that was as cool and steady as a rock. Then we went out to the taxi.

From our apartment—the one which had been Ruggles's and mine—on West Eighty-Sixth Street—to Luigi's place, at No. 17 Christopher, was about five miles. Again and again, of course, on the way down, we stopped with the traffic, often with a traffic officer at our very side.

One word, shouted by me, would have riveted his attention on us and he would have ordered our driver to pull up to the curb. But Mueller's gun kept pressing against my side and I knew he would keep his word. At my first attempt to call help, Mueller would plunge me into eternity.

On and on we went, in absolute silence, past officer after officer, not one of whom dreamed that Markley, murderer of their brother officer, was one of the men in that orange and black taxicab.

Then the cab came up to the curb opposite the gloomy rookery known as "Luigi's place." Stannistreet had been right when he said that Ruggles and I knew the spot, having captured Pendler, the drug-vendor there in March. Ruggles had not told Stannistreet, but the fact was tha' we had known that dubious den long before that, for we had taken even more dangerous and worse "wanted" criminals than Pendler, the drug-vendor, from Luigi's place.

But in spite of the evil repute the old shambling, slatternly building bore, I was sure that none of those who had fled to it from justice, had ever been "wanted" more than Markley was now for the murder of Dorgan, the policeman.

The taxi stopped at a word from Mueller; Hilliard and Branley and Cottrell got out, crossed the street, and went into Luigi's, leaving Markley, Mueller and me in the taxi.

After a few moments, which Mueller kept track of by the watch on his plump wrist, he got out of the taxi and whispered, as he leaned in through the open door toward me:

"Get out, now, Mr. Crane. Lean over so as to hide your face and alter your appearance as much as you can, then run across the street and into the side door! You know the place?"

"Yes," I said.

"Don't speak," Mueller said softly; "answer me with a gesture. Nod, when you mean *yes*. I can see you clearly. After you have gone into the side door, you will meet Hilliard, who will direct your next move. Now; run, and bend over! The side door! Understand? Run, when I count *three*. Got that?"

I nodded.

He counted in his soft voice—"One—two—three!"

At the last word, I bolted—not into the side door, but for the alley to the right.

A bullet, fired from an automatic with a perfect silencer, hit the cement just ahead of me, pinged off and crashed through a window somewhere. I abandoned all hope of the alley and swerved into the side door of Luigi's and there Hilliard was waiting for me.

Without a word, almost without looking at me, and indicating his next move only by closing an iron hand on one of my wrists, he led me swiftly up a flight of stairs, where Cottrell, as silent as Hilliard, and as prompt, took me up another flight, Hilliard going swiftly down the stairs up which we had come.

It was Branley who met me at the top of the second flight of those ill-kept and forbidding stairs, and he dragged me up still another flight and plunged me into that small, breathless, lightless back room from which, only three months before, Ruggles and I had carried the senseless body of Pendler, the drug-vendor.

What their intention was in bringing me here, only they knew—it had all been worked out by Mueller, undoubtedly, and I realized the futility of my trying to plumb the dark depths of Mueller's mind.

Back in the comfortable little apartment which had come to mean so much to me, I had heard Mueller assure Markley that when they had brought me to this tomblike room at Luigi's, I could safely and surely be counted on to do a certain thing—a thing, moreover, absolutely essential to the success of their plot to bring about the death, to-night, of Stannistreet.

There was something bewildering in realizing that, without my being told or in any way consulting me, these men confidently looked to me to perform, on scheduled time and with complete obedience to them, an act by which they, my enemies, would profit.

I tried to imagine what this anticipated act of mine was to be; in their plans for me and for themselves, it unquestionably played a vital part, but the more I groped for it, the less able I was to settle on anything which, in my mind, could be the thing they had planned for me to do.

But, though I could not fathom their plans for me, I knew that they had overplayed their hands: I did indeed know this old rookery—I knew it far better than they thought I did.

It was not for nothing that Ruggles and I had hunted Pendler and others as bad and even worse through this ancient ruin of a building.

Markley and Mueller would be waiting in the taxi across the street, and Cottrell, Hilliard, and Branley unquestionably were stationed at the front and the two side doors; but there was still another exit and I needed no flash light to find it for me.

All in a flash, I had remembered this. Ruggles himself had showed it to me. Instantly, I abandoned all effort at imagining what my recent captors had planned for me to do.

Standing motionless by the wall against which Branley had thrust me, I closed my eyes and visualized the approach to the tunnel by which I knew I should presently escape.

I had ascended three flights of stairs, the first under the espionage of Hilliard, the second with Cottrell, and the third with Branley; I was now on the fourth floor. To reach the exit I had so luckily remembered, I had, I knew, to descend to the street floor; but I would reach it by the back stairs and not by those up which I had come.

It was a matter of only an instant for me to feel in my back hip pocket for my small automatic; there is was, and my fingers told me that it was loaded and ready if I needed it.

Slipping the gun into my right side coat pocket, then taking off my shoes and tying the laces together, I fastened my belt over the connecting strings and thus made the shoes fast at the same time having both my hands free.

There was no light in this room I knew; and it was as dark as if its four walls, floor, and ceiling had been sheathed with tar paper. I felt along until I touched the door, then stood motionless again.

The moment of danger would come when I opened that door and stepped into the hall which, I remembered, was lighted none too well for general purposes and yet much too well for mine, by low-turned and weakly flickering gas jets.

I felt reasonably sure that Markley and his gang would be waiting outside; but they might have stationed some one outside my door, for all that.

Whatever the risk was, however, it had to be taken, and I took it quickly in a series of bounds which almost instantly carried me past the head of the stairs and into the almost pitch-black corridor in the first angle of which I crouched, panting but overcome with relief.

CHAPTER VI

NUMBER ONE-FORTY-FOUR

IN my first dash through the doorway of the room I had just left, it had seemed to me that I saw a huge, black shape glide into a room a little way down the hall; but there had been no effort at pursuit, and after a moment I could persuade myself that it had been my imagination only and not an actual witness of my swift escape.

Old though the house was, and neglected though it had been for who knew how many years, the floor was solid still and no board creaked under my feet as I hurried along, found myself almost immediately at the head of the back stairs, and began instantly their descent.

Their first turn brought me close to a window; a close, sultry air flowed heavily in on a sullen, heavy bellow of thunder; at the same time, something made me turn swiftly and look up the stairs I had just darted down. What I had expected to see, I could not have told; but, stare as I could, I could see nothing. Then, just as I was turning, grateful for having caught no pursuer in the act of following me, the whole world seemed to turn a sickly, livid gray and simultaneously to reel under a volcanic vibration of thunder. In an atom of time, that dazing flash of lightning had passed, but I knew I had seen, leaning over the stair's rail above me, a huge, hairy face, not speaking, not moving—but seeing me, I could not deny now, and seeming to know where I was going, even to what my desperate errand was.

I had used caution in descending the stairs until now; but now I threw caution to the winds—speed was my only hope and I knew it—escape, before this watcher could warn Markley and his gang where I was.

The burly giant who had peered down at me could not overtake me; my danger was that he might dart to one of the front windows and hail Markley and Mueller from there; if he did, they would have only to rush to the exit for which I was making at the back, and I should be trapped like a fly in a bottle.

My only hope was to reach that exit and get out before they could reach it.

Then I became aware of a new danger: instead of warning Markley and Mueller at the front, my pursuer was descending the stairs after me.

This I knew from the heavy steps whose sound, between the recurrent crashes of thunder, he now made no attempt to hide. On down he came, two steps, three at a time, the banister creaking and seeming about to give way under his heavy hand as he hung to it while sluing round its successive turns.

With my thoughts concentrated on the danger drawing every moment nearer behind me, I had forgotten the dangers lurking before my face: I reached the cellar door only to find standing before it a braced, apelike figure of a man who warned me back with a leveled gun.

If I had wanted to stop, I could not have done it—the door was exactly at the stair's foot and before the man could pull the trigger of his gun or spring aside I was on top of him, by the sheer momentum of my rush hurling him on his back and knocking him unconscious.

In an instant I had the cellar door open, had sprung through the doorway, closed and bolted it behind me, then was down the brilliantly lighted stairs into the cellar, across it, and had dived like a frog into the tunnel-like exit.

There was wet earth under my stockinged feet now, and in the silence I heard the crash of the cellar door as my gigantic pursuer broke it in; then I was out in an open court, was across this and out between two tenements and on the sidewalk.

With my last strength, I leaped to the running-board of a passing taxicab and, as I crawled, with the driver's help in through the door, told him to make all the speed his car could do to 144 Perry Street.

If the giant, who had gained on me in our descent of the stairs, had come up with me then, I could have made no resistance: I was as spent as a runner after a marathon and, I believe, should scarcely have felt anything that my huge enemy might have done to me.

But, as the taxi gained speed and I looked through the side window, I could see nothing of my pursuer. The sluicing rain lashed my face and I was glad of its invigorating coolness; but the glare and glitter of the lightning blinded me the next instant, and I ran up the window and leaned back in my seat, working out the details of what my next move must be.

I must warn Stannistreet that Markley was coming to kill him. I could not give the warning over the telephone, for my voice, husky as it was now from anxiety over Ruggles and my despair at discovering that he had gone, would not have been recognized by Stannistreet.

The only thing for me to do was to go direct to the detective's house and give him the warning face to face. I was confident then I could make Stannistreet believe me.

The taxi was taking me there swiftly. It was no distance from Christopher Street to Perry Street. Before I could realize it, the taxi stopped at the door, and I was paying the driver his charge.

" Wait a minute," he said quickly. " Sure this is the right place? There's no light showing here."

He was right; but the flash light, which I had out in an instant, showed the number " 144 " above the door.

" Yes," I said, " this is the place. Pull up to the curb, across the street, and wait for me!"

" How long 'll I wait," he asked, naturally enough.

" I don't know," I said dully. " Perhaps you had better not—wait." That was it: I had no idea of when I should come out of that door under those three numerals; I might never come out at all. I heard myself repeating mechanically the words: " Perhaps you had better not wait."

" Just as you say," the driver said surlily. He started his taxi, saying to me at the same time: " There's a taxi parked over there anyway."

His gears went into second, then into high, and his tail-light dwindled in size, then disappeared down the teeming street.

I dashed up the steps of the apartment house and turned the knob of the door, but the door did not open. There was a bell at the right hand side; I found it after running my fingers up and down the dripping wood. The janitor's bell, I knew; and I started to press it, then stopped, for I did not want the janitor.

My association with Ruggles had taught me to keep equipped with skeleton keys and had made me an expert in the use of them; so it was not more than a minute before I had the door open and was standing in the vestibule; and there, on the tablet at the right on the wall, was the name by which Stannistreet had told Ruggles and me he was known here by:

HENRY FOWLER
Suite No. 16

That meant the top floor, and I rushed up the stairs.

It was at the back of the house. The halls were dimly lighted—low-power electric light bulbs—evidently the landlord was thrifty. But there was enough light for me to read the numbers over the doors I passed.

I doubted if there was an elevator in

the remodeled building, but, even if I had seen an elevator, I should not have taken the time to rouse the elevator boy. I did not want to lose the time, and I did not want him any more than I had wanted the janitor.

I dashed on up the stairs, and "Suite 16" glared at me like the glowing eye of a lighthouse from which the shrouding fog has suddenly lifted. It may have been that my rush up the steep flights of stairs had left me breathless, or it may have been my sudden thankfulness that I had arrived in time.

Be that as it may, my legs suddenly went weak, and I leaned against the open window at the end of the hall for support.

Then I was across the hall and knocked on the door with my clenched fist.

"Stannistreet," I called, through the door. "Stannistreet?"

The door opened, and Stannistreet looked down at me.

"Markley and his gang are coming to kill you," I cried, bringing the words out in a rush. "They's coming—"

No word of his stopped me: it was his automatic, which had leaped to a level with my chest.

"Markley," Stannistreet said hoarsely. "Markley, by ——"

In the blur which fell suddenly between Stannistreet and me, I saw him coming straight at me.

"I am Crane," I said. "Crane! I—"

"All right—Crane," Stannistreet said grimly. Then, as his gun rose, then turned, butt down. "Call yourself Crane if you like. Think you could get me the way you did Dorgan?"

His loaded hand, which held my eyes fascinated, fell like a bolt from the sky down on me. Too late I remembered my disguise. "It's Crane," I tried to say. Then something crashed down on my head; I felt unsupportable pain, then toppled backward into a bottomless abyss.

When I could see again, I realized, as much as my numbed faculties enabled me to realize anything, that my hands and feet were bound, and a gag I could not dislodge made speech impossible. Some one had propped me up in a chair—Stannistreet, of course—and lashed me securely to the front and the back of it.

I could see the inside of the room now for the first time; Stannistreet was sitting at his desk with his back to me. I had no idea what interval of time had elapsed; but he was evidently pondering, at the moment, some legal document, one of those with which I could see that the desk was littered.

He paid no more attention to me than if I had never existed, and the utter cold-bloodedness of this struck me through and through; I forgot what I should have remembered: that, to Stannistreet, I was Markley, Markley, who had come there, the detective believed, to kill him. I forgot this, I say; I could remember only that Stannistreet, my old friend, Stannistreet sitting there with his back to me at his desk, had knocked me out with the butt of his gun, had bound and gagged me, and now, having made sure of my helplessness, had no further thought of me.

That was it: to him I was Markley, his prisoner, now. Before long, he would look up from his work, over which he was bending motionless now, and, if something reminded him that I was there, lashed to the chair behind him, he would reach for the telephone at his right, on the flat-topped desk, and give the notice of my arrest to police headquarters.

A policeman, two, probably, would come then and take me away, gagged still and unable even to attempt to demonstrate my real identity.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE STAIRS

THEN a new phase of my predicament occurred to me: to the police, who would come for me, I should be Markley as I was to Stannistreet. Markley had killed Dorgan, the policeman; and all the police in Manhattan were possessed with one burning desire now—to get their hands on the man who had murdered Dorgan.

I heard then what made my blood turn to ice: the almost inaudible sound of some one coming up the stairs. Stannistreet did not hear it, for he was lost in his examination of the document or whatever it was which had so absorbed his interest.

But I heard that sound; try as I would to doubt it, I knew that I had heard it and could hear it now.

I could hear it because Stannistreet, without realizing it, had left the door open into the hall. I could hear even the faint sound of those catlike, cautious feet coming up the stairs, and I wondered, almost idly because I was so powerless to do anything, how I could hear so perfectly so soon after my head had been broken by a gun.

And then I realized that Stannistreet had struck me not with his gun, but with his fist; he had knocked me down and groggy for a few seconds, but I was myself now and had possession of all my faculties.

I had possession of them, but I was powerless to use them—powerless to warn Stannistreet that at this very moment when he felt so secure in my being his prisoner, Markley, or some one of his gang, was outside the door now with black murder in his heart and cold death in his hand.

Noiselessly the door slowly swung in and before me in the doorway, which I could just crane my back to see, stood Markley himself. I saw him and he saw me. His coming corroborated all my worst fears, but did not surprise me; and his eyes, as they rested on me, showed no surprise.

Then, with the speed of light and the soundlessness of a shadow, he had whipped a blackjack from under his left arm and was poised close behind the still unsuspecting Stannistreet. I made one final effort to dislodge the gag which Stannistreet had so effectively forced into my mouth, but I could do nothing.

Far from crying out to warn Stannistreet, I could not make a sound. I could only watch Markley draw the blackjack back, then bring it down in one terrific, crushing, killing blow.

It caught Stannistreet from behind and crushed his skull like an egg shell: what, up to the instant before, had been Stannistreet, now was only a broken dead thing, sagged forward, face down on the desk, as void of life now as if in that inert body there had never been a spark of life at all.

And yet, such was Markley's ferocity, he struck once more, and then again, each time bringing forth that terrible sound which had followed the first blow.

Sure then that his awful work was done, Markley bounded to me and said hoarsely:

" Mueller said you'd beat it here, if we set you free at Luigi's, and Mueller was right. Now you'll stay here until the bull Hilliard has tipped off has got here and arrests you for killing Stannistreet. I'm off —out of the city, and the others with me!"

" Just a moment, Markley!"

The voice came from the doorway, the open door into the hall, and my hair rose on my head and I could not have spoken a word even if the gag had been loosed from my mouth—for it was Stannistreet standing there, Stannistreet alive and alert, looking not at me, but at Markley.

" Tricked, by ——" Markley said in a ghastly, choking voice.

" Trapped," Stannistreet corrected evenly. " Up with your hands!"

Markley's only answer was one wild, desperate spring, a knife gleaming in his right hand. Stannistreet's gun sprang to a level; the room roared once, and Markley went down, dead even before his face crashed down on the door sill.

Stannistreet bent quickly over the body. As he did so, a vast, slouching figure leaned in from the hall, unseen by Stannistreet. In that moment, when I had thought all was right at last, I recognized the gigantic figure which had pursued me down the dark stairs at Luigi's, and I knew that, after all, we were lost, for I was powerless to aid Stannistreet, who at the moment was all off his guard; and, even if my hands had been free, this burly brute could still have mastered Stannistreet and me.

He leaned down over Stannistreet like a looming personification of Vengeance. His huge, hooked hands were almost on Stannistreet's neck.

With one final effort I could have been capable of at no lesser crisis, I snapped the cords which had fastened my wrists, then I tore at the gag, only to go nerveless as a bag at the words:

" Needn't look again; he's dead, Stannistreet."

The voice was Ruggles's.

"And that," Ruggles said when, half an hour later, he and I were back in the living room of our snug little apartment, "is the end of Markley. Stannistreet gets full credit for the capture, and all the reward, of course, and will probably get a promotion.

"I have asked him not to say anything about our part in the matter." Ruggles looked at me gravely. "Stannistreet feels very badly at having had to give you that crack on the head, but it was—"

"It was necessary to the scheme you worked out for the certain capture of Markley. I realize that, Ruggles, so let's say no more about it. But what was the rest of your share in the business? I think I'm entitled to know that, don't you?"

"Absolutely! The thing went like this: you remember, I put some stuff in that brandy we gave Markley early this evening, here at our rooms, and he went to sleep on the bed in that extra bedroom. I figured he was good for several hours' sleep, and I lay down on the couch, closing my eyes and more than half dozing."

"All of that," I said; "you were as fast asleep as Markley himself, though you didn't make as much noise about it!"

"When you turned the light off," Ruggles said, "I knew you were going to get some rest yourself and it was up to me to keep my eyes open.

"After awhile, I got up, went out the back window and into Markley's room the way we did before, and Markley wasn't there—for all his irregular living, he had the constitution of a gorilla, and the dope that would have kept a gorilla asleep had not been sufficient to quell the restless vitality of Markley.

"I knew then that I had a job on my hands—it was clear as day, of course, that Markley had gone off to kill Stannistreet, and I had got to prevent that and, at the same time, not let things get to the point where Markley would tell what he knew about me to Stannistreet."

"Why didn't you let me in on it?" I could not help asking.

"Because I knew you could help best by staying behind. You see, I knew Markley and his gang only too well, Dan, and I knew Markley wouldn't pull a thing like knocking off Stannistreet without talking it over with his gang first.

"It was safe to assume they were around near here somewhere and that Markley had gone out to collect them, then would come here and hold a council of war; plan the killing of Stannistreet and the escape of the band afterward. Having collected them and posted them by the place here where he could call them, Markley would come back.

"If he found both you and me gone, he'd know we'd gone to tip Stannistreet off; but if Markley found me gone but you here with that make-up still on, he would be sure I had taken to flight—then Markley would figure he had all the rest of the night to get Stannistreet in, and I should have time to warn Stannistreet and set the stage for Markley's capture at Stannistreet's apartment."

Ruggles held a match over the bowl of the pipe he had filled, then went on.

"I went out, got Stannistreet on the phone, and told him to get a 'dummy' at the little costumer's shop on Sullivan Street, dress it up right with a wig to match Stannistreet's hair, and have the costumer set it at Stannistreet's desk in the living-room of his apartment.

"That costumer used to be in the theatrical business and he's an artist; from the rear, with that lighting effect, there's not one man in fifty who wouldn't have sworn it was Stannistreet."

"It fooled me, all right," I admitted, "but go on."

"After I got that through Stannistreet's head, I came back here and hid where Markley and his gang couldn't see me. He came in first, found you asleep and me gone, and then went out and got the others.

"You know what happened after that. I followed your taxi down to Luigi's, phoned Stannistreet again, this time to say the thing was coming along fast; you were to be disguised as Markley; you were to be set free on the chance you'd beat it to his, Stannistreet's, apartment to warn him.

"Markley was to follow right on your heels, do the killing, and leave you to be held for it long enough for Markley and his men to get out of the city."

"What did Stannistreet say to that?"

"He thought I was cracked, at first," Ruggles replied; "but after he'd got it straight, he said they could run it off as fast as they liked.

"The dummy was in the chair at the desk and could do everything except smoke a cigarette, and Stannistreet himself was ready and would try not to hit you too hard when he domed you."

"He forgot about that part of it," I said, resentfully, for my head still ached. "Why did he have to soak me that way? Why didn't he let me explain things to him and then have me wait in one of the other rooms or come home here?"

"Don't you see," Ruggles asked. "Stannistreet had to have a witness of what Markley did, and you, under all the circumstances, were the logical one."

"Why?"

"Because Markley expected to find you there—he was sure you would be there—sure that Stannistreet would be sure you were Markley himself and would therefore capture you and after that be off his guard and in a position easy to kill. And, you see, Markley was only a couple of steps behind you, I mean behind us, when we reached Stannistreet's apartment."

"'Us,' you say," I demanded. "What do you mean—'us'?"

"I was on the back of your taxi," Ruggles said. "I came up the stairs only one turn behind you."

"Followed me from Luigi's all the way to Stannistreet's, then let him beat me up that way, bind and gag me?"

"Yes, because, as you've said yourself, Dan, it was the only sure way we had of saving Stannistreet's life, capturing Markley, and not having Markley blab the story of my past out to Stannistreet—Markley knew too much about me, Dan, altogether too much about me."

"What Markley knows, you needn't worry about any more," I said, "for Markley's dead."

"Cottrell is not dead," Ruggles said gravely; "neither is Branley, or Hilliard, or Mueller, and they know of me all that Markley knew. They know, and it is only fair that you should know: I was the 'fixer' for that gang. You know what that means."

"No," I said, "I don't know what that means, and I don't want to."

"You'll hear it, sooner or later, from one of the four if you don't hear it from me," Ruggles said unwillingly. "Those four crooks know enough about me to put me where I've put a good many men, and they won't rest, to the end of their days, until they've 'got' me."

"You should worry," I said; "they're beating it away from New York as fast as they can, at this moment, and they won't show up here again in a dog's age! You've nothing to fear from them, Ruggles! Besides, they ought to feel only gratitude toward you: in the old days, as Markley himself said, you got them out of many a bad hole."

"Yes, I did that," Ruggles admitted; "but they'll hold me responsible for Stannistreet getting Markley; and I *am* responsible for that, though I did it only because Markley broke his word to me—you remember, I said I'd stand by him only on his promise not to try to kill Stannistreet."

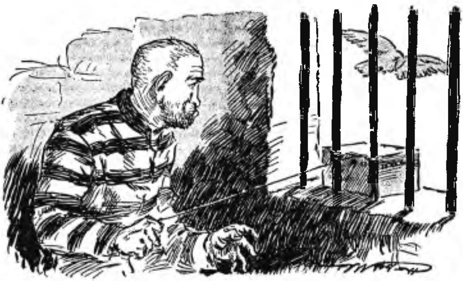
"Well, that lets you out, doesn't it?"

"Not in their eyes—not in Hilliard's Cottrell's, Brantley's, or Mueller's; they'll say I double crossed Markley, and they'll come back here, all at the same time, or one by one, to get me. I've brought you into danger enough before this, old man, but it will be just a case of living from minute to minute from now on. You'd better leave me."

"I'm not quitting."

Ruggles's powerful hand closed over my fingers. "I'm glad you're not! Dan, remember this, though: I *warned* you."

THE END



When the pigeon arrived he would pull the string

FRESH FISH! FRESH FISH!

By Joseph Fulling Fishman

HEREIN IS EXPOSED THAT LITTLE KNOWN BUT WIDELY ESTABLISHED INSTITUTION OF OUR AMERICAN JAILS—THE KANGAROO COURT

A Story of Fact

When you get a fish that's fresh and new,
And he don't know beans, but he thinks he do,
Just salt him down to a nice dark brown
With a little taste of the kangaroo.

IN spite of the fact that this sounds as though it may have been taken from a child's book of animal verses, it is just a part of an old jail song. A "fresh fish" is merely a new prisoner coming into jail, while "kangaroo" refers to the kangaroo court, one of the most curious organizations existing anywhere in the civilized world. And not only curious but practically unknown to those outside of prisons and jails.

It would seem impossible that an organization known to hundreds of thousands of men who have been in jail, and which has existed in this country for many years, should be so little known by the world at large that no mention of it has ever got into an encyclopedia or dictionary.

It is a fact, nevertheless. In the New York Public Library I searched every dictionary and encyclopedia I could find. The only reference any of them contained to a kangaroo was that it was an animal of Australia which carried its young in a pouch, and so on.

As a matter of fact, outside of books about jails, I have never seen the word in print, and dozens of authors and playwrights constantly writing stories about the underworld and underworld characters don't even know that it exists.

Nothing could better illustrate what a "close corporation" the criminal class is, and why it is so difficult to those " on the outside " to understand the workings of the prisoner's mind.

When a thing known to thousands and thousands of criminals can be kept from spreading to such an extent as to keep it out of the encyclopedias, it shows how really closemouthed the prisoner is about things in which he is interested.

For there are, in all probability, at least a thousand kangaroo courts in the United States. There are approximately three thousand county jails, and at a conservative estimate one-third of them have this organization existing among the prisoners.

In a few jails the sheriff or jail officials exercise a supervisory power over it, but in the vast majority the prisoners organize it, operate it, and mete out its punishments and penalties on the other prisoners without the slightest interference from the authorities.

The announced purpose of the kangaroo court, according to the jail authorities and the prisoners, is to maintain discipline and keep the institution in good condition. Sometimes it accomplishes these desirable ends.

In the majority of cases, however, it is simply an organization designed to levy tribute on the weaker prisoners or those known to have some money, and also for the purpose of providing amusement for the prisoners in order to while away the days, weeks, and even months of doing nothing.

The judge of the court is either the most popular or the most dominating among the prisoners. Perhaps the " toughest " would be the better word. For toughness is an asset not to be sneezed at when a man is in jail, as it undoubtedly saves him from considerable discomfort at the hands of the other prisoners.

He immediately appoints his assistants and the other court officers, these officers corresponding with the officers of a court on the outside. Sometimes the jail officials refuse to permit a kangaroo court to operate, but the majority of them look upon it as a help in maintaining discipline and keeping the jail clean and the prisoners contented.

More often than not it's simply tolerated by lazy or indifferent jail officials because it relieves them of responsibility, although even this type of jailer often has to step in to prevent the injury of an unpopular prisoner at the hands of a brutal court.

Let's take a look at the kangaroo court in operation. A new prisoner comes into the jail. Immediately the cry of " Fresh fish! Fresh fish!" is taken up from one end of the institution to the other

Out of the various cells pop the inmates, pouring into the corridor toward the entrance door to look over the new arrival to decide whether he's " blowed-in-the-glass " or not.

A blowed-in-the-glass stiff knows the ropes, and has probably seen many kangaroo courts. The court has to be a little careful with him. But if he's a kid who's never been in a stir before, there's fun and amusement for all, to say nothing of the possibility of replenishing the jail's depleted treasury by the addition of a few dollars for pies, cakes, cigarettes, and other luxuries.

Let's assume that we have one of the latter kind. An officer of the court immediately finds out whether the frightened new arrival has any " jack." This, of course, is most important.

The rapturous expression on the court officer's face—" Limpy " St. Clair by name —as he digs his hand into the newcomer's pocket, informs all present that pay dirt has been found.

His honor, " Digger " Henderson, the judge of the organization, immediately calls the court into special session. Digger earned his name by digging under the wall of a penitentiary and getting out into the open, where he obtained a splendid view of the rifle of a guard waiting for him, and then went back to serve the remainder of his time.

Digger is tough. The other prisoners know it, and Digger himself makes no effort to keep it a secret.

So the " fresh fish " is tried on the usual charge of " breaking into jail." Thousands of prisoners are every year tried by the kangaroo court in hundreds of jails for this same " heinous " offense.

"Noodles" Gallagher solemnly testifies that he was sitting in front of his cell playing crap with Ed Hughes and "Beans" Rogers when he saw the entrance gate swing open and a young man enter.

"Is this the young man?" inquires his honor. Noodles goes up to the "fresh fish," who has given his name as Pete Sinton, gazes at him intently, studies every feature carefully, and then replies: "Yes, your honor, this is the man I saw come in." Ed and Beans corroborate this statement.

Asked if he cares to say anything before sentence is pronounced, young Sinton gulps nervously two or three times, tries to speak, but merely shakes his head to and fro, whereupon his honor informs him that it is the judgment of the court that he be fined—here Judge Noodles runs his finger over a page of Breezy Stories, or any other book at hand, as though hunting the law—the sum of five dollars, which is to be used for the purchase of tobacco "an' sech other chow as the fellers want."

Glad to be let off so easily, young Sinton pays the fine. He thinks he's lucky, and he is, because if he hadn't been able to pay it he would have been sentenced to scrub the entire inner corridor of the jail under the supervision of Limpy St. Clair, Rube Elbows and Kid Skirts, who have shown by experience that they can be trusted to see that the fresh fish does a good job.

Now, cleaning the inner corridor of a small jail doesn't look like such an appalling job. But when you have three such taskmasters it's something which can be very easily underestimated.

The fresh fish starts to work. When he's through, St. Clair, with an expression of pained surprised, points to a dark spot in front of one of the cells. "It's a shadow," says the fish, who has at last found his tongue.

But St. Clair gives him a little lecture on such a patent attempt to dodge his work, admonishing him that only by doing his work well can he hope to progress in the world, and mentioning various well known captains of industry who owe their success to taking good care of the little jobs.

So Sinton scrubs on and after the lapse of a few moments his tormentor apologizes profusely, admitting that it is a shadow after all, and that it's funny he should have made such a mistake.

Occasionally, of course, his honor makes a mistake and catches a tartar. I remember upon one occasion seeing a kangaroo court "judge" in a jail in Arizona looking like he had been run over by a threshing machine.

It turned out that he had sentenced to floor-scrubbing a scraggly-looking "bum" who turned out to be a former champion pugilist down on his luck. When the judge sentenced him to polish the bars the "fresh fish" replied with a smack on the jaw which made his teeth rattle.

His honor sat down on the cold stone floor to think over what to do next, as there was no precedent in kangaroo court procedure for handling such an emergency at the moment. The judge finally decided he would hit him back.

But there were three or four pugilists dancing in front of his buzzing eyes and he couldn't decide which was the real one and which the figment of his disordered imagination. So he decided to adjourn court for the day.

I say there was no procedure for handling such an emergency *at the moment.* But there is a method of handling it ultimately, and no one prisoner who challenges the authority of the kangaroo court can hope to "get away with it." I have known it to be tried on hundreds of occasions, and in only a very small percentage is it successful.

This is for the very simple reason, of course, that there are many against one. So, in the case of this pugilist, nothing was done at the time. But, if it had not been this fighter's first taste of the stir, he would have thought better of antagonizing the court, as, in cases of the kind, reprisals are made when the refractory prisoner is asleep. This was exactly what was done in this case.

That night, while the pugilist was asleep, an "officer" of the court placed a twisted piece of paper between his bare toes and lighted it.

A moment after he had returned to his cell, ostentatiously snoring, there was a piercing scream which " awakened " all the other prisoners, who were lying, with ears tensed, waiting for it. No one, of course, knew anything about it. The prisoner's foot was terribly burned and blistered, taking several weeks to heal.

I have seen numbers of prisoners who have been so treated when they incurred the enmity of their fellow-inmates. And in the majority of cases they will get little sympathy from the jail officials. If one complains he'll probably be told by the jailer that it was his own fault, and that he should have obeyed the mandates of the court.

But it is when a " sucker " with plenty of money arrives that the kangaroo court stays in session almost continuously. A prisoner of this kind will be utterly amazed at the number of rules he can violate, notwithstanding his best efforts.

He will find that his cell is not clean, that he was seen spitting on the floor, that he left the shower turned on so that all the precious hot water ran away, that his bed was not properly made, *et cetera.*

If he takes the charges seriously and offers proof to offset them he will be charged with snoring and keeping the other prisoners awake. Quite naturally, he cannot deny this. For every such " offense " he'll be haled before the kangaroo court, fined a dollar or two by the judge, who puts on a " this-hurts-me-more-than-you " expression for the occasion, and admonished to go and sin no more.

The money, of course, goes into the " pot " and the genial Irishman who has the cake and pie privilege at the jail, wonders where all the new business is coming from.

The formality which is gone through in bringing charges, and particularly the seriousness with which some of the prisoners take it, would seem screamingly funny to any outsider permitted to witness it.

But outsiders never are, and I never knew any one, outside of officials whose business takes them into jail, who had seen such a trial. These charges, which are often in writing, will recite that, " on the 19th day of June, A. D. 1927, one Daniel Haggerty, alias Postage Stamps, alias Red, alias Fat, did, knowing and willfully, with malice aforethought, indulge in uncalled-for politeness to a ' screw ' by greeting him with the following words, to wit, that is to say: ' Good morning, Mr. Ketcham,' contrary to the form of the rules in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the Booneville County Jail."

Some of the old-timers have had indictments against them so many times that they can recite the form of them by heart. Indeed, I have met many jail prisoners who were as well versed in the criminal law as lawyers on the outside making many thousands of dollars a year by proving that their client wasn't there when it all happened.

It isn't usually necessary, however, for the court to bide its time to punish a refractory " culprit."

The judge is usually chosen because of his fistic ability, and when occasion demands his honor is not above laying aside the dignity with which he is invested, stepping down from the bench, and smacking the defendant in the jaw, thus speeding the course of justice and rendering undue delay unnecessary. Or, if his honor appears to be getting licked, his clerk and bailiff, and possibly one or two other attachés of the court will step in to aid him.

There is, therefore, little doubt about the ultimate result, although I knew one prisoner, a strapping six-foot surveyor, who had got into trouble through passing a bad check, who licked the judge and attachés of the court individually and collectively, then drew a line in the jail corridor and threatened to lick any man who crossed it.

As a result he had a private jail during the balance of his stay. But a case like this is decidedly unusual and it takes a scrapper of extraordinary ability to maintain such a position.

Hardened old-timers will often enter into the spirit of the court, when they haven't money, and agree, by hook or crook—usually, it is unnecessary to say, by crook—to get some luxury for the boys.

Thus, one I know promised that he would get a quart of whisky for the gang. He was placed "on probation" for three days, with the understanding that if he didn't make good, he would be compelled to work out his sentence.

The jail windows, on one side, opened out into a small court, the windows having a thick iron mesh screen over them to prevent the passing in of any contraband. The mesh was very fine, giving a space of but a small fraction of an inch. But the prisoner made good.

He "flew a kite"—as the prisoner calls a contraband letter—out to a pal, and a day or so later the pal appeared at the window with a cornucopia made out of heavy glazed paper.

He held the wide part of the cornucopia, which was filled with a quart of whisky, outside the bars, leaving the other end, which had a very small opening, just inside the mesh. He then tilted it and the delighted prisoners inside allowed the beverage to trickle into their tin cans.

Another moneyless prisoner agreed to give the court a squab dinner. No one expected him to make good, as this was an almost impossible undertaking. The prisoner asked for a week's probation, which an indulgent court granted, more out of curiosity than any other motive, to see what the prisoner would do.

The latter immediately got busy. Borrowing a box from the jailer, the prisoner took it apart, put it piece by piece through the bars, and reconstructed it on the outside, working by sticking his hands through the bars, and incidentally almost "beaning" a citizen below by dropping the hammer upon one occasion.

After the box was completed, he secured it to the bars with a string, then made a pigeon trap out of it by tilting the box, holding it up with a small stick and scattering bread crumbs and other food inside. It was not long until the pigeons began to arrive.

When one got inside the box he would pull the string attached to the small stick, the box would drop and the pigeon would be trapped. He kept them alive until he had got five or six, when he killed them and fried them on a shovel over a small spirit lamp.

I know of one case in which a prisoner made his experience with the kangaroo court pay dividends. The jailer told me this story just a few weeks ago. The incident happened during a murder trial which had aroused nation-wide interest.

The woman charged with the murder—incidentally she was subsequently acquitted—was confined in a small town jail. The jailer had been pestered to death by reporters wanting an interview with her, which the jailer refused to grant, as he had been threatened by the district attorney with the loss of his position if he permitted any one to see her.

One day a frowzy-looking "bum" was brought to the jail to serve ten days for vagrancy. The jailer took him down to give him the usual bath, when he noticed that, despite his filthy exterior, his underclothing was immaculately clean.

He immediately jumped to the conclusion that he was a newspaper man who had had himself committed in order to see if he could get to talk to the accused woman for a few moments. So he determined to take him "over the jumps."

Not only did he give him the most disagreeable jobs in the institution, but he "tipped off" the kangaroo court, which immediately began work to make his ten-day stay as miserable as possible.

He was charged by the court with every offense under the sun. In fact, the eyesight of the court officers became so keen that they were able to see things which never happened. The reporter took the tormenting in good part, paying the fifteen or twenty dollars which he was assessed in various fines.

But when he got out he sold an article on his experiences for five times the amount. This is the only instance I ever heard of where a prisoner made money out of a kangaroo court, and this "prisoner" probably has set a record.

But the kangaroo court is used not only to get money for the general fund out of which to buy luxuries, but also to provide amusement for the boys and alleviate some of the boredom of jail confinement.

Usually, of course, this amusement is at the expense of some half-wit or "prison simple," and sometimes the humor will be of a decidedly cruel nature. Often, however, it is just merely harmless fun. Prisoners, particularly the unsophisticated ones, will be tried on all kinds of ridiculous charges.

Thus, the kangaroo court in a jail which I used to visit frequently once tried a prisoner who wasn't "all there" on the charge of stealing a chicken and a pig. Before he was brought up for trial one of the prisoners opened a pillow, took out a handful of feathers, sprinkled them over the back of the "accused," put a considerable quantity in his pocket, stuck a few in his shoes, and so on.

Then, when he denied the theft, his honor directed that a search be made. When the accused prisoner saw the feathers taken off him, he promptly—and seriously—admitted the theft of the chicken, but denied positively that he had stolen the pig. He had just sense enough to know that they couldn't find any hog feathers on him.

This horse play, owing to peculiar conditions existing in some of the jails of the country, often sounds like comic opera.

For instance, in some of the smaller county jails, particularly through the South where most of the prisoners are mountaineers and countrymen known to the sheriff—and from whom he gets his political support—a prisoner is often intrusted with the key to the jail during the sheriff's absence, and I have, on dozens of occasions, on my regular visits of inspection for the government, been shown through the jail by a prisoner.

And, strange as it may sound, in many of these jails escapes are practically unknown, as these mountaineers have a curious sense of honor. They'll violate every liquor law that was ever put on the statute books, but once they're put on their honor not to escape, they can be absolutely depended upon.

In one such jail the kangaroo court tried a prisoner for keeping too close to the stove. He was found guilty and sentenced to spend an hour *outside the jail.*

As there was a cold rain falling, he protested vigorously against the cruel and unusual punishment, which he eloquently contended violated the constitution.

But the court instructed two of its officers to carry out the sentence, so, while the prisoner intrusted with the keys opened the door, the protesting "offender" was shoved out into the rain. He was let in, drenched to the skin, in half an hour, the court informing him that his time had been cut for good behavior.

The kangaroo court, of course, could not exist without the permission of the jail officials. Sometimes, however, when there are several dominating prisoners in the institution, the organization becomes so strong and well-knit that the prisoners try to use it to enforce demands for privileges against the jail officials; in other words, biting the hand that feeds them.

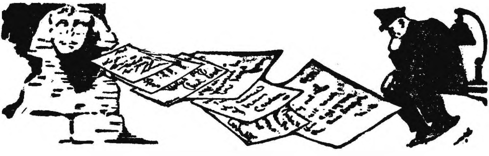
Usually it's because the particular hand doesn't feed them well enough to please them, as such demands almost invariably have to do with the menu. In the event the jail warden is a "weak sister" their demands are very often met.

Or, even if he isn't weak, he may be lazy or indifferent, or immersed in some outside prison, as many sheriffs are, so that he thinks the easiest way is to let the kangaroo court run the jail the way it sees fit.

The sheriff or jailer who wants to escape trouble in the long run will treat his prisoners fairly, kangaroo court or no kangaroo court, and stop right there, but if he has a kangaroo court he will find the situation much more difficult to handle.

When he awakens to the fact that the situation is getting out of his control it may be too late, as more than one serious beating or even killing of a jail official has resulted from his refusal to meet the demands of a particularly strong kangaroo court.

This is the reason why prison reformers everywhere are making a determined effort to stamp it out. And likewise the reason why they are making very little progress, as the vast majority of hardened jailbirds throughout the country respect nothing in the world but brute strength.



SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

Edited by M. E. Ohaver

PRESENTING A LIST OF SOLVERS AND THE SOLUTION TO CIPHER No. 47 OF JULY 23; ALSO, SOME TASTY NEW PUZZLERS TO SINK YOUR TEETH IN

ATTENTION, fans!

Here is the patiently awaited solution to cipher No. 47 of the July 23 issue.

As you may remember, this cipher was published with the statement that its solution would not appear in this department unless supplied by our readers themselves. We really expected some answers. And that our hopes were realized is demonstrated by the fact that these lines are being written.

As explained in the above mentioned issue, this cipher employed an alphabet of twenty-five numbers—I-J using the same symbol—five letters having one-figure substitutes, and the remaining twenty having two-figure substitutes. Spaces between substitutes were disregarded in enciphering, the cryptogram being transcribed in groups of five figures each.

With the key it would be an easy matter to regroup the figures and translate the resultant numbers. But without the key it becomes necessary to find which figures are used alone or as *unit* figures in the two-digit symbols, and which are used only as *tens* figures.

The fans were quick to discover several methods of doing this. Probably the most important of these is based on the simple rule that any digit preceded and followed by more than five different figures must be one of the unit figures.

The accompanying table shows the prefixes and suffixes of all nine digits in the present cipher. For example, *4* is preceded by 1, 2, and 3, and followed by 2, 6, 7, and 8; making six different figures in all. It must therefore be one of the unit figures. By the same token, *3*, *7*, and *8* are also units.

3-7-8	*1*	3-4-5-7
3-4-5-7-8	*2*	3-4-5
1-2-3-6-8-9	*3**	1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9
1-2-3	*4**	2-6-7-8
1-2-8-9	*5*	2-6-8-9
3-4-5-7-8	*6*	3-7-8
1-3-6-7-9	*7**	1-2-6-7-9
3-4-5-6	*8**	1-2-3-5-6
3-5-7-8	*9*	3-5-7

Another easy rule to apply is that all *doubled* figures—as 33 and 77 in this case—must be unit figures. It is also evident that the last figure in the cryptogram must be one of the "units." Accordingly *5*, which ended this cipher, can be placed in the same class with *3*, *4*, *7*, and *8*, already singled out by the above methods.

Now, if *3*, *4*, *5*, *7*, and *8* are the unit figures, the remaining digits, *1*, *2*, *6*, and *9*, must be the tens. This known, it is easy to regroup the cipher in symbols of one and two figures, and to solve by straight substitution methods.

13-8-5-68-67-67-7-97-67-93-13-8-14-68-93-
93-97-93-8-24-14-68-23-23-97-67-63-8-3-97-
17-97-67-97-13-8-67-14-8-15-93-4-68-13-3-
7-23-63-93-23-68-13-95-23-63-97-25-8-3-97-
67-93-8-24-23-63-97-14-7-13-95.

Thus, the predominance of 97, occurring nine times, suggests that it might be *E*.

In which case, the repeated *23-63-97*, ending in this assumed *E*, is probably *THE*. Determining other letters and words in a similar manner, the translation, given below, is soon reached. The alphabet—formed upon the key word CITADEL after the method in the July 23 issue—and a short example of the encipherment are also appended.

	C	B	O	W	I
2	F	P	X	T	G
6	Q	Y	A	H	R
9	Z	D	K	S	E
1	M	U	L	N	V
	4	5	8	3	7

Message:	N O B A R R I E R S. . .
Substitutes:	13-8-5-68-67-67-7-97-67-93. . .
Grouped:	13856 86767 79767 93. . .

"No barriers, no masses of matter, however enormous, can withstand the powers of the mind."

Methods for solving No. 47 were submitted by the following readers: Ken Davidson, Montreal, Quebec, Canada; H. L. Bellam, Reno, Nevada; J. Levine, Long Beach, California; and Arthur Bellamy, Boston, Massachusetts.

The several solutions agreed on all the main points, and the procedure given above embodies the best ideas from all four. For another cipher of this type, but in a different key, turn to Cipher No. 93, in this issue.

The key to No. 85 (Ken Davidson), of the October 22 issue, was *11-3*, conveyed by the signature "KEN," a *3-letter* word, the initial letter of which is the *11th* in the alphabet. To decipher the communication, merely transcribe it in lines of *11* words each—counting the dash at the beginning as a word—forming eleven columns. Then take every *3rd* column downward, disregarding the other columns, and get the message: "The man who succeeds in deciphering this must have made good use of his ability." It is easy enough when you get started.

Last week's No. 89 (Earnest Brewster) was merely a continuously written straight substitution cipher, using the subjoined simple numerical alphabet based on the key word HARLEQUIN, and conveying the following message. This one should have fallen an easy victim! Did you send Earnest your solution?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
H	*A*	*R*	*L*	*E*	*Q*	*U*	*I*	*N*	B	C	D	F
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
G	J	K	M	O	P	S	T	V	W	X	Y	Z

Message: Diamond salesman with samples valued at fifty thousand will leave on the noon train to-morrow. Meet me at the station.

This week's cryptograms are arranged approximately in the order of their difficulty. No. 92, the easiest of the lot, is the usual normally spaced, straight substitution type, each cipher letter fixedly signifying one message letter and no other. You should get around this in short order.

No. 93, after you have applied the method given above, should occasion you but little more trouble than No. 92. And that only because it will be a continuously written cryptogram instead of a normally spaced one. You won't find this hard if you try. But try!

Finally, sink your tooth into No. 94. This one is a combination substitute-transposition affair, and is a little more complicated. But friend Walker has so simplified both processes that we dare not give you a hint or we would give away the whole business. With the key you can read this at sight. What can you do without the key?

CIPHER No. 92 (R. B. Robinson, Jr., Los Angeles, Calif.).

NF SJBG QPFRGJL JQ XBGWBDCQ.
CJOF QCF IVLR SFJGL JWG RCVVQ
QV ZBYY. HJSQFS, HCBFE.

CIPHER No. 93.

65871 85673 23965 37891 98937 69518
15693 23512 39321 23796 58737 21418
73732 35623 72165 87135

CIPHER No. 94 (M. Walker, Akron, Ohio).

FTJFH OJIET ZBBTF SFEFU
NSOJE FIUOF NVFCP SIGTJ
PNUOT ISBXF UJUIF IUFPI
IVTBB UQQJP UOEFJ ICTVP
EOUTB IIUDF OBPOQ UTBAT

Next week: answers to Nos. 92, 93, and 94 in this issue; the method of solving No. 88 of two weeks ago; and some hints for No. 91, last week's "*Aloha Oe,*" the Hawaiian song cipher.

Don't forget, fans, to include explanations with ciphers submitted for publication.

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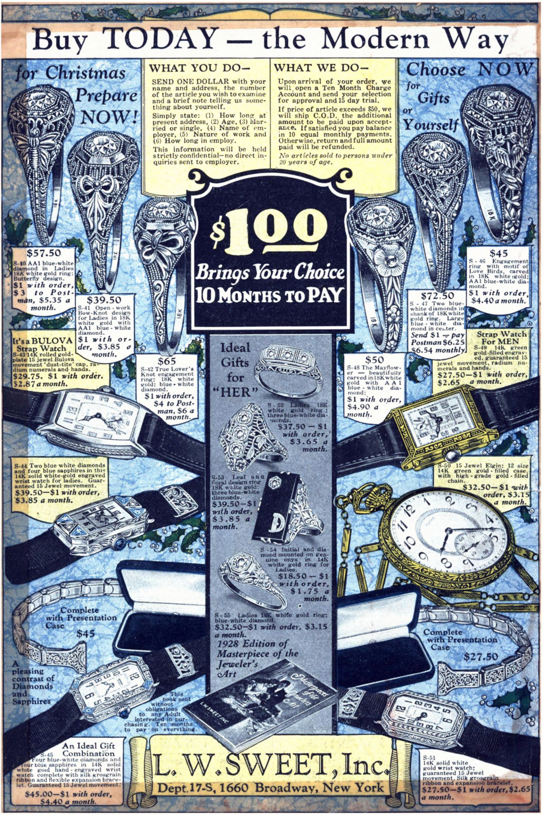

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S-40 AA1 blue-white diamond in Ladies 18K white gold ring: Butterfly design.
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S-41 Open-work Bow-Knot design for Ladies in 18K white gold with AA1 blue-white diamond.
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$65
S-42 True Lover's Knot engagement ring; 18K white gold; blue-white diamond.
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It's a BULOVA Strap Watch
S-43 14K rolled gold-plate 15 jewel Bulova movement 'dust-tite' cap, radium numerals and hands.
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$45
S-46 Engagement ring with motif of Love Birds, carved in 18K white gold; AA1 blue-white diamond.
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S-47 Two blue-white diamonds in shank of 18K white gold ring. Large blue-white diamond in center.
Send* $1 — *pay Postman* $6.25 $6.54 *monthly

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S-48 The Mayflower — beautifully carved in 18K white gold with AA1 blue-white diamond;
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Strap Watch For MEN
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Ideal Gifts for "HER"

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S-53 Leaf and floral design ring 18K white gold: three blue-white diamonds.
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S-50 15 Jewel Elgin: 12 size 14K green gold-filled case, with high-grade gold-filled chain.
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Complete with Presentation Case **$45**

A pleasing contrast of Diamonds and Sapphires

Complete with Presentation Case **$27.50**

An Ideal Gift Combination
S-45 Four blue-white diamonds and four blue sapphires in 14K solid white gold hand-engraved wrist watch complete with silk grosgrain ribbon and flexible expansion bracelet. Guaranteed 15 Jewel movement.
$45.00—$1 *with order*, $4.40 *a month.*

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S-51
14K solid white gold wrist watch; guaranteed 15 Jewel movement. Silk grosgrain ribbon and expansion bracelet.
$27.50—$1 *with order*, $2.65 *a month.*