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by John Hunter

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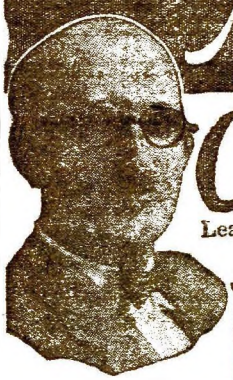

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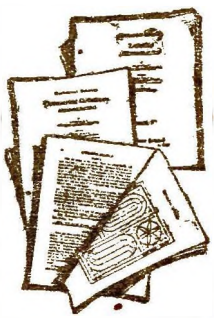

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# Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

## WILLIAM J. FLYNN, EDITOR

Twenty Five Years in the Secret Service of the United States

VOLUME XXVII SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 1927 NUMBER 2




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# Flynn's Weekly Detective Fiction

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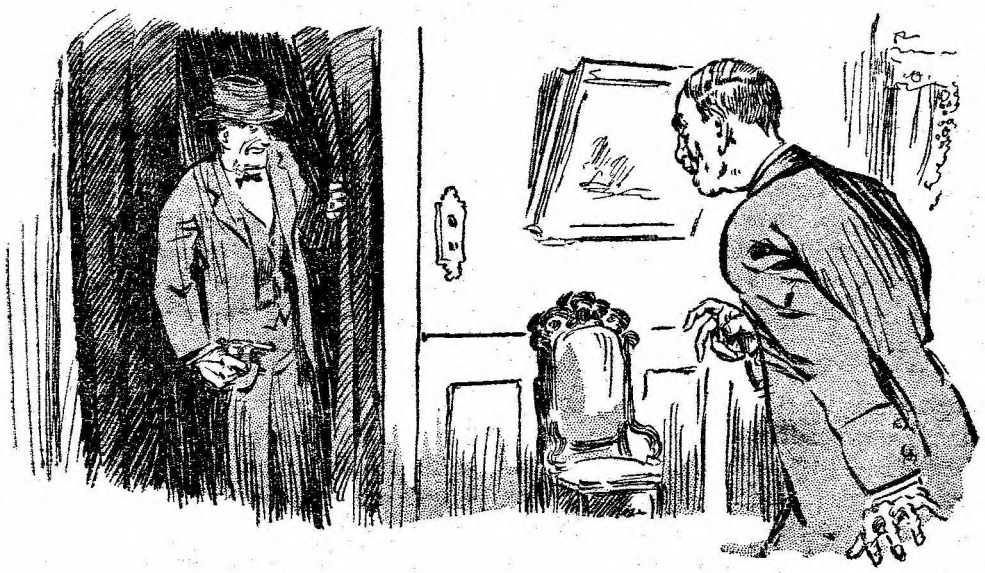


He held a gun low against his gray flannel trousers

# A FELLOWSHIP OF EVIL

By John Hunter

**"FOUR OF US MET THAT NIGHT IN A SHANTY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND FOUNDED A PARTNERSHIP OF A SORT—"**

## CHAPTER I

### FOUR STRANGERS

THROUGH the long, narrow chink where the heavy curtains failed to meet could be seen the riding lights of vessels swinging on the tideway of the dark river. Directly below, a white glare told of the Embankment lamps, and across the farther bridge lighted trams made thunderous progress. Big Ben chimed the half hour after midnight.

Very faintly, to the ears of the two men in the luxurious sitting room of the riverside suite, came the strains of dance music from the ballroom beneath them. Apart from this, the place was heavily still with that stillness which seems always to rest on the upper regions of great hotels.

Mr. William Smith sat back in his deep,

padded chair and puffed reflectively at his cigar, his somewhat mild blue eyes never swerving in their regard of the man seated opposite him. He was rather unimposing—William Smith.

Of average height and build, with the slightest of stoops about his shoulders, there was no hint in his outward physical appearance of the virile strength contained within his apparently non-muscular body. Only his thick, heavily knockled fingers were out of the ordinary.

His sparse, fair to ginger hair had been allowed to grow very long at the left temple, and was brushed and plastered down across the bald patch on the top of his head, leaving a "parting" at the left hand side which just escaped the top of his ear. His clean-shaven face was burned brown by suns such as England never knows.

His mouth was overlarge, ugly, and a complete set of too perfect false teeth showed hideously white through the slightly parted lips. His blue eyes held a quality of ingenuous inquiry which had proved Smith's passport through life.

He was in dinner clothes, neat, quiet, and his only personal ornamentation was a single diamond winking on the index finger of his left hand. Smith knew a lot about diamonds. He had dealt in them illicitly when the name of Bill Smith was something to whisper from the Rand to Table Mountain.

"Well, my lord?" he asked gently.

The tall, dark man opposite him flared: "Oh, for God's sake stop calling me 'my lord.'" He got to his feet, lithe, easy, just too well dressed, but with a little air of distinction about him which separated him from William Smith by a gulf which might never be bridged. "Let us drop all these hints and get down to facts. Was Trevelyan one of your—your—confederates?"

"I know Trevelyan very well," admitted Smith gently.

Lord Bordington caught his breath. He stood, glaring down at Smith for a few moments, his hands hard clenched. Smith sipped at the Scotch and soda by his side. In those seconds of unspoken physical threat he took his eyes, for the first time, from Bordington.

Bordington sat down. Something seemed to have gone from him—something striking and keen. He looked smaller as he huddled in the chair. He repeated: "Give me the facts. All of them."

Smith smiled. "You've done well, my lord. Six months ago you were a poor man. You will remember Bordington was for sale—one hundred thousand pounds was the price, wasn't it?—and nobody would buy it.

"Great name, great collection of pictures, great traditions—all going to the deuce, because you have the misfortune to live in what I might term the gold age, the age when gold is all men strive for.

"Have you ever reflected, by the way, on the power of money? I don't mean the power of its possession; but its actual power. It's dead—yellow, minted gold, printed paper, written checks; but it controls you and me and all the destinies of the earth. A long while ago man was a fool. He created money for his own convenience and now money is likely to destroy him. Already it is his master." He shrugged his shoulders. "For my part"—with an ugly grin—"I am content to be a slave."

Bordington looked at him hollowly. "I don't want to listen to cheap philosophy. I want to know why you asked me to call here and see you. Who—what—is this Fellowship of Strangers?"

"An interesting question," observed Smith. "And one I will willingly answer, seeing that you are hardly likely to betray the confidence. The Fellowship of Strangers was formed about twenty years ago in a certain town in South Africa which shall be nameless, but which lies between the Matoppo hills and the Great Karoo. Tells you very little, eh?

"Let me see, I said twenty years. Perhaps it was a little longer. Anyhow, the last echoes of the Boer War were dying. There were a number of masterless men kicking around. I was one of them. I was about twenty-six at the time.

"There were four of us met one night in a shanty outside a diamond town. It was a tough shop—bad whites, worse blacks, hell-fire to drink, and life hanging

on a thread. The other three were named Goort, Bradley, and Pink.

"Goort was big and brutal. Bradley was older than we were—a fellow nearly forty—a stiff proposition who still could remember the days when he was at Eton. Pink was a year my junior. Funny how names sometimes fit.

"He was little and slim—looked as though he had got tuberculosis, but hadn't. Was a non-smoker and non-drinker. Yellow hair and gray eyes. It was he who killed Goort afterward. I saw him do it. He got him in Du Toit's Pan Road in Kimberley at three o'clock in the morning. Threw a knife at him from a doorway. However—"

Bordington helped himself to a cigar. His hands were shaking so that he could hardly hold the matchflame to its tip.

Smith's even voice droned on: "We four—that night—stood together in a bit of a scrap—nothing. We formed a partnership—The Fellowship of Strangers—and we got down to things. Not going to trouble you with all we did. But when Pink killed Goort he lifted from round Goort's waist a belt with fifty thousand dollars in it. When Bradley—er—died—snakebite, you know—the thing got into his bed one night—"

Bordington leaned forward, his face gray. "You devil! Did you put the snake—"

Smith shook his head. "No. I paid a 'boy' to do it. I'm no good at snakes myself."

Bordington sat back as though pushed roughly. "Go on," he said, through his teeth.

"As I said, when Bradley died, Pink and I shared something like seventy-five thousand. We were in fair circumstances. Then—various things happened. Pink lost his money. I came to Europe with about fifty thousand pounds, the only member of the Fellowship left. The Fellowship still exists, but in a different guise. There is no longer equal partnership. I have a number of men working for me on commission. Trevelyan is one of them."

"I see. You are the head of the gang of criminals of whose existence we have always been confident."

"The newspapers have paid me certain compliments," admitted Smith.

Bordington studied him, and in the silence of that examination tried to conceive the depth of the man's villainy. He could picture the horror of those hidden years in South Africa, years whose adventurings had been but grimly hinted at in Smith's recent account. They had been a formidable quartet, Goort, Bradley, Pink, and Smith.

But Goort had gone—murdered openly by Pink; Bradley had gone, killed cunningly by Smith; and—last of all—the little devil, Pink himself, had been ground flat by the master scoundrel.

## CHAPTER II

### BLACKMAIL AND A CURSE

"AND now," added Smith, "we will talk about you. As I have already said, you have been lucky. Six months ago a pauper; to-day a man of comparative affluence. It is something on which to congratulate oneself. There is, however, one little fly in the ointment. There always is. This side of paradise I guess there are more flies than ointment. And in that connection I'll give you a word of advice. Never write letters."

Bordington's tongue touched his lips. "I thought so," he said softly.

Smith smiled with some geniality. "Of course. You're no fool. That's why you accepted my invitation to come here. You guessed that note had strayed; that Trevelyan had forgotten to burn it."

Smith selected another cigar. "When a man with a title, and holding a responsible official position in his majesty's government, finds the old family home, everything his forefathers prized, in danger of coming under the hammer, it's a great temptation to him to do something crooked—a kind of honorable dishonor, if that's not too involved. D'you get me? He sacrifices himself to save the face of his ancestors, kind of thing."

Bordington, who had been hanging his head, looked up at Smith. "You are a shrewd man," he said. "You read me very correctly!"

"My job," said Smith pleasantly. "I've

earned my living by reading people correctly. However, there it is. It was nothing—that matter with Trevelyan. I'll admit that. Just a bit of information which wasn't supposed to leak out—and your moniker on what I believe the historians call a scrap of paper. Well, that was what we were after—that scrap of paper and your signature. The information was nothing to us."

Bordington nodded mechanically. For the moment he was not seeing Smith, but before his eyes was a mind picture of the scene in the Hotel de Paris the previous winter, when Trevelyan had dined him well, when just too much Pol Roger had been drunk, when Trevelyan seemed the finest of fine fellows and the whole world's arms were outflung generously.

That was when the scrap of paper had been signed. They had been clever. Trevelyan, darkly handsome, young, gifted with an Oxford accent and impeccable manners, had "worked" Bordington six months before that night.

"What do you want?" asked Bordington. "I presume you wish to sell me my signature?"

"Exactly. There's nothing subtle about me. I've evolved no wonderful plot for your undoing. We'll get down to tacks. Blackmail's my game—and the price isn't in cash. The money Trevelyan gave you enabled you to get into South Russian oils when the bottom was out of that particular market.

"You got in, my lord, because you knew in your official capacity that the Soviet at last intended to come to a real trading arrangement, and that South Russian oils would benefit. Well, the shares you bought at six or eight shillings each now stand at so many pounds. You're a rich man. It was shrewd of you.

"Perhaps, I knew something, eh? Perhaps I was able to balance the offer and the exact opportunity so that the temptation was too strong for you. Which brings me to my point. Your Government—I acknowledge none—is concluding a treaty with a certain Eastern power which, of late, has been suffering from serious internal disturbances.

"The treaty is secret. Nobody is supposed to know of its existence. But it will restore order. It will set the finances of that country on a sound basis. It will do a lot of things—so rumor informs me. Unfortunately, I can get no details. Now, to speak more clearly, I will mention that Che Fiang Railways and Goldfields Limited, the mining company which owns its own railway to the sea, and has rights over a territory as big as Scotland. It's good enough bust.

"It's shares stand in pence—pound shares, mark you, quoted at pence. A man with my small capital could buy Che Fiang Railways almost clean out—provided he knew it was worth buying. If this treaty does all my rumor tells me, Che Fiangs are the swiftest road to fortune that this decade has shown us. I want you to supply me with the terms of the treaty, so that I can judge for myself; and in consideration thereof, you shall, with your own hands, burn that scrap of paper."

As Bordington opened his lips, Smith held up his hand. "A moment, before you start in on the righteous indignation business. I'm not a spy. That old international guff is worked out. I'm a financier—a backer of long-priced starters on the stock markets of the world; and all I ask for is a little information straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. I'm putting you in on Che Fiangs, mind you.

"There's a tip for you in it, as well. And the treaty won't be harmed in the slightest. I'm not selling it to Germans in disguise. I just want to know if your treaty will so far put things right that the richest gold district in the world will be permitted to get down to proper work. Once I know that, I'll forget everything."

Bordington shook his head. "You're wrong, Smith. You've misjudged me. I shan't do it." He spoke evenly, but there was strain in his eyes.

Smith stared straight at him. "All right." He seemed undisturbed. "I'm not going to jump at you, my lord. I'll give you time. You've got a wife and a daughter, I think. Daughter's likely to make a good marriage, I hear. You've got a name, and a family tree. I don't go

much on those things myself—but some folks think they count a hell of a lot.

"You've got all those—and I've got a newspaper. It's only a little newspaper; but it's good enough. I bought it cheaply. A provincial sheet of the type which I believe is usually designated 'the local rag.' I shan't send your scrap of paper to the head of his majesty's government. I shan't send it to *The Times*.

"I shall reproduce it in my little newspaper. That'll be enough. I shall keep on reproducing it in the middle of the front page until all the press of Great Britain starts wondering. Then I'll sit back for you to take action."

Bordington, of a sudden, took to walking about the room in swift, staccato movement. He stopped in the middle of this striding and wheeled passionately on Smith.

"One day," he said tensely, "your sins will find you out, Smith."

Smith nodded. "One day's always a bit ahead, my lord. Now there's that detective fellow—Murray—the secret service guy that's supposed to be hunting down what you call the mysterious gang of criminals." Smith's eyes lighted. "By the way, who is he? Is it all bluff? Or is there such a fellow?"

Bordington said shortly: "I don't know anything, except that Murray actually exists; and I hope to God he'll catch you."

Smith examined him for a second, and was apparently satisfied that he spoke the truth. "Hm. Pretty close at headquarters, aren't they, if a man like you doesn't know Murray. Anyhow, if ever he has the luck to hit my trail he'll find it the thinnest he's ever followed.

"But to get back to business. I'm giving you forty-eight hours from now. At midnight two nights hence, you'll come along with a rough copy of the provisions of the treaty. If you don't, the following day my little newspaper puts a jolt into Fleet Street with the scoop of the season."

Smith stood up. His manner was casual. He might almost have been recapitulating the principal points of an ordinary business arrangement. Bordington seemed hardly to have heard him. He was still walking about the room. He turned to Smith.

"Damn you," he said, quietly. "I refuse. Do you hear?"

"Think about it," smiled Smith. "Forty-eight hours. And don't forget—if you try to blab—that old newspaper will still come out with the glad news. Pinch me, and you cut your own throat. I'd advise you to be sensible. Allow me."

He preceded Bordington to the door and opened it. His eyes were more ingenuous than they had been all through the interview. His smile was almost pleasing.

And then his face changed. Bordington, for the first time, realized that the man could be disturbed, shocked, perhaps almost frightened. Reaching the doorway, beside Smith, Bordington was conscious of a curious odor, as though some outlandish tobacco had been smoked in the corridor outside the room.

Then Smith laughed. The laugh was short, caught at quickly, without mirth.

"That's damn funny," he said. "I've not smelled that for a long time. Pink took to smoking—just before the end—and, like lots of folk who wait a long time before doing a thing like that, he had strange tastes. He got the stuff from a Boer farmer near Bloomfontein. "But still—"

He lost his attitude of tension. His old smile came back. "Good night, my lord. Forty-eight hours."

Bordington walked down the corridor. He was hardly conscious of his going. In his head were thundering a thousand phrases, a thousand defiances, which he might have hurled at Smith. He wondered if he had taken it all lying down; if his silence had been the paralyzed silence of absolute terror; if his lack of outward emotional display had impressed Smith with a sense of indifference toward the fate of the treaty and his trust. He was filled with a reeling despair. He walked blindly.

He turned the corner at the broad, quiet, dimlit landing, and went toward the elevator. Near the decorated iron gates a man, who was waiting, saw him and turned swiftly away. He was a little, slim fellow, and he walked with a pronounced limp. But Bordington did not see him. He had eyes only for the figures of his own thoughts.

While Bordington went down in the lift, the cripple limped downstairs.

## CHAPTER III

### "DON'T SELL!"

KATHLEEN—she called herself Kitty—Willis had dark brown hair, very wavy, bobbed and delicious, brown eyes, very deep and wide and laughing, and lips so lusciously red that they were certainly made more for kissing than for anything else. In addition, the some hundred and twelve pounds of her were lithe, slimly and beautifully fashioned, and specially designed by nature for the wearing effectively of modern feminine garments.

All of this sounds somewhat highly colored, but it is a true and faithful account of the thoughts of Jim Lansdale as he lay back in a punt and watched her movements as she poled the placid craft through the still, slow waters of the Bord.

They had met about ten days previous. Kitty had arrived in Bordington on a walking tour; had met Jim, who was secretary to the lord of the manor—Lord Bordington—in the way that pretty girls have of meeting presentable young men; and the walking tour seemed to have come to an abrupt and altogether satisfactory conclusion.

"Well," said Kitty, looking down at Jim. "I'll give you a penny for them."

"They're worth more than that," said Jim.

"Are they? Or are you afraid to confess that you were feeling ashamed to lie and watch me do all the work."

"I'll do it. I'd rather. Only you made me lie down here. Let me have a go."

"You lie still. Did the old man come back this morning?"

"Yes, unfortunately. Very early. Caught a train from London about one o'clock. In a devilish temper, too. Went straight to his study and began messing about with papers from his private safe."

"Kept you up, eh? Which accounts for the attack of laziness to-day?"

"No. He *got* me up. He always does. But he sent me back to bed again. I'm never allowed to see what's in the private safe. It's the big brown safe which is my pigeon. The other contains all the state secrets and the names of the crowned heads of Europe. The only folk in whose presence it's opened are potentates from the seat of government."

"How perfectly thrilling. By the way, does he know I went to tea in your quarters yesterday and that you showed me round the castle?"

"No. He probably wouldn't mind, anyhow. But I'd rather he didn't know. He seems worried lately, and I've got an idea that there are big things on—somewhere. He's neglected all the various work attached to the estate, and I've had very little to deal with except departmental routine stuff, which he never sees."

Kitty poled on. It was dreamily, lazily glorious. Trees crowded down to the edge of the narrow stream, breaking now and again to show gleams of still water where arms of the river invaded the front line of the land's defenses. There was sunshine striking down through the trees in shafts of light like the sun's rays in a great cathedral. Flies danced across the shimmering surface of the water, and only little splashings and wood sounds disturbed the quietness.

"This," said Jim, "is the life. Why fellows want to slave in offices and factories long after their youth is spent, amassing millions, I never can tell. There can only be a negative satisfaction in dying in harness and knowing that your decease will be anounced on the placards and that somebody will write your obituary. The paths of fortune hunting lead only to the grave."

Kitty looked at him quickly. "Is that poetic outlook—sufficient for the day, a loaf of bread, a bottle of beer, and thou beside me singing in the midst of the buttercups on a sunny day—or is it just a facile expression of laziness?"

"Both," grinned Jim. "But, honestly, I believe in work when you're young and fit for it. But I reckon there's something wrong with a fellow who goes on like mad piling up cash—for the sake of cash and—power. That's what it is, you know. Power.

"When a rich man dies they all tell the

old, old story of how his enterprise and his initiative gave work to thousands. Probably they did. But did he go on just for the sake of giving work to thousands? Not on your sweet and gentle life, old girl. He went on because he'd got hold of power with both hands—and loved it."

"You're probably right; but it doesn't destroy the fact that his initiative and whatever else you said did give work to thousands. There's something to be said for the big capitalist, the man with the driving force and the restless get on or get out spirit.

"He possesses at least one great and admirable quality which is not always recognized by his street corner detractors, and that is a tremendous courage. But still, we can't argue on a day like this. And neither of us is a capitalist. What made you take to secretarial work, Jim? Weren't you born in the East?"

"Yes." Jim dangled his hand in the water and looked away. "My father held an official position out East. He had a good salary, I believe—quite an important man in a small way. He sent me to Cambridge. I was to go in for the diplomatic service. But—he died. My mother never survived me."

There was a short silence. Kitty was eying Jim curiously, and in her expression was something Jim, had he looked at her, would not have easily been able to read.

He added: "When my father's affairs were cleared up, it was found that he was in a financial mess. He had put all his money into some gold business over there—Che Fiang Gold Mines, or something. It's a concession territory. I've got all the script of the stock now; but it's hardly worth the paper it's written on.

"My father was evidently one of the prime movers in it, because he had a great many founders' shares, and they give me a large amount of control. But I've often contemplated selling them. I expect the concession will be revoked and what little is left will go by the board. It's happened out there before. His death prevented me getting into the service, and so when Bordington offered me this job I took it."

"I shouldn't sell," said Kitty quietly.

Jim looked up sharply. "Why?" The monosyllable was jerked, as though her advice was unusually startling.

"Oh—I don't know. On the principle of never say die, I suppose. I believe in hanging on, you know. But have I surprised you?"

"No"—slowly. "Only—it's rather curious, your saying that. Of course, Bordington knows I hold this stock; and last night, when he came back from London, he asked me about it. He never mentions it in the ordinary way. Although he seemed so worried, he—perhaps I was mistaken—kind of forced himself to geniality.

"You know what I mean. You can usually read that sort of thing in a man. He spoke in a fatherly fashion—the middle-aged, successful man taking an interest in the striving lad. He said he should like a gamble in Che Fiangs, and was willing to risk a bit. He offered me eighteen pence a share for my holdings.

"The London Stock Exchange quotation is eight pence. It seems rather decent of him. He's always been decent to me, and I take it as a kind of friendly lift. He thinks there's a slim chance of their pulling round, but a bigger chance of their dropping, and he considers he can afford to help me out."

Kitty nodded. "May be." She looked slightly puzzled, and said no more.

They reached the little quay beside the meadow, just beyond the fringe of the trees, and Jim helped Kitty ashore.

"Well," he said, as he held her hand after she had stepped on to the bank. "What about selling?"

"Selling?" She hesitated, and then laughed. "I'd forgotten your old stock. Do what you like, Jim. I don't understand stocks and shares. Never worry about them."

"No." His grip tightened as she attempted to withdraw her hand. "Kit. Isn't it possible for you to stay after tomorrow? Can't you wire for an extension of your holiday?"

She shook her head. "My dear old thing, Barker's bank never gives extensions of holidays to its feminine employees. If I'm not back by Monday morning there'll

be a run on the bank, and one of the Big Five will be wiped out of existence."

His face clouded. "That's pretty rotten, isn't it? And we've had such a gorgeous time. Like waking up from a dream. I shan't like Bordington when you're gone."

She was trembling slightly. They had been pals all through the ten days behind them, chatting on all kinds of subjects except this one, and—somehow—the ten days, to her, at least, had been the happier for it. If ever she might look back on them and name them as happy in the light of that knowledge she so steadfastly withheld from him.

Looking up into his face she was conscious of something within her—stirring slowly, so that she wanted to run and hide her eyes.

She said, very steadily: "Jim, will you leave go of my hand?"

He stared at her earnestly. "Yes. I'm sorry."

They walked across the meadow together, and neither spoke until they reached the lodge gates of Bordington Park. There Kitty smiled.

"You're ever so fine, Jim. I'll see you to-morrow."

"Of course." He spoke absently, his eyes devouring her.

He stood and watched her as she swung down the road; but she did not look back. She dared not.

There were many strange people who would have been very surprised to have seen Kit Willis's eyes in those moments; for they were filled with tears.

## CHAPTER IV

### NIGHT WORK INTERRUPTED

BORDINGTON MANOR showed dark against a dark, starless sky—a black mass, hunched high, edged by battlements, with a dull gleam of glass showing here and there as the night's faint light touched tall, mullioned windows.

In the shadow of the wall, a darker shadow moved—silent, swift, decisive. It reached a long window, coming to the ground from the full height of the lower story, and there it stayed for a moment. There was a barely audible click, and the swift shadow had vanished.

Inside, despite the blackness of the place, the shadow moved with unerring precision, as though the whole of the great mansion's interior was familiar. Up the broad staircase, to the left along the picture-hung gallery, to the left again toward the house front, and so to the door of the study.

The door offered little resistance. It was opened—and pushed gently close—within a few seconds. A thin, pencil-like ray of light plunged into the heart of the room's darkness, arched around swiftly, and settled on the face of a safe let into the right-hand wall.

The light went out.

The shadow was at the safe, eyes closed, ear pressed to the cold, hard surface, slim fingers slowly turning the knob of the combination, ears and nerves tautened for the sliding of the wards.

It was a splendid safe, but it had to cope with a matchless safe-breaker. For fifteen minutes its perfectly balanced mechanism refused to betray itself by sound or "touch;" but at last super-acute senses and hearing triumphed and the safe surrendered.

With the opening of the ponderous door, the safe-breaker drew a deep, gasping breath and sat down. The strain and the concentration had been tremendous, and every nerve in the lithe, taut body was vibrating.

It was when the reaction was passing that there came a movement at the door, a click, and the room was flooded with light. In the doorway was Lord Bordington, and in his hand was a pistol.

"Stand perfectly still," he said, for the burglar had leaped to her feet. "A woman, eh?"

He stepped forward, and indicated a chair. "Sit down there and lay your hands palm downward on the tabletop where I can see them. Right." He scanned the safe swiftly. Obviously, nothing had been disturbed.

"Just in time, it seems." He surveyed his prisoner curiously. "You're a very clever girl—too clever and too pretty to be doing this sort of work. You opened that by ear and touch, eh?"

"Yes." She was perfectly at her ease. "What's your name?"

Her lips closed tightly. Bordington smiled. "That's not in keeping, is it? Anybody with your brains shouldn't boggle at a point like that. What is it?"

"Willis—Kathleen Willis."

Bordington frowned. "I don't remember it." He was trying to recollect if, in his official capacity, he had ever encountered the name among those of the few notorious criminals likely to be capable of opening his safe.

"You wouldn't. This is the first time I've been caught." A sudden urgency showed in her eyes. "I suppose there's no chance of your remembering that tag about the qualities of mercy?"

"Shakespeare, eh?" He laughed quietly, although his eyes were haggard. "No. Mercy is the doctrine of the foolish."

"The fools are the wise men," she countered. "They keep their consciences clean."

He sat down opposite her. "You're a quick little devil; upon my word. And cool, too. Not afraid, eh?"

"Not a bit—except—well, there is a reason why I don't want to be handed over to the police. It's a reason which nearly caused me to abandon to-night's job and sacrifice a lot of time spent in preparation. That's all."

"Hm. Pathetic—" dryly. "By the way. How did you know the exact spot in which to cut the burglar alarm of the hall window? And how is it you came straight to this room? You see, I've been for a walk in the grounds. Affairs keep me up late. I have to think a lot."

The former haggardness returned to his eyes. He was remembering that on the following night he had to render an account to William Smith.

"I found the window swinging gently open. I went straight to my room, got this gun, and came down here. Now there was no disturbance in the house. You've only just got the safe open. You can't have been in the place more than twenty minutes, because I left the front door twenty-five minutes ago. So—how is it?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm a good guesser," she said. Her eyes were defiant on his.

"Have you bribed or pumped one of my servants?"

"I never bribe—and I'm no great shakes with a pump handle."

He leaned forward across the table. "Listen—tell me the name of the fool or rogue who has allowed you to get acquainted with this house—and you can walk away. You've done no harm, so I can let you go."

Again her shoulders lifted. "Take me to jail," she said.

His lips curled. "Honor among thieves?"

"No. The imp of the perverse. Ever read that story, by the way? Creepy thing, isn't it? I like Poe when I'm in some moods."

He regarded her quizzically. "You're a quaint little thing—slinging Poe and Shakespeare at me in the middle of a discussion on housebreaking."

"*Chacun a son gout,*" she said. "You probably know quite a lot about them, and nothing about housebreaking. We must have a common ground for conversation, mustn't we?"

"I suppose we must. So you won't betray your pal, or your dupe. Well—perhaps it's admirable, though hardly business. Are you armed?"

"Yes. I've got a seven-shot automatic pistol in a little pocket at the front of my gown. Do you want it?"

"I think it's better. You can give it to me, can't you?"

She looked at him. "You'll allow me to take the gun from my pocket? Men have been shot from under the table before now."

"I know. But I don't think you're the shooting sort. Anyhow"—with a little bitterness—"I'm not so sure that I'd mind being shot."

She pushed the pistol across to him. "Thanks." He sat back and studied her. She was, he thought, and she must realize it, in a desperately tight corner. Hitherto, on her own statement—which he believed, seeing that her name was entirely unfamiliar to him—she had escaped the clutches of that law she broke.

She did not know the soul-breaking

ordeal of prison life. She was confident in her youth and her fresh beauty, her agility of body and wit. She bore herself with incredible courage, although the night was likely to see set on her forehead the brand of the outcast.

Before morning she would be with the lost. Within a few hours her record and her finger-prints, her photograph and her measurements would be at Scotland Yard. She would be marked down, pariah, hunted. At his entry through the door behind him her life had snapped.

She must know all this. She must! And yet she would not escape it by betraying her confederate; and she faced the prospect of it with an equanimity which, while astonishing him, gave birth to admiration within him.

A younger and less experienced man might have been tempted to set her free. A man with more humor in him might have talked lightly of a "a good smacking," and have turned her out.

But to Lord Bordington as he sat and looked at her, an idea came.

It was somewhere about this time on the previous night that he had talked to William Smith, and in all the hours since, that formidable individual's commonplace figure had loomed largely in his mental pictures. He saw Smith now, as unperturbed as this girl opposite him—but not more cool, nor more unperturbed.

He realized again, sickeningly, the man's threat, his power, his personality. But opposite him was a personality, not threatening, but just as impressive. If Smith was a striking thing, so was this girl. If Smith, in his quiet, unimpassioned way, was a living, vital force, so was this girl.

Kitty, eying Bordington with some interest, saw his eyes light suddenly. His next words astonished her.

"I'd like to talk to you. I've got a proposition to put before you, which it might pay you to hear. Do you smoke?"

"A little—but I'd rather not, just now." Her eyes were guarded.

He walked across to a sideboard and helped himself to whisky and soda and a cigar. He carried the pistols with him, dropping them into his pocket. Kitty sat still. Bordington asked a question which astonished her still more.

## CHAPTER V

### A COMPACT

"WOULD you like to earn fifty thousand pounds?"

"Earn—what?" she asked.

"Fifty thousand pounds."

"Are you talking sense?" She inclined toward coldness.

"Absolutely." His voice told her more than the word. He was terribly in earnest. "I've got some work for you to do. If you care to do it—and if you do it successfully—you can have your freedom and fifty thousand pounds."

She smiled. Despite his intense agitation, he was able to note that the smile was deliciously sweet and enticing.

"It's an awful lot of money. You've awakened my flagging interest in your conversation. What have I got to do?"

"Commit another burglary," said Bordington calmly.

Her brows knit. "I think you're mistaken in me. I'm not to be hired."

"I don't wish to hire you," said Bordington smoothly. "I wish to take you—for one night only—into partnership with me on an affair which, unfortunately, I can't altogether explain to you, but which is of tremendous importance, not only to me, but to the world at large."

Her forehead was clear once more. She smiled again. "I begin to feel very important. You're a government man, aren't you? Is it all about spies, and boxes at the opera, and beautiful women and Russian grand dukes?"

He laughed too. "No. Unfortunately, the usual concomitants have been left out. It's to do with a very dangerous man with a very commonplace name. It touches on large sums of money, but little else. And the stage is one of London's biggest hotels."

"Which?" she asked quickly.

He hesitated a moment, then: "The Magnificent."

"Ah!" The exclamation was very low. After a pause, she added indifferently: "It's a fine place. I've stayed there often. Look

here—you can't expect me to accept this offer of yours without hearing it.

"I'll admit that you know nothing about me except what's pretty bad; but if you wish to go any further with this matter you'll have to accept my word on one point. You must tell me your plan, and as much of the circumstances as you feel necessary, and you must accept my word that if I turn the whole thing down I shall not betray your confidence.

"If I may be permitted for one moment to pick up my little tin trumpet and blow it right heartily, I would point out to you that I've kept faith with the—er—person who foolishly allowed me to get a sight of the interior of your house; so if that's any indication of my feelings on such points of honor, you may consider yourself fairly safe."

Bordington was silent for quite a long time. She endured his scrutiny carelessly, but with reassurance in her eyes. At last he said: "I think I can trust you in that. Anyhow"—with a short laugh—"it's rather absurd to worry about it. Because if you accept, I've to trust you far more. I'll tell you all I think necessary, and you can judge for yourself."

"Thanks," she said; and there was an acknowledgment of compliment in her tone which drew a quick look from him and settled what slight fears of her probity he might have entertained.

"To begin with," said Bordington, "I want to emphasize that there is a considerable element of danger in the affair." He paused. "That is, perhaps, hardly emphatic enough. It's being in the service which brings one to these guarded phrases. But understand—if you accept my offer, you pit yourself against a deadly dangerous man.

"Within the past twenty-four hours he has acknowledged himself guilty of a particularly dastardly murder. Heaven alone knows what other sins lie to his account. He values human life as nothing, and he is also quick, cunning, and possessed of immense courage."

Kitty said slowly: "I think I will have a cigarette, after all. Thanks very much. Who is this man?" She looked serious. Bordington's words had evidently impressed her.

Bordington considered his reply before giving it, and decided that he might as well tell everything not actually relevant to the treaty.

"You are—a thief," he said, hesitating over the accusatory title.

She smiled. "Don't spare me. Well?"

"You will therefore have heard, among your friends, of the Fellowship of Strangers."

He saw a light flash and die in her eyes. It was confirmation of all that he had said regarding William Smith. He realized, in fact, that he need never have described Smith, but have merely stated who he was. Evidently the fellowship had a particular notoriety in the underworld.

"Is—your pal—one of them?" asked Kitty.

"He is the chief of the fellowship," said Bordington.

He saw her lips purse in a silent whistle. She kept her eyes on his face. "You haven't said enough," she observed. "Your description of him is watered down. The chief of the fellowship, eh? My word! That man's got a reputation which makes the most hardened crooks in London shudder. Who is he?"

"His name will convey little to you. It's Smith—William Smith. But, as a matter of fact, the fellowship, as such, doesn't now exist. It has been—er—dissolved. Smith, actually, is the head of a little band of ordinarily clever criminals who carry out his instructions and find benefit to themselves in doing so. Now you know the man you're up against, and what's behind him, do you still wish to hear the rest?"

Kitty nodded. "Yes. I'm with you so far. I never mind a little excitement; and fifty thousand pounds is a lot of money, isn't it?"

"Plus freedom," said Bordington gravely.

"Yes—and other things." He thought a shadow crossed her eyes, but, if it did, it was gone so quickly that he could not be certain of its presence.

He proceeded to his further explanation.

"To-morrow night I have to meet this

man Smith in the sitting room of his private suite in the Hotel Magnificent. I can give you the number of the suite and the exact situation of the sitting room. I will confess something to you. That man holds a paper by means of which he can threaten me with ruin. In exchange for it, he demands another paper—which I am taking to him to-morrow night. When I hand him over the paper he wants, he will hand me the paper he holds. Is that clear?"

"Quite. Ordinary blackmail, eh?"

"Perhaps. At any rate, I shall burn, on the spot, the paper Smith hands me. You will be outside the room. When I leave the room you will know that I am safe, in so far as his threat against me is concerned.

"You will then get into his room—at once, before he has had time to study the paper I have given him—and steal it from him. The method of stealing I leave to you. You will probably need a weapon, and the best method would be to hold him up with a pistol. In the moment that you deliver into my hands the paper you obtain from Smith, you receive fifty thousand pounds and your freedom."

She regarded him curiously. "Can't you do it yourself? Can't you take a pistol with you, get your precious paper, burn it, and then demand back that which you've given him?"

Bordington shook his head. He was quite frank in his reply. "No. To begin with, to make open confession, I'm afraid of him. Probably I'm influenced by my position; but he seems to me a man of infinite resource, and were I to pit myself against him I would feel as though I endeavored to cope with an unknown quantity.

"I should have no confidence in myself. Further, things might go wrong. You never know what will happen in a big hotel. I have a name, a reputation. Smith, if things went wrong, would tell the whole story. It would be difficult for me—even though the paper were burned—to deny complicity were I caught in his room threatening him with a pistol.

"It isn't done by men in my position. But you are different. If things go wrong—well—you are what you are. There still will be fifty thousand pounds for you, by the way, if things go wrong like that, and you are caught; but I'm afraid you'll have to serve a sentence, and you will have to keep your mouth shut as far as my participation in the affair is concerned.

"Does it appear a reasonable proposition to you? You see, if you rob Smith, he will never know that I am behind you. You must make him think you are an ordinary hotel burglar, and you must keep up that pose to the end—whatever happens."

Kitty nodded. "It's quite clear," she said. "And I see your viewpoint." She examined the tip of her cigarette. "You're asking more than you know. This man is a very powerful force in the underworld—so powerful that until to-night I've never been able to learn his name. The people who work for him are afraid to breathe it. It's that kind of thing which gives you an idea of his influence. I know of one man connected with him—a flash hotel crook named Trevelyan; but even from Trevelyan I've never learned anything, and neither has anybody else."

Bordington stirred in his chair. "I've met Trevelyan," he said bitterly.

Kitty laughed. "He's the fellow who got you into the mess, eh?"

"Yes. But are you willing to accept this commission?"

He waited anxiously for her reply, realizing, as he did so, how she had impressed him, how true was that conception of her personality. He wanted her on his side—an ally—and even as he wanted her, his shifting thoughts, his basic weakness, was seeing another opportunity in this chance meeting.

She said: "I'll do it. Tell me all the details—the time I meet you, where, and the rest."

He told her everything.

He let her out by the window through which she had entered the house, and she vanished, wraithlike, into the darkness of the park. He went upstairs slowly. He knew he would not sleep all through the night, but he felt somewhat comforted by the strange alliance he had just formed.

He did not go to bed, but went to the

study and sat down and wrote to his wife, who was in Paris with his daughter.

Kitty, streaking across the park, turned and looked back at the fringe of the outer tree-belt, just as the moon slid from behind the banked clouds and bathed the manor in pale light. There was somebody standing at a window in the left wing—the window of a room she knew. The somebody was Jim Lansdale.

Sight of him made Kitty run.

The following morning Lord Bordington did two things, both of considerable importance. The first was to send for Jim Lansdale and talk to him about Che Fiangs. The second was to drive over to Bordington in his car and see his solicitor.

When Jim came into the room, Bordington said: "We had a burglar last night, Lansdale. Came in through the hall window—cut the burglar alarm in the right place, and made the cleanest entry imaginable. Must have been disturbed, however, because nothing has been touched."

He looked hard at Jim as he spoke, and told himself that Jim looked a little pale and hard, keener than usual. Jim received the information with appropriate astonishment, and expressed himself as being glad that the break-in had proved abortive.

Bordington said no more on the subject. He could realize a change in Jim, and, for the moment, its significance eluded him; but he wondered whether Jim would be able to tell how it came about that the particularly pretty burglar of the previous night had had so complete a knowledge of the interior lay-out of the manor.

"About Che Fiangs, Lansdale. I'm still in the same mind regarding a purchase. The country's in an unsettled state just now, and hardly looks like pulling round; but there's always a chance, and I'd like to take it. Is eighteen pence a decent price to you?"

Jim hesitated. It was more than a decent price. It was somewhere in the neighborhood of a shilling above the stock exchange quotation. Had the offer come from anybody else but Bordington, he would have suspected an ulterior motive behind its munificence; but Bordington had always been more than kind to him, and he saw in the figures named only another evidence of his employer's generosity.

In fact, it was this generosity which largely persuaded Jim to accept the offer. It seemed that he must hurt Bordington if he turned down so advantageous a proposal, made, as it apparently was, in the friendliest possible spirit.

"It's a tall price," he said. "Above the market quotation. And of course it will suit me, if it suits you."

"Right," smiled Bordington. "Then we'll call it a deal. I'm going to London again to-day, and I'll see my brokers and get it put through."

As a matter of fact, he telephoned his brokers from the offices of his solicitor, instructing the stock exchange man to buy all the Che Fiang shares on offer that day. By four o'clock that afternoon, when the stock exchange closed, Che Fiangs had risen a few pence, there were some dealings on the curb outside, and cleverly distributed purchasing by his brokers had placed Lord Bordington well on the road to obtaining a commanding position in the company's control.

## CHAPTER VI

### AFTER THE TRANSACTION

WILLIAM SMITH waited in the luxurious sitting room of his suite in the Hotel Magnificent. It was a warm night, oppressive, and there was a hint of thunder in the atmosphere. The trams on the Embankment sounded unusually loud. London seemed tense, expectant, breathless. All noises were magnified.

Smith looked at his watch. Bordington would come. That was a certainty. A man like Bordington could not afford to risk his name and standing for the sake of such a betrayal as Smith proposed. Smith was a sound judge of character. He knew that Bordington, weak, and unstable though he was, would never have made a great surrender.

Anything of vital importance to his country would have been zealously preserved as secret. But this information about the treaty was of little moment—on the face

of it. It was, in effect, an inspired "tip" to a man who wished to make money swiftly on the Stock Exchange.

Smith had spoken the truth when he said he had no interest in international affairs. He did not wish to sell the terms of the treaty to any foreign power.

Smith, thinking of the treaty and Lord Bordington, tried to tell himself that Bordington was not guilty of any great breach of confidence; but he knew all the time that he was.

He picked up the *Evening Standard*, and, for the first time, glanced down its column of Stock Exchange notes. There had been "some activity" in Che Fiang shares. Smith's brow wrinkled. Apparently purchasing had been going on not only in London, but in Manchester, Glasgow, and at other places. The purchasing had been done through various brokers, and while it had given rise to much wordy speculation, it had not induced a deal of financial speculation on the part of the House.

The price of the shares had risen from eight pence to one shilling and sixpence—eighteen pence—bid. The general consensus of opinion seemed to be that somebody with more money than sense was indulging in a thousand to one against gamble. There still appeared to be plenty of sellers.

Smith tossed the newspaper aside. In the morning he would be able to secure more detailed news of what was going on. It was rather curious—this rush on Che Fiangs—but— His telephone bell rang. "Mr. Mallison" wished to see him. Mr. Mallison was Lord Bordington.

Smith ordered that he should be shown up at once. He waited. The room was very still. Through the wide open window no breath of air came. He had the door of his bedroom closed, and the door to the valet's room on the other side of the room was also closed. Besides these communicating, interior doors, each of the rooms had an outer door leading into the usual small lobby, which, again, had a main door giving on to the corridor of the hotel. Outside each window a balcony stretched.

Bordington came into the room, and Smith went to meet him with hand outstretched.

"How do, my lord," he said. "I'm pleased to see you behaving sensibly."

Bordington looked down at his hand, and then into his eyes.

"This seems entirely unnecessary," he said curtly. "I haven't long to spare, and I don't propose to waste time by indulging in ridiculous expressions of esteem. Have you the paper you promised?"

"I sure have. But sit down. If we're not going to fall on each other's necks, there's no reason why we shouldn't behave like human beings. Have a drink?"

A whisky, Bordington decided, would not hurt him. Smith splashed out a couple of stiff pegs, and, lifting his glass, squinted through it at the light.

"Here's to honesty," he said. "It's the best policy—when the other fellow practices it." He pushed across a box of cigars. "By the way. You've seen the evening papers to-night?"

Bordington shook his head. "I hardly ever read an evening newspaper."

Smith grinned. "Don't come that House of Commons stuff here, for God's sake," he pleaded. "Is it a fact, you haven't seen 'em?"

"I have said so."

"Hm." Smith considered him closely, and decided that he was telling the truth; also, he decided something else—something the denial was intended to make him decide—that Lord Bordington had nothing to do with the purchase of Che Fiangs during the day.

Had Bordington been the buyer, and knowing to what interview he came that night, he would most certainly have studied the evening papers in order to discover what comments they had to make on the day's dealings. Smith was making the little error that so many very clever men make.

He forgot—to paraphrase the bon mot of a famous figure in history—that a clever man can be more clever than his neighbors most of the time, but not more clever than they all the time; that, in fact, to everybody of intelligence come moments when they are far above the average in perception and swiftness of thought.

Smith added: "Somebody's been getting into Che Fiangs up to their neck."

Bordington permitted a little flicker of indifferent surprise to show in his eyes. "Is that so?"

"I said it," retorted Smith. "Who d'you reckon it 'll be?"

Bordington shrugged his shoulders. "I can't tell. What does the House say?"

Smith indicated the *Evening Standard*. "Nothing much. No sensational rise in price—considering. The *Times* might have more to say to-morrow. They'll have all night to think about it. An evening paper can't be expected to hand up so much stuff. I wonder what the extent of the purchases are?"

Bordington finished his drink. His hand was quite steady.

"May I be permitted to remind you that I didn't come here to discuss stocks and shares?" he asked. "If you'll carry out your part of the bargain, I'll carry out mine. I'm rather anxious to get the thing over and bid you good-by. I don't find your company or your conversation very entertaining."

Smith laughed. "That's it," he said cheerfully. "Don't mind me. Well—let's have a look at that treaty."

"Where is my note?" asked Bordington.

"Here." Smith tossed a folded paper on to the table. Bordington reached out to get it, but Smith's hand dropped across it. "A moment, my lord. Business is business. Stand back a bit. Thanks"—as Bordington got to his feet. "Look at it." He spread the paper flat, so that Bordington, out of reach, could see it quite plainly. "Genuine?" he asked.

"Yes." Bordington was displaying his first signs of agitation.

"Right. On that sideboard is a candle and matches. I'm going to lay this paper on the sideboard. You'll lay the treaty copy on the table. While you're burning your note, I'll pick up the treaty. Is it suitable?"

"Yes."

Bordington was very tense. He half suspected and expected treachery. The elaborate precautions against trickery further heightened his nervousness.

Smith walked over to the sideboard and dropped the note beside the candlestick. Bordington deposited the copy of the conditions of treaty on the table. It was all done with a solemnity which was almost ridiculous.

Bordington burned his note, after a brief examination of it, with pitiful eagerness. Its genuineness was beyond all doubt. In fact, Smith had decided that it was of no further use to him. He was too wily not to realize that persistent blackmail is likely to prove disastrous to the blackmailer. He believed on big, sure strokes—and finishing.

He scanned the treaty conditions. They were complicated, couched in legal language, and were not too clear to the eyes of a layman without some consideration; but there was enough there to show him that unless Lord Bordington was an exceptionally clever faker, the thing was a true copy.

Bordington turned round. His eyes were shining. The note was a heap of crushed carbon in the candlestick, for he had smashed the crinkled remains with his fingers.

"That's that," he said. It was like a prayer of thankfulness.

Smith grinned. "Feel better, eh? Glad to see you picking up. I like people to be happy. Unfortunately, in business, one has to do certain things. However, all's well that ends well. Watch the stock markets for the next few days and see me wading into Che Fiangs. I suppose it's no use offering to shake hands? Well, well. We all have our likes and dislikes, don't we?"

Bordington said: "Good night," and turned to the door.

Smith, as on the previous occasion, preceded him. "Let me do the honors," he said. He was aggressively, insultingly cheerful. "Don't slide out as though you'd committed a felony. I'm sorry to part with you. You're a man with a good business sense. I hate those guys who think it shows strength of mind to go round kicking against the pricks. So long."

Bordington walked straight across the little outer lobby, out through the outer door and into the corridor. He did not look at Smith.

As Smith shut the door, Bordington glanced round. The girl, he decided, should

be ready. He was to be given time to get downstairs and out of the hotel—five minutes, they had calculated—and then she would strike. It had been a good plan, securing her services. She was a poised, daring, witty little thing, and she might prove a match for Smith if she came on him unawares and when he imagined himself absolutely safe.

If Smith, afterward, loosed on her the whole of the underworld, that was her funeral—not Lord Bordington's. Bordington would pay her her fifty thousand. It was up to her to insure her personal safety.

He took the elevator, came to the marble floored entrance hall, and stepped out.

Meantime, Smith closed the outer door, stepped across the lobby, and into his sitting room. There, he came to a standstill, rigid, bent forward slightly, his face like a beast's.

Standing between the parted curtains, crookedly, thin, peaked face thrown forward, one shoulder hunched, cripple fashion, with a gun held low against gray flannel trousers, was a slim, weakly man.

"Pink, by God!" said Smith.

Pink smiled.

"Hello, my lord! Pardon, my lord—" mimicing Smith's voice of a few minutes before; and then, snarling: "Sit down—you dog!"

Smith walked toward the chair Lord Bordington had just vacated.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE STUPENDOUS BLUFF—CALLED

IN this, the most stupendous moment of his life, all Smith's reserve of power and self-control came to his aid. The man before him had stepped back over the edge of death to confront him. Any second might be his last. He knew Pink well—the fellow's complete disregard for human life, his fiendish rages, the immense passions which flared in the wasted, stunted body. Pink, in a rage, was more terrifying than many giants.

Pink dropped into a chair. "You'll fold you arms, Bill Smith; and if you move a blessed finger I'll kill you where you sit. I want to talk to you."

Smith folded his arms. He was watching Pink steadily, and his commonplace face showed no signs of any emotional or mental disturbance.

"Fancy your coming back," he observed.

"Yes—fancy," drawled Pink. He leaned forward. "You wanna choose a higher cliff—the next one you push me over—Bill Smith."

"I will," said Smith coolly.

Pink's gun hand moved suggestively. Smith did not flinch.

"I been listening," said Pink.

"I gathered that."

Pink cocked his head to one side. "Don't you talk educated these days? Got up, too. Funny what other people's money'll do for a man, ain't it?"

"Extraordinary. And more extraordinary what one will do for other people's money. But you said you had been listening. Is that statement relevant to this interview?"

"Aw—can that high falutin' talk. I listened twice—first time you talked to that bloke—and this time—and I've got a line on the whole bag of tricks."

Smith permitted himself to smile, although his eyes remained watchful. "The same old Pink," he said. "You were always good at getting lines on things."

Pink nodded. He looked haggard and drawn and ill. He stared hard at Smith—not seeing the man sitting before him, but seeing a high bluff on the Karoo in the pitiless blaze of the African sun—seeing himself standing near the edge of that bluff, hearing the first slight sound which told him of Smith's presence behind him—feeling once more the twinge of terror which leaped through his heart as he turned—too late—and hearing his own wild cry as he went hurtling out and down to the stones far below.

"You're deep," he said. "By God, you are! Deep at killin' and twistin'. It's easy for a snake to find it's way into a man's bed; easy for a man to slip over the crumblin' edge of a bluff; and hard for anybody to say as anybody's put the snake in its place or pushed the bloke that fell. You're a good killer, Smith—but when you started in on killin' me, you started wrong."

"Apparently, I did," said Smith. "As

I believe you observed earlier in this conversation, I miscalculated the requisite height. But the past is past. We were discussing the present. About this eavesdropping business. What of it?"

"This." Pink leaned forward. "I want half of all you scoop on this stock deal."

"And if you don't get it?"

"I'll kill you."

"When?" asked Smith. He might even have been amused, by the light in his eyes.

"What d'you mean?" snapped Pink. "See here, Smith. I've not searched the face of the earth for you for years to be chivvied. You get that tight. If I hadn't overheard what I did the last time I was here, and to-night, you'd have been dead by now."

"Really? Let me explain. I can't give you half of the proceeds of the deal now—because the deal has not come off yet. If you leave me alone to clear the deal—you might find difficulty in killing me. It's now or never, Pink, it seems to me."

It was the most courageous thing William Smith had ever done in his life. It was the biggest bluff he had ever put up. It had its effect.

Pink momentarily, but visibly, faltered. He said harshly: "What've you got up your sleeve, Smith?"

"I? Why?"

"Cheeking me like this."

Smith laughed. "Nothing, Pink. How can I?"

Pink stared at him uncertainly. Bill Smith, thought Pink, knew how dangerous he—Pink—was. Their past association must have taught him that. He had robbed and tried to murder Pink. He knew that Pink had sought him across the wide earth to take his life. And yet he was undisturbed. He indicated to Pink the vital necessity for immediate and drastic action.

It was not logical. Smith was no man to take mad chances. He knew something which was hidden from Pink. Suddenly, Pink wondered if he sat in a position of deadly peril! The thought set his flesh creeping, for, like most physically weak folk, he had an inordinate love of his own life.

He was remembering all Smith's cunning in the years that were gone; how Smith had never been cornered, had never tasted the bitterness of defeat and failure. The terror of the man's name in those old days was revived in Pink's memory. Smith had been the unnamed leader of the Fellowship, despite their vows of equality, and that period of his captaincy had left its mark on the innermost mind of the twisted, broken little devil now facing him.

Pink leaned forward. Suffering had distorted both his mind and body. The broken wreck a Boer had found at the bottom of the bluff and had patched up into some semblance of manhood was not the balanced deadly creature who had crossed hands and sworn the oath that night the Fellowship of Strangers was formed. William Smith was realizing that. Pink was dangerous—but not too dangerous. Thus reasoned Smith.

Pink snapped: "I asked you what you've got up your sleeve." His eyes blazed. His wasted form was racked by a violent emotion which swept through him like the breath of a typhoon. "I say this, Smith—I'll hang for you. I mean it. If I get you—they can do what they like with me. Now, am I in on this deal or not?"

"I fail to see how you can be," said Smith. He had a consciousness of increasing peril. Bluff would hardly succeed with the desperate man opposite him. He wondered what he could do to thwart Pink. "You see, Pink, I shouldn't play straight with you any more than you'd play straight with me. The deal's not through yet, as I've said, and once you let up on me—you've lost me."

Again Pink was uncertain. It was the most amazing thing to which he had ever listened. He had expected lies, cajolery, wide promises; instead, he received the blunt truth. When one deals habitually in lies the truth is apt to deceive.

Smith was now tense and strained, although he managed to preserve an appearance of indifference. There was death for him in the mounting decision in Pink's eyes. Pink intended to kill. Something shook inside Smith. For the first time in his life the cold fingers of fear lightly touched his heart.

Death—when the biggest coup of his career was reaching its consummation! Death—from this man he thought dead.

Pink mouthed something. The oath broke the silence startlingly. The gun came up—

And the door of Smith's bedroom opened.

"Drop that!" It was a feminine voice, clear, steady, commanding.

Pink and Smith turned, the former with his mouth agape, the latter with his hands dropped to the arms of his chair, his body leaned forward, as though to leap to his feet.

He saw the girl uncertainly—very beautiful—just an impression of her. She was talking again to Pink.

"Drop that gun!"

Pink's pistol fell to the floor. He sat back in his chair, huddled up, his tongue seeking his lips.

The strange girl took command of the situation. She stepped forward and picked up Pink's pistol, swinging it in her left hand. To Smith she said: "He'd better go, hadn't he? One can't fight in a big hotel. It isn't done."

Smith nodded. Events had been rather swift.

The girl tossed her head back. "Get out!"

Pink slid past her to the door, muttering, his red-rimmed eyes shooting from her to Smith and back again. At the door he stopped, angry of a sudden.

"All right—Smith—you and your sidekick—I—"

He went out, slamming the door.

On that, Smith found his tongue. "Who the hell are you?"

His rescuer smiled. "I'm Kitty Willis, and I'm supposed to be employed by Lord Bordington to rob you."

## CHAPTER VIII

### AS ONE THIEF TO ANOTHER

SMITH got to his feet and, walking to the sideboard, helped himself to a neat whisky. He felt he needed something. He had tricked Bordington, met a man back from the grave, stared into the eyes of death, and listened to a naïve confession—all in the space of half an hour; and it was a fairly full program even for Bill Smith.

Also, he wanted a moment in which to collect his thoughts. Danger from Pink was temporarily past, but there was sure to be some reaction. Smith was older than he had been in Africa, and his nervous system was not quite so elastic. Smith, after all, was only a very clever and scoundrelly human being, and not the superman type unencountered outside the pages of fiction.

Kitty watched him with an air of indifferent interest which concealed a swift summing up of his capabilities so far as she was able to judge them in the first few moments of this first encounter. She had listened to his conversation with Pink, and that alone had been a trumpeted warning for her. Few men could have faced Pink as Smith had faced him.

Smith swallowed his whisky and turned round. He was altogether composed. He twisted the tip of a cigar between his finger and thumb, breaking the outer leaf.

"That's an amazing statement," he said. "I'd like to hear it all. Sit down."

Kitty dropped into her chair. Her little pistol was back in her pocket. She laid Pink's gun carelessly on the table and left it there.

"It about covers all the ground," she said. "Lord Bordington has offered me fifty thousand pounds to recover a paper which, I understand, he has just handed you."

Smith's eyes narrowed. Bordington was not quite so "easy" as he seemed. It had been a cute idea to employ this nonchalant young woman to steal back the document after he had seen his own incriminating note burned. Smith's quick brain summed it all up at once. If anything had gone wrong Bordington would not have been implicated.

"Why have you split?" he asked.

Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "Bordington's no use to me. You might be. Directly he told me that Fellowship of Strangers stuff I knew what I intended to do."

"He told you that, did he?" asked

Smith, and was conscious of error. He had been so confident that Bordington was too afraid to mention their connection to anybody, that he had seen no harm in talking of his past in order further to frighten Bordington. Now he found that Bordington had babbled to a woman thief.

"He did," agreed Kitty. "Of course, I'd heard of you. And I was anxious to meet you. So I pretended to fall in with his wishes."

"How did you get into touch with him?"

"Oh—I decided to break into his place—Bordington Manor. I was shown over it by—by somebody who didn't know who I was, and I got a good idea of its interior layout, and where was the safest place to get in. Unfortunately, Bordington was suffering from insomnia, and he came down for a walk, and caught me. He seemed worried. Had you on the brain, I expect. Then he told me a lot of things about you, put up this proposition—that I should steal the paper and get fifty thousand as payment for doing so—and here I am."

"Who showed you over the place?"

Kitty's momentary hesitation was not lost on Smith. "Bordington's secretary. A young fellow named Jim Lansdale."

"Hm. Friend of yours?" Smith watched her closely.

"No. I—met him."

"Ah! Flirtation, eh?"

"Perhaps."

Smith laughed quietly. "That's useful. It's one of the methods barred to me. No nice-looking young men—or women—will flirt with me. That's where you get a start of me. Well, it's real good of you to have called off that thug just now, and to have tipped me about Bordington. I'd like to take you to dinner one time to express my appreciation."

"I don't want to go to dinner," said Kitty calmly. "I want something more than that."

"Hello—another participant in the stock deal?"

"No. You can keep your stock deal, if you wish to, although I reckon I've helped in it a good bit; because by now that document could have been mine. I want to be in the Fellowship."

"What?" Smith stood staring down at her.

"I want to be in with you. I've heard a lot about you, and I reckon you and I could do big things. You've just admitted that I've got advantages that you don't possess. Mind—I'm not coming in like Trevelyan. I know him.

"He's only half a man. I'm in fifty fifty with you. I can give you some names of people to go and see. There's Danson, the jeweler in Piccadilly—the biggest fence in London. Ask him. And there's Stocky Wellbow, and Gertz. Ask any of them. They'll tell you about me."

She had mentioned three of the most notorious and cunning criminals outside the Fellowship, and, to Smith, it was as good as is a reference from a great bank to an honest man. He knew all three men personally, and they would answer any questions he cared to put.

He was on the point of curtly turning down the proposition when he decided to have another look at her. She was poised and delightfully fresh and beautiful. She looked less like an habitual criminal than anybody Smith had ever encountered. He had just had an example of her calmness in the little encounter with Pink, and her subsequent behavior. He had big things on his hands, and there was Pink lurking in the background. Pink—

His cunning brain was working swiftly. She had flirted with young Lansdale, Bordington's secretary, in order to obtain admission to the manor. She looked the most innocent thing in the world.

It was himself—or Pink—for death—and quickly.

He could not see clearly ahead, but, half formed, there was a plan in his brain, as he answered.

"Come and see me to-morrow at noon. By then, I'll have talked to Danson and the other two and found out what they have to say about you. If their word's good, we'll probably fix up something."

"Right," said Kitty. She got up and went to the door. "By the way, you need not be afraid of my talking about the Fellowship, even if you turn me down. I'm not built like that. And there's another

thing. Bordington's not such a fool as you seem to think him. Watch your step, comrade, or you might get tripped."

"Oh—I'm all right."

"Ye-es," hesitantly; and then: "By the way, is it the truth that that fellow Murray, the Secret Service man, is out to get the Fellowship?"

"I've heard it. Bordington said he was. Why?"

"Well—I'm not windy. But Murray's the chap who got Heine, the German, wasn't he? Kind of mystery being—working behind the scenes, known only to the Home Secretary and the commissioner for police. I'd like to repeat my warning about watching your step. I only asked about Murray because it's as well to know how we stand. It makes no difference to my offer to join you."

"Offer?" Smith laughed.

"Sure! You don't think I'm on my hands and knees, begging, do you? Good night!"

She went out.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHERE THE NEXT BLOW?

SMITH drew at his cigar. "A cute little dame," he soliloquized. "If those three give her a good character I'll take her. I think she'll get Pink for me."

Smith always preferred to "arrange" for other people to do his killing, if possible.

The following morning, at precisely eleven ten, Smith had a shock. The House had just opened, and his brokers were on tiptoe for the purchase of Che Fiangs—price limit one shilling and eight pence. In ten minutes they telephoned Smith.

The buying of the previous day had been disclosed as extensive. The overnight price was ignored when the market opened, and Che Fiangs were offered at three shillings—buyers. In effect, the price had risen sensationally, and there were people willing to pay it.

Ten minutes later came the startling information that Che Fiangs were not easy to obtain. There were rumors going round the House, and holders who had long regarded the shares as a dead loss were now sticking to their holdings in the hope of a complete recovery.

Somebody had struck hard at Smith, and his coup had fallen to the ground. He had secured a few hundred Che Fiangs at something like five shillings each—face value one pound—but now the price was soaring, there was every prospect of a heavy gamble in the shares developing, and Smith was virtually shut out.

In a week or two the details of the treaty would be known, so that instead of the bottom falling out of the rush—as so often happens—and the market collapsing, holders would realize that they had only to wait to insure the stability of their purchase.

Smith was beaten.

He could buy on a market rising like a rocket, if he wished, and get his brokers to pay anything demanded on the floor; but his tremendous scheme for acquiring vast wealth with a gesture had failed. Whoever had bought on the day before Bordington handed Smith the copy of the treaty had already made a large fortune, and must make more.

By noon Che Fiangs stood at ten shillings. Nobody could say what they would be by night time. Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow had only stray packets of a few hundreds on offer. Paris and New York were buying. There seemed no sellers anywhere. Such is the rapidity with which a substantial rumor flashes through the financial meshes of the world.

At midday Kitty arrived, looking very cool and radiant in a simple white gown. Smith met her in the palm court, for she pointed out that it was hardly seemly for her to go up to his suite. He was morose.

"What's wrong?" she asked. "Has somebody let you down?"

"Badly. The stock deal's off. I could still make money, if I wished, but somebody's queered the pitch as far as money for nothing is concerned."

Kitty laughed. It was a very musical laugh, but it did not lighten the heart of William Smith, as it should have done. "Have you seen the three gentlemen I mentioned?" she asked.

He nodded curtly. "Yes." His eyes

were curiously interested for a moment. "You seem to hit the high spots, my girl. Danson couldn't say enough. Is it right that you're the holdup man who cleaned out Ikey Levenheim after he'd double crossed his partner in crime, Horman?"

"If Danson said so?" observed Kitty demurely. "You see, it's so easy robbing thieves. They think they're clever. I shouldn't have touched Ikey, only I learned that he was cheating Horman, his accomplice, who was doing all the work. So I sat by and let Ikey cheat to the limit, and then I just helped Ikey get rid of the spoils. It was very simple—because Ikey had to keep on bolting for fear of Horman. He couldn't come back and raise things against me."

Smith rubbed his chin. "Well, if anybody can put one on Levenheim they deserve a medal. I'm pleased to know you. I've decided to take you in—not fifty fifty—but sixty forty. I get the big end."

"It 'll do," said Kitty calmly. "I mentioned equals because it's always better to ask for more than you expect. What's the move now that the stock deal's off?"

"I don't know. I've got to think. A funny thing's happened. That fool, Trevelyan, has gone and got lost. I telephoned a place I know last night, asking for him, and he hasn't been seen for three days."

"Bolted?" asked Kitty laconically.

"Hardly. There's no reason why he should. He stood for a percentage on this deal."

Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "Then he's not lost. He's probably away somewhere."

"But he was told to stand by. My men usually do what they're told to do."

There was a doubt in Smith's voice which caused Kitty to look at him quickly. "You're thinking of that fellow, Pink," she said. "He can't possibly have done anything to Trevelyan. I should say he's never heard of him. He's not starting the systematic wipe-out business—working up from the bottom."

Smith confessed: "I was thinking of him. I'm beginning to wonder if I got rattled a bit—what with Pink coming, and this deal dropping through. I've got to think about the deal. I want to know who put me away, and who has queered the pitch."

They chatted for a little while, and at last Smith said: "I can't ask you to lunch. I don't want to be seen about with you too much. It's a rule of mine. Give me an address, and I'll notify you when you're wanted."

Kitty handed him a card. It contained an address in Kensington. "I've got a service flat there," she explained.

She was preparing to leave when a boy walked through the palm court calling a number in that peculiar sing-song voice which appears to be a requisite gift with all hotel page boys. Smith lifted his hand, and the boy came over to him.

"The man is waiting, sir," he said.

Smith took the sealed envelope the boy held, opened it, glanced at the letter inside, for what seemed to Kitty an overlong time, and then took out his wallet. From the wallet he extracted a five-pound note.

"Give the man this, and tell him there is no answer," he said.

The boy, with a look of surprise, accepted the note, and departed on his errand. Smith glanced across at Kitty.

"This is disturbing," he said. "I've got here a message in code. It's from Brixton prison. It's been smuggled out to a certain address, and passed on to me. Trevelyan sent it."

"He's caught?" asked Kitty quickly.

Smith nodded. "Yes, and he says that from what the plainclothes men who took him said, he gathers that Murray supplied the information which puts him away. Your concern about Murray seems to be justified."

Kitty was looking serious. "I know it is," she said with conviction. "I've got a feeling. You know how it is. A woman gets a thing into her head—without logic—but it's right, all the same. I've got a feeling about Murray. He's nearer than we imagine. And the fact that he can lift Trevelyan out of your lap, and you not know it, proves how dangerous he is becoming."

She left Smith deep in thought. Murray, the unseen, the unknown, the scoffed at, had struck silently and swiftly and effec-

tively. Smith wondered where the next blow might fall—and when.

## CHAPTER X

### THE HEART RULES

KITTY ever afterward admitted it as a mistake; but it was a mistake which she excused on all kinds of different grounds, excused, in fact, so cunningly that she almost justified it. She went down to Bordington to see Jim Lansdale.

She knew she was acting foolishly. There was a loud outcry within her against the journey; but she went. It was sufficient answer to the arguments of common sense and the outcry of instinct.

Bordington was very delightful in the afternoon sunshine—she traveled there straight from her meeting with Mr. William Smith—a winding street bordered by quaint cottages, with a gabled inn displaying a swinging sign, a glimpse of church spire above massed greenness, soft half-timbered houses, and mellow warmth over it all.

There was a dog asleep on the cobbled pavement, and a cat sat on a window ledge and surveyed him contemplatively. An old man was dozing on the bench outside the inn. Save for the low monotone of an English summer, there was no sound, and no other sign of life.

Kitty strolled slowly. After the Strand this was wonderfully refreshing and restful. She had once heard an Irish girl describe London as a great, gloomy old place which had forgotten how to be young and, having passed middle-aged restfulness, was drifting toward senile decay. She wondered if the description was justified, as she walked along the village street at Bordington.

She was in a mood for meadows and fields and the songs of birds. We all get like that sometimes—especially on a warm, sunny day, when the Strand and Piccadilly stink of wood blocks and burned petrol, and the clamor of London makes the heated head reel.

Kitty determined to think rurally. It was an escape from thinking of Bill Smith and his affairs and of Jim Lansdale. She looked through the bottle-glass windows of the little shop and watched bluebottles and flies vainly assaulting the impregnable sides of glass jars filled with sticky sweets. She inspected critically yards of tape, cheap stockings and all kinds of other things, displayed in the window on the other side of the door of the same shop.

She stroked the cat, and said: "Hello, old boy," to the dog, as he opened one eye, cocked it at her, and then closed it. She smiled ravishingly on the old man as he touched his hat; and she stepped lightly into the cool, shadowed interior of the low-roofed, beamed inn.

They were pleased to see her. She had, she said, come back for at least one night. Her old bedroom was given her. It looked out across the garden, blazing with roses, and, beyond the garden, across fields and rolling woodland. Half right, above the trees, Kitty could see, in the heat hazed distance, the twisted chimneys of Bordington Manor. Jim Lansdale was there. She wondered what he was thinking—whether of her, or merely of his work. She sat on the edge of her bed and felt unhappy, which was very unusual for Kitty.

The evening was dreary. She wandered in the direction of the manor—of course, by chance—and did not see Jim Lansdale; which, also, of course, was extremely unimportant, and did not at all account for there being something suspiciously like tears in her eyes when she snuggled down between silk and clean linen soon after sunset.

She was up early, and ate a delicious breakfast, in which cream and fresh fruit predominated. Then she went for another stroll, and though there were many delightful walks in the neighborhood, her feet took her once more in the direction of the manor.

She met Jim Lansdale.

It was at a crossing in the path through the woods. The sunshine made leaf-shadow patterns on the path. There was a shimmering halo of white fire above the swaying treetops. There were birds' songs on the quivering air, and butterflies drew trembling lines of color against the restfulness of the undershadows.

Jim walked round the corner—and so they met face to face.

Kitty's heart leaped and dropped with a bang. She was suddenly trembling and felt afraid—for the first time in her life. She looked up at Jim, and tried to smile, but the smile was a pitiful failure.

He glanced at her, and she saw his face change. It was as though a door had shut in it—barring her from all sight of his thoughts and emotions. He raised his hat and stopped.

"I thought you'd gone away," he said. There was no intimacy in his tone.

"I had." She knew it was an utterly ridiculous remark, but it was the only one she could think of at the moment. With this, she surveyed him curiously. It was funny that she could talk calmly to such a formidable being as Bill Smith and find herself tongue-tied and afraid in the presence of Jim Lansdale.

There was a struggle taking place inside him. Despite the closed door, some signs of it showed in his eyes.

"Are you staying long this time?" he asked.

"No. To-day."

They stood silent for what seemed to Kitty a very long time.

At last Jim burst out: "You said you would see me on that following day—but you bolted without a word. And—I saw you the night before—running across the park in the middle of the night."

She bit her lip. For an incredible moment she found herself actually contemplating telling him all the truth; but the moment passed.

"Yes, Jim," she said nervously. "Are you going to the manor now?"

He stared at her. She had not answered his implied question. "I was going that way," he said.

"So was I."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were wide with appeal. The signs of struggle in his increased. He was understanding that she was unhappy.

"We'd better go together, then," he said.

They walked side by side along the path. Jim did not utter a word. He was filled with burning thoughts—with indignation against her for running away from Bordington without a word, after telling him that she would see him on the morrow; for her lack of explanation of her extraordinary behavior on the night he had seen her bolting across the park after midnight.

And she wished she had not come. It had been foolish. It had been surrender to a feminine weakness which, in her game, was best suppressed entirely. Heartache had brought her, a longing to see his face and hear his voice, perhaps to reassure him in some inexplicable fashion. It was abortive and productive only of pain. She should have stayed away and forgotten—if forgetting were possible.

She could stand the silence no longer. "Did you keep your Che Fiangs?" she asked. It were better to talk about his affairs than continue this meaning silence.

He looked quickly at her. "No. I sold them to Bordington."

"I say! You didn't!" She began to understand. It was Bordington who had "queered Bill Smith's pitch."

"I did." He made the assertion in a tone which demanded why she should be concerned about it; and then, evidently relaxing a little, he added: "I'm wondering if he did me; if he knew that something was going to happen?"

"I told you not to sell," said Kitty.

He stopped and faced her. "Why?" His eyes were challenging. "Did you know something, too?"

She contrived to look bewildered, but there was something pitiful in it as well.

"Of course not. But I had a feeling—" she stammered.

"Oh, I see."

They walked on. It was the most horrid walk Kitty had ever taken in her life. His heavy footfalls seemed to sing "Be sure your sins will find you out." She glanced at him from time to time. He was walking very erect, looking straight ahead.

So they reached the farther end of the woodland and came to the edge of the meadows which reached up to the kitchen gardens behind the manor.

There, Jim looked down and sideways at Kitty. The sun was coming through the trees on her. She looked fragile and deliciously dainty and sweet. Her lips were quivering ever so slightly. He re-

membered all those days on the river and across the footpaths. She had been fine, then. She had been a real pal, sensible, full of fun, loyal.

Urgent excuses for her began to form in his thoughts. A young man can always find a host of excuses for a pretty girl, once he has surrendered himself to contemplation of her prettiness and consideration of what good qualities she possesses. He commenced to reproach himself—a dangerous sign. He had been pretty beastly to her. Perhaps there was a perfectly solid explanation available as to why she had failed to keep her appointment with him and why she had been in the manor park after midnight that night.

It was all very well for a fellow to condemn a girl; but, these days, girls were so easily condemned. Perhaps he should have given her a chance. Anyhow, she had come back, and it was absolutely obvious that she was none too happy. A few minutes before he had found a negative exultation in her unhappiness—a kind of "serve her right—let her suffer" feeling. Now, he wanted to go to some quiet place and kick himself for a brute. Thus does the stronger sex display its inherent weakness.

In the shadow of the outer line of trees he stopped.

"I say," he began, "I'm awfully sorry about Che Fiangs. You see—"

"What do you mean?" asked Kitty. She did not look at him. Once more, as when first she met him, she was trembling.

"Well—I mean—being short with you. It was decent of you to ask about them. I suppose I was an ass not to take your advice. And—about that—I mean, I wasn't insinuating anything. It was an awfully rotten thing to ask you if you knew anything. You quite understand, don't you?"

"Of course," said Kitty. Now she wanted to cry, which was altogether too awful to contemplate. Also, she was perilously soft toward him, and it made her want to tell him the truth far more—which was likewise too awful to contemplate.

She was happy that he had forgiven her; terribly unhappy that she had ever invited forgiveness by coming down.

Jim went on in his stammering way: "I had rather a dust-up with Bordington last night about it. I mentioned casually about the rise. You know—nothing was meant. I gave him credit for having acted decently and for being lucky. He jumped down my throat."

"Yes?" asked Kitty. She wasn't listening particularly. She was wondering whether she could look up at him and retain her self-control.

"Went absolutely off the deep end. Asked me if I was insinuating anything. Of course, that made me wonder. I mean vehement declarations of innocence without accusation usually point to guilt, don't they?"

"I suppose so," said Kitty. He was, she thought, nicer than ever. He hadn't suspected Bordington. It was just what he would not do. It wasn't in him to suspect anybody—not even herself.

"I said something. One does in those moments. We had a bit of a set to."

"You quarreled?" asked Kitty.

"I suppose you'd call it that. I walked out. I expected to be fired this morning, but he seemed all right. He had a letter in handwriting I've never seen before which seemed to amuse him, and he told me I need not hang around all the morning as he was expecting a visitor. But the butler gave me a good look over and two of the maids. They must have heard the dust-up, I suppose."

"Yes," said Kitty awkwardly.

Again they were silent. The subject of Che Fiangs was exhausted, and there seemed nothing else to talk about. Lansdale's quarrel with Bordington, seeing that it had produced no serious after effects, was of little importance at the moment. Both had a consciousness that all their talk had been in circles, carefully evading the centerpoint of interest—themselves.

At last Jim said: "Are you staying here for long, this time? I thought you had to be back."

"I—got a day off, and came down."

"Why?" The question was a little eager, quick.

"I—thought—I ought to see you, and apologize for bolting—like I did."

"Oh, that's all right. I'm sorry I was so cut up when I first saw you. I ought to have understood."

So he was accepting her presence in the park that night! He did not intend to push the matter further. Kitty was unutterably miserable. It was like deceiving a child. He wanted to believe in her, and, despite herself, he persisted in doing so.

She wanted to run away. She was drifting toward the edge of a precipice, and she knew it. Soon, by these halting steps, he would come again to declaration of love, and this time she would not be strong enough to stop him.

Coming down to Bordington had been sheer, stupendous folly, playing with fire; and both he and she were likely to get burned.

He stepped a little closer to her.

"Kitty—" he said, unsteadily.

She tried to answer him, but could not. Her eyes were misted, so that she did not see clearly. Her face was pitifully pale.

A shot rang out.

In the stillness of the morning it sounded like a hammer blow on glass at night time.

It came from the direction of the manor, short, sharp, vicious.

There was a great cry. Something broke through by the kitchen garden, and ran—a man running like mad. Kitty saw him for but a moment, before he vanished into the undergrowth which, at that point, reached down from the woodland toward the gardens; then he had vanished.

"What was that?" asked Jim, voicing the usual exclamation in such a crisis.

"Come on!"

Kitty gathered her skirts and ran toward the manor.

Jim came after her.

## CHAPTER XI

### DEADLOCK OF FOES

AFTER Kitty had left him on the day he accepted her offer of partnership, Bill Smith gave considerable thought to the matter of Che Fiangs. At first, when he received the information his brokers had to give him, he had been too enraged calmly to consider the whole situation; but his rage soon passed. Years and experience had long since taught William Smith the futility of anger.

Somebody—who knew—had spoiled the market. Somebody—*who knew*—

Bill Smith turned that over in his mind for a long time—all the afternoon, in fact. And in this consideration of it he remembered the words of that strangely wise little beauty who had just become his partner. She advised him to watch his step in regard to Bordington, who was not such a fool as he seemed.

Of course, he wasn't. William Smith had long since realized that. No man reaches—and holds—a position of eminence if he is a fool. He might reach it—by influence—but it's the holding of it that is the acid test.

Slowly, he concluded that Bordington was the man who had scooped the pool ahead of him. He wrote to Bordington that night, a curt note, telling him that he proposed to call on him the following day on an important matter.

The next morning—the morning on which Kitty met Jim Lansdale—Bill Smith was in Bordington.

He was received with the deference due to an expected visitor, and was shown into the great paneled library, which, looking out across the tennis courts, was the pleasantest room in the pleasant house. Smith glanced out of one of the tall windows.

There were the courts, *en-tout-cas*, grass, and hard green courts. To the left of them was a stretch of flower-bed dotted lawn. To their right was a tall, clipped hedge cutting off the kitchen gardens which spread all across the rear of the manor. It was a wonderful place, Smith reflected.

In fact, all these old English homes were wonderful places—monumental, unattainable without the passage of time. In an incredibly sentimental moment he felt almost regretful that, one by one, they should be trampled beneath the onward marching feet of so-called progress.

Lord Bordington came into the room, and Smith turned to meet him.

Bordington was suavely polite: "I hope I haven't kept you waiting. You're a few minutes ahead of your time. But sit down.

I don't know whether you drink in the morning. There's a bottle and syphon on that sideboard."

Smith shook his head. He took a cigar, and dropped into a chair. "About Che Fiangs," he said abruptly.

"Yes? You have apparently been busy. I see there have been some interesting movements in the quotations."

Smith scowled and took the unlighted cigar from between his lips. "Very busy," he said. "Only somebody has been busier."

Bordington's eyebrows lifted slightly. He did not say anything.

Smith got to his feet. He was ever unable to sit down when agitated.

"You've done me," he said, with brutal directness.

"I'm afraid—" began Bordington coldly.

Smith waved him to silence. "Shut up a minute. That girl spilled the beans to start with."

"Ah!" It was a little, quiet exclamation. Bordington was suddenly watchful.

Smith went on. There was the suggestion of a mirtless laugh in his voice: "Set a thief to catch a thief, eh? Well, it's an old saying, but all the old sayings aren't true. It was a good plan, but it fell down on one point—the character of the girl. You thought fifty thousand was fair bait. She was a high flyer, though. She preferred partnership with me."

"Is that so?" asked Bordington. "Well, it may interest both you and her to know that I have asked the Home Office to put Murray on her trail for a theft of the copy of the treaty from my safe on the night I met her."

Smith lit his cigar. He wanted to think. There was some admiration in his eyes when he next looked at Bordington, who, all this time, had remained standing.

"By God! That's cute of you, eh? You reckoned she'd split to me, or just bolted. You knew I'd got the treaty. So you put the blame on to her. You're pretty deep."

"I endeavor to practice intelligent anticipation," agreed Bordington.

"Hm." Smith drew reflectively at the cigar. This man whom he had once trapped was difficult to hold. He began to appreciate the abilities of the lost Trevelyan, who had managed to secure Bordington's signature. "Now listen. I've come here to level things a bit. I've got the treaty, and I can tell my story as to how it reached me. You've cornered Che Fiangs."

Bordington laughed. "As frankness seems the dominant note of this interesting conversation, I might as well confess that I have. I hold a controlling interest in the company's affairs. I shall smash anybody who tries gambling in the shares. Do you understand that?"

"Oh—I understand it, all right. I spotted the red light quick enough to keep out."

"I presumed that you would, although it pained me to have to come to the conclusion. I should have dearly liked to have smashed you. Which brings me to a little point. You said just now that I fell down in a little scheme on my reading of the character of that girl—Willis, was her name? May I point out that you also fell down on a little scheme, through failure correctly to read character? Mine?"

"How's that?" asked Smith.

"Well—you held my piece of paper and you wanted the treaty copy for a certain purpose. I was in this position. I must either risk ruin or hand you the copy, whereby you would profit. But it suddenly occurred to me that if I removed from your reach the opportunity of profiting by receipt of the treaty copy, my handing of the same to you was largely innocuous.

"In other words, once your precious scheme for the purchase of Che Fiangs fell down the copy wasn't worth—to you—the paper on which it was written. It was a sound scheme, and it was an alternative to the more direct plan of getting the girl to steal the copy. It has succeeded.

"Within a couple of weeks, the provisions will be no longer secret. The thing is signed, and nothing can hold it back from enforcement. It is now of little value to any outside government, because it is *un fait accompli.* As a matter of fact, it was only valuable to a financier who contemplated a gamble in Che Fiangs. In addition, by the way, I have made an extremely large fortune."

Smith heard it all without apparently

being very moved. He admired Bordington as a man who had called check to him so far; one of the very few men who had ever done so. He admired Bordington for his lack of resort to forceful methods. He could never imagine Bordington threatening with a gun—like, say, Pink. Bordington would, however, get there just the same; get farther, in fact.

Smith paid one of the few compliments of his life. "My lord," he said, unconsciously using the mocking appellation he had employed when he had Bordington in his power, "if you'd been in The Fellowship we'd have bossed the universe."

Bordington smiled. "I'm not ambitious," he said drily.

"No?" Smith studied him, standing with his back toward one of the windows, and facing Bordington squarely. "Well, we've chucked all the bouquets, and we've handed out all the explanations; so now we'll get down to brass tacks. This is how I see it—plainly and without frills."

"I can imagine you abhor frills," observed Bordington. His lips were still smiling, but his eyes were very watchful. Though he had scored so far, he did not delude himself into thinking that the formidable man facing him was anywhere near to defeat. Bill Smith was not so easily beaten as all that.

"Yes," said Smith. "I've got your treaty. To-morrow, unless you and I come to an arrangement, it's going to be published word for word in my paper. Not only that, in heavy letters on the front page, is going to be given a full account of your little stunt at Monte Carlo—how you met Trevelyan and that girl he had in tow; how they got you to sign the paper; how you sold the treaty to me for that same scrap of paper.

"Further,"—Smith leaned forward slightly—"Trevelyan, who's now in jail, will swear that it's all true. He'll turn King's evidence, my lord. D'you get that? I'll pay him to do it. I'll make it worth his while. He'll make a written confession, signed, sealed, delivered, and all the rest of it.

"I'll have the girl over from Paris. I'll pay her, too. I'll put 'em in the box against you. I'll break you—into little bits—if I break myself in doing so."

His tone had increased in intensity as he spoke. His voice did not lift, but, rather, seemed to drop, so that he appeared to hiss the conclusion of this increasing threat.

Bordington listened intently. There was peril ungauged in it. He might face it through. His anticipatory move of advising the Home Secretary that the treaty had been stolen by a girl burglar—seen running across the park at night—might serve to negative Smith's statement; but it might not.

Smith had a devil of a lot of mud to throw, and a devil of a lot of people to throw it. Some of it might stick. He, Bordington, had a wife and daughter in Paris, where the daughter expected to make an admirable match. There must inevitably be a scandal. His daughter's future was at stake, to say nothing of his wife's honor and the honor of his name.

Smith, he realized, was an adept at marshalling to best advantage forces which appeared half beaten.

"What do you want?" he asked quietly. "I would say, by the way, that I ask the question not because I contemplate immediate surrender to your threats, but so that I can weigh the whole situation—whether it will be better to meet you or fight you."

"Don't fight," said Smith flatly. "It hurts. Even if you kill the other fellow he usually manages to leave marks on you. The war showed us that. Fighting's not worth the candle. It's only for history books and tales of romance. Compromise is the strongest suit in the human pack.

"You bite on that. I'll tell you what I want right now. All you've made on Che Fiangs at the end of six months. Here—I'll put it more plainly. You sell me your Che Fiang holdings now at two shillings a share. That more than covers you. Leaves you with a bit of profit, in fact."

Bordington shrugged his shoulders. "You are too generous. I couldn't possibly presume on you."

Smith grinned. "Not you! But they're my terms. Or—exposure."

Bordington stood silent, looking down at

the polished top of the table. Smith tried to read his thoughts by studying his face; but failed entirely to do so. He reckoned he had won. Bordington must surrender. He dared not face this thing through.

Bordington spoke at last.

"I'll sell for five shillings each," he said. "That's a fair profit for me, and an immense profit for you. The shares stand at nearly par now."

## CHAPTER XII

### FOR THE CRIME

SMITH shook his head. The enemy had committed the blunder of giving a little. The banners of weakness were waving over the opposing forces. Smith drove home his blow.

"In three minutes," he said coolly, "there'll be no question of buying—only of a deed of gift."

Bordington looked up at him quickly.

"I mean it," said Smith. "I'm not here for my health, and my time's money—your money. That, I guess, is what was meant by the fellow who first coined the phrase."

Bordington's fingers rapped nervously on the tabletop. With a gesture, Smith had reversed the positions. Bordington had not foreseen this display of resource. He reckoned that Smith would give up the fight when he found that he was balked on Che Fiangs. Instead, Smith had merely joined the battle more closely, and looked like boring through to victory.

"I shan't take two shillings," he said.

"All right." Smith stubbed the ash of his cigar on to the carpet. "You'll take nothing. I don't care. Only you don't want to be such a fool; that's all."

"Suppose I defy you?" asked Bordington quickly.

"I shall be surprised at you," replied Smith. "I just now paid you a compliment. Don't make me reverse it. See here, you can get out of this business slightly on the right side. Why the devil you want to be obstinate and make a fuss, God only knows. I'm putting up a fair proposition. In sixty seconds it ceases to hold good. Now then—two bob or nothing? What is it to be?"

As he asked the question, muffled by the closed windows, he heard a crack. There was the crashing splinter of broken glass behind him. Something went under his elbow—for his right arm was lifted in the act of conveying the cigar to his lips—went so close to his side that it touched his jacket.

Bordington suddenly stiffened, his hand gone to his chest, his face rigid, surprised, agonized.

He dropped flat at Smith's feet, and when Smith went to his knees beside him and lifted him, he found that he had been shot through the chest in the region of the heart.

Bordington's face twisted into a ghastly semblance of a grin. His last words were: "Smith—I think it's—nothing! I hold Che Fiangs now—eh?"

His head fell back.

Smith straightened himself. The Che Fiang deal was definitely off. Just when he had won, just when the cards seemed to be running all his way, the hand of death had stacked the pack against him and the jackpot was scooped into all eternity.

Further, there was danger. He was Bill Smith, of The Fellowship. The police knew him, but could fasten nothing on him. He now stood above a dead man, a famous man, murdered in his library. There were running feet in the corridor beyond the door. The whole vast house was waking to clamorous life.

*Murder!*

The word suddenly leaped at Smith. Murder—and the ultimate punishment under law.

It would be ironic if he went to the gallows for a crime he had never committed. He had an almost irresistible inclination toward panic. Unconsciously, he had bitten through his cigar, and the glowing section lay on the carpet. He ground it with his heel.

He wanted to run away. While he knew it was foolish—for all the house was aware of his presence—the impulse was almost uncontrollable. He actually turned toward the broken window through which the bullet had come.

With that movement he stopped dead.

A young man was pelting across the tennis courts, taking the nets in fine style, like a hurdler.

Behind him, twinkling, Smith had a vision of a pair of exquisitely silk-sheathed legs, decked by rosetted garters. He saw the owner of those self-same adornments as the young man's running carried him out of the line of direct vision, and he caught his breath.

For this was his new partner—Kitty Willis. Smith waited for her to come.

## CHAPTER XIII

### LIFE CALLS IN ITS DEBTS

IN the few seconds during which he waited for the arrival of his somewhat astonishing and apparently ubiquitous partner, Bill Smith reviewed his own position with lightning speed. He repeated that he was of The Fellowship, known to the police, but immune from their more distressing attentions only because they were unable to prove anything against him.

That was one vital point. The second—and to be taken into account with it—was the fact that murder had been done in his presence. Those were points against him.

There was a point for him. He had been in the room. The whole household could swear to that. Whereas the broken glass clearly indicated that the shot had been fired from outside. Also, medical evidence would attest wounding from a distance.

Seeing things a little more calmly, Smith decided that while he stood not the slightest risk of being accused of murder, he might be accused of being an accessory to the fact, or he might be asked a whole lot of awkward questions which he would find it difficult to answer.

The young man arrived, and so did Kitty Willis. Kitty looked at Smith and then at Bordington. Jim Lansdale was already on his knees by Bordington's side.

Smith said tersely: "Shot from somewhere outside."

"Where was he standing?" asked Kitty. There was something in her voice which drew a quick look from Lansdale—something hard and decisive.

"Where he fell," said Smith. "He dropped in a heap right on the spot."

"So!" Kitty went and stood behind Bordington. To Lansdale's intense surprise, she appeared almost unmoved by the dreadful thing on the floor. There were now people knocking on the door, and Jim, while watching Kitty, called out to them to enter. The butler, a footman, and a maid showed outside.

Kitty, meantime, looked across Bordington's body to the broken glass and straight through.

"Somebody shot him from behind the hedge," she said. "Half a minute."

She slipped out of the window and ran across the corner of the nearest tennis court, keeping a straight line with the body and the broken pane of glass.

"Cute dame that," commented Smith. "Who is she?"

"Ye-es," said Jim slowly, and watched Kitty with a little bewildered frown.

Kitty returned. "Somebody who limps came in through the little gate on the farther meadow, walked up the path near the hedge, squeezed through the hedge, fired his shot, and bolted. I get the limp from examining the newly dug bed of potatoes. He plunged straight across that after firing the shot. The right footmarks are heavier and more clearly defined than the left, which smudge and drag every time."

She looked at Smith as she finished, and Smith knew, as well as though she had told him, that it was Pink who had fired the shot. Pink had meant to kill him—Smith. That accounted for the bullet going so close. Instead, Pink had missed, and had killed Bordington. It was a stupendously tragic mistake.

In all this Smith was conscious that somebody was telephoning for the police. He waited. He felt calm and collected. He would bluff through the whole situation. He studied Kitty and Jim Lansdale, and wondered why Kitty had been down to Bordington. Kitty looked at ease—too much so.

Smith decided that she was very disturbed. Jim Lansdale was obviously bewildered. Girl bank clerks don't act as Kitty acted when first she arrived in the

library. Girl bank clerks aren't so composed in the face of dreadful and sudden death as was Kitty. Her behavior indicated a long experience of alarums and excursions denied to the ordinary sheltered girl.

The police came, the local superintendent, a sergeant, and a constable. They brought the official doctor with them, and an atmosphere of terriffic excitement. Bordington knew not murder. Its most hectic crime was an occasional drunk and disorderly with violent assault charges; and these were so few and far between that the last one was almost forgotten.

That murder should have been committed, and that the murdered man should be the lord of the manor, was an upheaval of the very first class. The doctor made his examination. Photographs were taken. The body was moved from its position on the floor. The superintendent began to ask questions.

He started with William Smith, and William Smith had a perfectly straightforward story to tell. He produced his card, giving his address as the Hotel Magnificent, London.

He had, he said, come down to see Lord Bordington on important private business which concerned only themselves, and Lord Bordington had been shot while the conversation was in progress, the bullet apparently coming from the direction of the kitchen garden hedge and, as the policeman could see, breaking the window in transit.

William Smith was put on one side. Jim Lansdale was questioned. He told nothing except that he had heard the shot and come running to the spot.

The butler, the footman and the maids had much the same tale to tell—a shot and a rush to the scene of the crime.

Then the superintendent turned to Kitty. He stared for a moment. His eyes ran over her. He appeared to be repeating something to himself—like a description of a "wanted" person. Then he said: "Is your name Kathleen Willis?"

"Yes." If Kitty looked momentarily in the direction of Jim Lansdale, if in her eyes flickered, almost imperceptibly, a swift appeal, nobody noticed it. She seemed cool and collected and watchful.

The superintendent said briefly: "You are the person who was wanted in connection with the Levenheim business. Got away with it on a technical error of law, eh?"

Kitty nodded. "I stuck up Mr. Levenheim," she said. "He deserved it. He'd robbed Horman, after getting Horman to break into the Consolidated Syndicate's place. You people got all the goods back from me. I'd only robbed a thief. There was no reason why I shouldn't get off."

Jim cried: "Kitty!"

She looked at him. She seemed very jaunty. "All right," she said. "It's true. But you can prove that I didn't kill Bordington. I was with you at the time."

"Oh, God!" murmured Jim.

Kitty's lips were just a shade tighter when she looked at the policeman. "Because I was wanted over the Levenheim deal, and because I happened to be around at the moment Lord Bordington was killed, it isn't up to you to start investigations on the premise that I did the killing," she said. "A limping man shot Bordington, and the dug-over potato bed behind the hedge will prove it."

"When I want you to teach me my duty I'll ask you," snapped the superintendent. "I want you to answer some questions."

He elicited from her the fact that this was her second visit to Bordington, and that she was on friendly terms with Jim Lansdale, who, all the time, stood back against the wall, white and drawn.

At the finish the superintendent said: "Why did you come to Bordington, and why have you so sedulously cultivated Mr. Lansdale's friendship?"

Kitty looked him straight in the eyes. "That's not relevant to the crime," she said. "I shan't answer."

The superintendent's face flushed with anger. He knew that Kitty need not answer any of his questions unless she desired to do so; and she was correct in her assertion as to irrelevance, in so far as facts went up to that moment. She had a complete alibi. She had, beyond all doubt, been with Jim Lansdale when the shot was fired.

Suddenly the inspector turned to Smith. "These two people," he said, indicating

Jim and Kitty. "Where did they come from?"

Smith answered slowly. "They were running across the tennis courts when I saw them."

This was true. The superintendent said: "Ah!" as though he had scored an important point.

They were all allowed to go. Kitty went out alone through the window. Jim Lansdale still stood by the wall. He did not look at her as she went. He was like a man stricken over the head, dazed and half stunned.

Bill Smith followed in Kitty's footsteps. Somehow, Smith felt uneasy.

They traveled up to London together, but Kitty did not speak all the way, until, nearing the terminus, Smith said: "What's got you? Wind up?"

"No. I was wondering why life always calls in its debts at the very worst moment."

## CHAPTER XIV

### EACH MOVES IN HIS WAY

A WEEK later the superintendent made an interesting discovery. Bordington's affairs were in perfect order, and so his will was quickly proved. It left everything to his wife save a section of his holdings in Che Fiangs—those shares he had bought cheaply from Jim Lansdale —and which he now left to Lansdale.

There was an explanatory paragraph, which said that he knew he had actually cheated Lansdale in the purchase of the shares, and that Lansdale must inevitably discover this. But the shares had been temporarily necessary to him for "private reasons of control," and he left them to Lansdale as some compensation. They were now worth some two pounds each, and were still rising, and so Jim Lansdale found himself a comparatively rich man.

But the superintendent saw something else in it all. The man, William Smith, had said Lansdale and Willis had come running across the tennis courts immediately after the shot was fired. Beyond all doubt, the shot had been fired from beyond the courts. Willis was a notorious woman thief.

Jim Lansdale had, on Bordington's own statement, a reason for anger against Bordington; and by Bordington's will he was likely to benefit immensely.

Was it possible that, as Bordington's secretary, he had been able to learn the contents of the will, without Bordington being aware of this?

The superintendent was inclined to think it possible, even while he was unable to see how it might have been effected. Lansdale was consorting with a criminal. He had refused to make any statement regarding his relations with her, and became solidly and curiously dumb every time the police mentioned her name.

This was a fact the superintendent marked against him; for the superintendent had no romance in his soul.

He found himself facing this situation. A young man, poor, cheated by his employer, and yet possibly knowing that he would become wealthy should his employer die, on the friendliest terms with a woman who had no equal in the realms of crime.

There were all the ingredients there for a highly satisfactory murder.

Further, it had been cunningly done. They had shot Bordington from behind the hedge of the kitchen garden, and then come running across the tennis courts as though the shot had alarmed them.

The superintendent was building up a pretty theory. He got more and more excited and self-satisfied as he went on.

Not only had they done all this, but they had provided for something else. They had most daringly shot Bordington while he was talking to somebody—choosing that moment so that that somebody could provide them with an alibi.

In effect, they had wanted somebody to see them come running in an alarmed state across the tennis courts, and who could they have had better than a man who was with Bordington when he was shot?

In all this the superintendent saw the workings of the clever brain which had defeated Levenheim, master crook. The woman would have designed it all; the man have executed it. It was the old tale of Adam and Eve.

The woman thought of it—the man did

it. The superintendent told himself that he had found an apt comparison. It rather tickled him. He actually forgot to set a police trap for motorists on the only straight and safe piece of road around the district.

And that talk of the woman's about a cripple and the potato bed. That was cute, if you like. Anybody can imitate the mark made by a cripple on recently dug earth, if they practice a little. The superintendent did it himself.

The woman was clever. She provided for everything—even for a mythical murderer. Nobody had seen the cripple. Nobody had found the marks save herself. William Smith, on being questioned, had stated that she had gone straight to the spot in the hedge where the marks commenced.

That was a little error, thought the super. She should have cast around a bit. But she wanted to get things done. She wanted to hammer home her defensive evidence before anything else was discovered.

The superintendent devoted a long hot afternoon and evening to full consideration of all these points; and found at the finish that, momentarily the woman was out of his reach. There were strong grounds for suspecting Lansdale, because he had had something to gain.

The woman, also, might have had something to gain, provided that there could be proved to have existed between herself and Lansdale anything more than a mere casual friendship. Suppose, for instance, Lansdale had promised to marry her, or take her away with him, or provide for her in any way whatsoever.

That was all right; but she was just outside the circle for the time being. It was another indication of her cleverness, thought the superintendent. She was as elusive as the proverbial eel.

But even eels were caught—provided the hook was baited right.

The superintendent decided that the hook in this case might be Jim Lansdale. There were no scientific methods about the superintendent's workings. He was a believer in the sound police routine of constant questioning, watching, burrowing, working. He didn't pick up cigarette ends, sniff them, analyze them, decide they were made in Constantinople and that, therefore, the murderer was a Chinaman with one eye, who was addicted to drinking whisky.

There was none of that stuff about the superintendent. He fastened on to some salient fact, and he stuck to it until it revealed another salient fact. He had the patience of Job and the pertinacity of a bulldog.

In addition, far more important, he had the wonderful and complex organization of the British police behind him. He believed that all murders were committed for a motive, and that that motive fell under one of a few heads—revenge, anger, jealousy and love of money.

There was money in this. It provided the motive.

On the following day he found Jim Lansdale up at the manor busy on Bordington's affairs.

That evening the London newspapers had something to scream in heavy headlines.

James Lansdale, the late Lord Bordington's secretary, had been detained on suspicion of complicity in the murder of his employer, and was being closely questioned by the local police.

That same evening, also, Kitty Willis telephoned Bill Smith at the Magnificent and asked him to meet her within an hour. They met at a quiet Soho restaurant and dined. Kitty seemed her usual self.

Smith said: "Seen the papers?"

Kitty nodded. "Yes. That superintendent's a fool. I know Lansdale didn't do it, because I was with him all the time. It was Pink. Which brings me to the reason why I wanted to see you."

"What is it?" asked Smith.

Kitty looked straight at him. "Pink's tried once," she said slowly, "and he has failed. He has, inadvertently, committed a crime which might hang him one day—especially if one of us cared to go to the police and tell them everything. You can bet that he knows you suspect him. Pink wants to get you. He'll hang afterward gladly; but he must get you. It seems to me that there's a crisis at hand."

"In what way?" asked Smith.

"Why—if you don't slip into it, and get

Pink—he'll kill you. I'm not running in harness with you in order to uphold a private vendetta. I want the board cleared and work begun, and I'll confess that I'm afraid of work with Pink around. I think it's time you finished with Pink."

Smith nodded. "You're right. But how? Killing is dangerous. There's enough trouble brewing over this Bordington affair."

Kitty looked contemptuous. "I'm not talking about murder. It may surprise you, but I don't believe in killing. But Pink is a murderer. He has killed Lord Bordington. I think my evidence might hang him.

"If the police had only taken the trouble to accept my theory as correct, and had made inquiries in the district, they would have found that a man answering to Pink's description came down to Bordington by train. However, that's neither here nor there. What we know is that Pink did it. We don't want trouble with Pink.

"I suggest that we get hold of him and threaten him with exposure regarding the killing of Bordington. We might pay him a certain sum to clear, on condition that he signs a confession—some such arrangement as will absolutely tie his hands. And then we'll book him a passage to the other side of the earth and see him on the ship. Is that all right?"

"It sounds fairish," agreed Smith. "Who's to find him?"

"I reckon you can do that. You've got a gang. I haven't. It's easy to get into touch with a man like Pink if you want to. By the way, I'd be present at the interview, eh?"

Smith grinned. "Protection?"

"Well, two to one is better I think. Pink might be awkward."

"You're right. I'll fix an appointment with him—not here, of course—and let you know. We'll go along separately. We'll both get there within five minutes of each other. Is it understood?"

"Right."

Twenty-four hours later Kitty was notified by Bill Smith that if she presented herself at No. 14a Danden Street, Rotherhithe, London, S. E. at 8 P.M. on the following night and asked for Mr. Pink, she would please Mr. William Smith. Pink was found, and all that remained was to dispose of him. Evidently he was willing to discuss terms.

It is now necessary briefly to chronicle two occurences of some importance to the people concerned in the affairs of Bill Smith.

At eleven o'clock in the morning of that day when Kitty was due to meet Messrs. Pink and Smith in conclave, Jim Lansdale was brought before an extremely altered superintendent. The man had lost his bluster and his official manner.

Jim, surveying him, realized by the outward and visible signs that he had been not rapped over the knuckles, but heavily banged. As a matter of fact, the superintendent was perilously near to reduction in rank.

A certain somebody had told him that while he was an expert at trapping speeding motorists he was apparently useless for the investigation of the lesser crimes, such as murder. He had overlooked a vital point in the investigations—and overlooked it because it was supplied by a woman crook, whom he had made up his mind to suspect.

Jim Lansdale was released unconditionally. As he turned to go he said: "There was a girl gave you her address. I've never had it, but I'd rather like it, if it isn't asking for something that's not permissible."

The superintendent looked him over. "If you take my advice, young man, you'll keep away from her," he said. "She's dangerous." And then: "All right. I'll give you her address." He did so. He was probably wrong in acting thus, but he was a rattled man.

Jim read the address three times in ten minutes, as he walked toward the manor At the end of fifteen minutes he had come to a decision.

He would go to London by the first available train and ask Kitty whether it was all true.

The second event of importance was that within an hour or so of Jim's release Bill Smith had an urgent call from a certain shady solicitor, a call which took him

straight to that solicitor's office in the city. He found that the man was acting for Trevelyan who, curiously enough, had, since Smith received the note in code, been moved from his original prison to another.

Smith was with the solicitor for an hour. When he left there was a hint of a pallor beneath his bronze. He had used the telephone at the solicitor's office, and the number for which he asked was a Surrey number.

He did not return to the Hotel Magnificent for the rest of that day.

## CHAPTER XV

### THERE WAS A SLIP

KITTY reached Danden Street, Rotherhithe, at eight o'clock exactly. She found it a short thoroughfare, joining two others of similar aspect, a street composed of two parallel brick walls of uniform ugliness, in which, at regular intervals, had been knocked large and small holes for doorways and windows. The houses had minute cemented forecourts, fronted by iron railings.

Some of the iron gates were useless, because the progeny of the district appeared to spend their time in swinging on them, to the detriment of their hinges. Danden Street was not slum. But it was desperately, perilously poor—the kind of street one finds by hundreds in our big cities, where folk hang to life's edge by their finger tips.

Kitty knocked at the door of No. 14a and asked for Mr. Pink. A woman who looked as though the weight of the world's troubles rested on her bent shoulders told her he was upstairs in the back room—"what he used as a bed sittin' room, him bein' fond of sittin' alone and readin', and not much struck on pitchers or comp'ny."

There were two children clinging to the woman's skirt. She was wiping her hands on a coarse apron. The odor of washing drifted through the house. It was eight o'clock in the evening. Kitty went upstairs through a mist. The mist was across her eyes.

Kitty knocked on the door of the top back room and was bidden enter. Pink was sitting on the edge of a bed, facing the door. On his knee was a gun. He cried out when he saw Kitty, and, as she closed the door behind her, he exclaimed: "What do you want?"

"I'm waiting for Smith," said Kitty. "We're partners, you know. We're in this together."

Pink scowled at her. "I owe you one," he said. "You cheated me that night I had him."

Kitty smiled. "All in the game, Mr. Pink. May I sit down?"

Pink nodded gloomily. He sat leaning forward, with the gun dangling between his legs, loosely held by the butt and trigger. He did not look again at Kitty. She might not have existed.

The minutes passed—five—ten—fifteen.

Kitty began to feel uneasy. What had happened to Bill Smith? Why had he not come? Had things gone wrong? She was as near to panic as ever she had been in her life with that thought.

Pink stirred.

"Bit late, ain't he?"

"A little."

Pink settled down into his hunched attitude once again. Five minutes more slipped into eternity.

Kitty kept control of herself. Something *was* wrong. Bill Smith would never have been late for this appointment—certainly not as late as this.

There was a hitch—an unforseen error—a slip—somewhere; and, at this juncture, a slip might mean death.

"What's Smith's game?" demanded Pink suddenly. "Keeping me hanging about with you. What'd he want me for, anyhow?"

"He wanted to come to some arrangement over things," said Kitty.

Pink sneered. "He's got a hope."

Kitty leaned forward. "Listen, Pink. I'm not in the game so far as you and Smith are concerned, so perhaps I can put it better than he can. If you kill him, you'll kill yourself. You've got years of life before you, and Smith's willing to admit that he owes you something. He proposes to buy you off—with two things, silence and money."

"Silence?" repeated Pink. "What's that mean?"

"About Bordington," said Kitty quietly.

"Eh?" It was sharp, snapped. Pink's face was alight, his eyes cunning. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Murder," said Kitty composedly.

It was a tense moment. She saw Pink's fingers involuntarily tighten on the gun. Her own hand was clutching her little pistol in the pocket at the front of her gown.

Pink took a deep breath. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"You do. You killed Lord Bordington."

"That's a blasted lie. See here! I'll—" Pink's voice lifted.

Kitty shook her head. "Don't get excited. I know you did it. Smith knows you did it. We have absolute proof. So why deny it? We wish to make it a basis for bargaining, and I can't get any farther while you keep shouting out useless denials."

Pink's tenseness relaxed a little. His tongue touched his lips.

"I don't know how you found out," he said. "Guessed, I suppose, eh? I was after Smith, curse him. I must have missed him by less than an inch. Saw his coat twitch. That fool Bordington was right in the line, and got it fair. I ducked pretty hard, you can bet."

"Yes," said Kitty. "And now that we quite understand that you killed Bordington, I want to say that Smith's offer is this: He will pay you a certain sum down—I can't tell you how much, because he's not here—pay your first-class passage to any distant country you wish, and keep his mouth shut about Bordington, if you call things a deal. Does it appeal to you?"

Pink gloomed a little. "I swore I'd get Smith," he muttered. "Swore it. It was the first words I spoke when I came round."

"Yes, but it was a long time ago," urged Kitty. "You can view things more sensibly now. That matter between Smith and yourself can be ended better than by bullets. You've already killed Bordington in attempting to kill Smith. The next time you might kill yourself—at the hands of the law. Smith has only to telephone Scotland Yard, and you'll hang."

"I'd blow the whole game," said Pink savagely.

"What game?" asked Kitty.

He scowled at her. "About Smith."

"But you can prove nothing. That's just the point. You'll hang, and Smith will live on; whereas by taking his offer you get freedom. Now I can't stay any longer. Am I to tell Smith that you're considering the suggestion?"

"If you like." Pink got up. "Where *is* Smith to-night?"

"I don't know. I wish I did." There was something in Kitty's voice which aroused suspicion in Pink's eyes.

"You're afraid," he said. "Is anything wrong?"

"Well—I don't know. He should have been here. He was anxious to be here. I can't understand it."

"All right." Pink grinned. "I hope he's collared. I'll be waiting for him when he comes out. Tell him I'm thinking about his proposition."

Kitty went. She hurried. She made straight for the nearest telephone box and was inside it for some time. She was tense and strained.

Things were wrong. It drummed in her head. There had been an unforeseen slip somewhere.

She took a taxi homeward. There seemed nothing else to do.

And Pink, sitting in his bedroom after she had gone, found the door of it opened without preliminary knocking. He tried to reach for his gun, but he found that he was too late.

## CHAPTER XVI

### "THE NEAREST BUT NOT NEAR ENOUGH"

KITTY'S flat at Kensington was situated in a block of so-called mansions standing in a quiet square. It was as nice as any place situated in the heart of London ever could be. Which means to say that its sunshine was always robbed of half its violet rays by tons and tons of smoke; that it was invaded many times during the winter by hideous fog; and that always there came to it, threateningly, the roar of ceaseless traffic.

In the hot weather it was afflicted by the smells of burned petrol and heated woodblocks. In compensation for these deficiencies one could, of course, always get a taxi at the door, and there were many theatres, music halls and picture houses and restaurants near at hand. Of such is life composed.

Open country and swinging seas have nothing on a good picture house and a London taxi ride. Besides, she lived near the cognoscenti, whatever they may be. "Everybody" lived in London, although when "London was empty" it always seemed just as full, an enigma inexplicable up to this very day.

On the little things of everyday life great issues may sometimes hang.

Kitty's flat door had two locks—one of them an ordinary lock with a doorknob each side. This could be locked by turning the key, or left latched so that the door could be opened from either side by use of the knob. This was never locked.

It was reënforced by a Yale lock, which was the strong point of the door's defenses. The Yale was the fellow who was designed to keep out the burglars. Everybody knows that a Yale lock can be put out of action by turning back the little knob and slipping up a small catch, when the tongue of the lock is held back. When Kitty's Yale lock was in that position, the flat door could be opened by turning the knob of the lock below the Yale.

Kitty reached her flat and put the key in the Yale lock. She was perturbed. All the way from Rotherhithe she had wondered what had become of Smith; and the more she wondered the stronger grew her conviction of peril.

She had bought an evening paper on her way, and had read that Jim Lansdale was released, a knowledge which brought her some thankfulness and a curious sense of shame. Behind her anxiety was a gnawing unhappiness.

She let herself into the flat.

The front door gave entry to a little square hall, very tasteful in decoration, from which the various rooms opened. The doors of some of these rooms were not closed, and Kitty had a swift glimpse of her own bedroom, delicate, perfumed; and a swift glimpse of a mirror in the sitting room. Reflected in that mirror was Bill Smith.

Kitty's hand went up to the Yale lock. She closed the door. She walked into the sitting room.

It was an act of terrific courage.

She could have bolted, but her jaunty spirit refused to find refuge in flight. Besides—she wanted something—something of which the night had hitherto cheated her.

She said: "Why didn't you come along to Pink's? And how did you get here?"

"Your maid let me in," said Smith. "She's tied up on her bed now, and gagged."

"I see," said Kitty; and told herself that, for once, her assurance had made her overstep the mark. She had been a fool to come into the flat. "Well?"

Smith got to his feet and leaned against the mantelshelf. He looked changed, harder than ever, more terrible.

He said: "You're a clever woman."

Kitty nodded. "Cute, I think you once said. But you're a clever man. How did you discover the truth?"

"Trevelyan. I was sent for by his solicitor. I found he'd been shifted. It struck me—you know." Smith was speaking in conversational tones. "I asked a lot of questions. The solicitor had had a tip. None of it was direct, but it all pointed one way. I sent a smart man down to Danden Street. He recognized one or two well-known people. He saw Pink taken away. That was good enough for me. I *knew!*"

A gun seemed to come to Smith's hand by magic. He added, with a snarl: "Hold your arms above your head. So! Stand still!"

He stepped forward and, feeling at her skirt, located her little pistol pocket, and relieved her of the weapon.

"Now you can sit down," he said.

She did so. Her heart was beating very steadily, but slightly more heavily. She was watchful and alert; and all the time she realized the stupendous folly of that entry into the flat.

Smith went on. "It was a clever scheme—getting Pink and me together—to talk.

I suppose you were coming along to supply conversational leaders, eh? So that we should say all that we'd done."

"That's right," agreed Kitty. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, you know. There's nothing like getting evidence of a man's guilt from his own lips. It's usually conclusive, especially when he's sane and levelheaded like you are. It seemed to me the only way of doing it. Things were getting pressing. Pink messed things by shooting Bordington, you see."

"And getting your pet boy pinched," sneered Smith.

Some color showed in Kitty's cheeks. "You'll have seen the evening papers?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. I know he's safe. You're a wonder, aren't you?"

Kitty shrugged her shoulders. "What do you intend to do?"

"Kill you."

She leaned back. She stared at him, and saw him vaguely, wolfish, grim. His teeth were showing.

"Listen," he said. "Directly I was phoned about Pink I knew the net was tight. I guessed that when I didn't show up at Pink's every policeman in Britain would be looking for me. I guessed that every port and every ship would be watched.

"They'd at last got a line on the leader of the Fellowship, and all hell would be shifted to hold him. But—they reckoned without one or two things. I'm a man who always has believed in care. I learned to fly a year or two back—when flying was become a very practicable thing. I've got a house in Surrey where I keep a plane, and that plane has been prepared this evening for flight. Round the corner I've got a fast car, and I'm riding for Surrey when I've finished with you.

"I guessed the police would be watching trains and boats—perhaps roads—I'll have to chance that. But the last place they'd watch would be this little flat, eh? So I came to settle with you first."

He was right. Kitty knew that. He had put his finger on the one weak spot. He could kill her in this flat, and only the morning would show the crime. By morning, if he won through to his plane, he would be hundreds of miles away.

He added: "Did Pink put himself in the soup?"

"He stated that he had killed Lord Bordington, if that's what you mean," said Kitty. "Although, for that matter, it was largely unnecessary. I had him all right. It was you I wanted to get."

Smith laughed. "A great many folk have tried to do that—and though you've come nearest to them all, I doubt but that nobody will ever succeed."

"Pink talked of Bradley and a fellow named Hunt," lied Kitty carelessly.

Smith's laugh broadened. "Did he? He would. At the time he regarded it as admirable that Bradley should be killed by snake-bite and that Hunt's death should be carefully arranged to look like accident. Shows how people change. Hunt was an I.D.B., you know. Fell across us. Wouldn't work in with us. We—removed him."

"I know."

Kitty got to her feet. Her action was deliberate. Smith's finger was itching at the trigger of the big automatic. She wondered whether he would shoot her or kill her more silently.

She thought of Jim Lansdale. He was free. The stigma was removed from him. He would never know—now. He would just think that the superintendent had made other discoveries. He would try and forget her.

She felt aimless. She thought of the flat door. Why had she come in? Why hadn't she run when she saw Smith? It was folly of that type which changes lives. Half the world's catastrophies are due to moments of sheer madness.

And now—he would kill her.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LOST MOMENT

SHE heard him ask a question. "Who brought you into this?"

"My father. At least—he allowed me—under persuasion. I've helped him before. He could make no headway; so I came in."

"Hm. You achieved a reputation, didn't you?"

"I thought it best. It was a short cut to you."

"Yes. Cute. Your father's still in business then?"

"He wasn't. He retired after the war. But they brought him back on the Fellowship job."

"Come-backs are never successful," said Smith. "I've always noticed it. Look at Pink. He'll hang. He ought to have stayed away. Why'd you go after Bordington's safe?"

"It was this way. I knew about Trevelyan. You know, it's well known that you and he work together. Well, I learned about the Monte Carlo business—Trevelyan—the woman—Bordington. I didn't know what was happening, of course; but I did know that those three were associated.

"The woman's record was no better than Trevelyan's, and Trevelyan was your employe. Long shots sometimes hit the mark. I thought I'd go through Bordington's private papers. Under the arrangement by which I worked I couldn't go straight to him; and, anyhow, if he were in a mess it would do no good.

"Curiously enough, my luck was in. He caught me, offered me the job of robbing you, and so opened the way for me to effect a partnership with you. I decided on it directly he made his offer to me."

Smith's eyes gleamed. "You don't miss much. Funny, that you should overlook the chance of my coming here to-night, wasn't it? I was afraid you'd reckon on it—and cover against it—when I didn't show up at Pink's place. But I had to risk it."

Kitty took a turn about the room. She knew that he was deliberately wasting time, so that she should be punished. Omnipotent and infallible up to this moment, he hated her for tricking him and for bringing him to the brink of disaster. It was the narrowest shave of his whole life.

"That Levenheim business?" asked Smith. "Was that all in the game?"

"Yes. I knew Levenheim had the goods on him. After all, the goods were the biggest thing. I recovered those—by robbing him—and it gave me a reputation. It was worth letting Levenheim go to get that reputation, because it put the hall-mark on me. I was after bigger game than Levenheim—you!"

"So. And now you've got me." Smith laughed quietly.

He stood and watched her. She could not endure it. He was gloating over her. She knew that. Every nerve in her lithe, slim body was throbbing with suppressed anxiety. Life was curiously sweet.

She kept thinking of the days with Jim Lansdale on the river. That had been a mistake—that business. She should have realized that she was too young, too vividly alive, for flirtations. They might develop into something else—as this one had developed.

Smith looked at his watch.

"Time's up!" he said.

She turned and faced him. Her heart had leaped to her throat. She read the unutterable things in his eyes. There was no courage now—only flooding, devastating fear; for she was young, and to the young death is dreadful.

But she would not show the fear. It filled her. It racked her. It made her feel faint. She wanted to collapse, to scream, to do all kinds of futile things which would have pleased him because they belittled her; yet she held herself steady. Though the trumpets of terror sounded a diapason in her ears, her eyes were unflinching.

"You'll hang—Smith—" she said—breathlessly.

His teeth showed. "I've a good mind to kiss you, first, for that," he said. "You're damned pretty."

She remained very still.

His gun came up.

The front door bell rang.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MURRAY RETIRES

SMITH was as still as Kitty. His eyes lost their savagery and held a question.

"Who's that?" he snapped.

She had to recover her wits. She forced

her reeling brain to action. She had to answer at once—so that he did not realize how desperately she was thinking—thinking.

"My father," she said. "I have been expecting him ever since I arrived here. You've wasted time, Smith."

She heard his breath going through his teeth.

"He can wait outside—till I've finished," he said. "Let him ring."

She shook her head. "You're wrong. I left the Yale lock unfastened. He can walk in by turning the handle. He'll do so if there's no answer."

It was flimsy, illogical. Had Smith paused to consider it he would have realized how absurd it was. A man who can walk straight into a flat doesn't stop to ring. If ringing produces no answer he would certainly imagine the flat empty.

But Smith, like Kitty, had now to think quickly. He knew that somebody was outside, and it was quite a sound thing to imagine that somebody was Kitty's father. She looked so easy and cool that he believed her story about the lock. Anyhow, he could soon prove it.

"Get out to the hall," he commanded. "And if you make a sound I'll risk everything and shoot to kill."

She proceeded him into the hall. Their feet made no sound on the heavy carpet.

There, Smith was able to verify that she spoke the truth. The little slit between the body of the Yale lock and the socket into which the tongue fitted showed no sign of brass.

There was a rap at the door. The ringer was trying knocking.

Kitty looked round. Smith was close.

Kitty took a risk. She was like lightning. She was more athletic than Smith, a modern girl unhampered by voluminous skirts and multitudinous petticoats.

She turned and kicked. Her toe caught the gun. As she kicked, she cried: "Come in! Help!"

The gun went upward—Smith still gripping it. Kitty, with the energy of sheer desperation, flung herself forward, hoping against hope that the person outside would enter, and, on entry, prove a physical match for Smith.

She got her arms round Smith's arm, and she clung, holding the pistol hand above her head for a few threshing, terrible seconds.

The door handle turned. She heard a cry.

Something came over her head, and clutched Smith's wrist above her grip. She felt the wrist and arm turned backward, and she heard Smith gasp. The pistol dropped to the floor, and, quick as light, she had it.

Smith was back against the wall, holding his twisted wrist. Kitty said: "The telephone. Call Scotland Yard. Say Murray wants help. Give this address. William Smith, I arrest you for the murder of Hector Bradley in South Africa in—Jim!"

Jim Lansdale was at the telephone. He could not understand it all; but he knew that the girl who was supposed to be a criminal was calling in Scotland Yard on the authority of the name of Murray, and was arresting this man Smith for murder. It was bewildering: but he telephoned.

When, at last, Smith had been taken away, maniacal in his wrath, Jim looked at Kitty.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"My name's Murray," she said. "I'm the daughter of Murray, the British Secret Service man who became famous during the war. I was a kid, then, of course. But father retired, and they wanted him to go out against Smith, who is the most notorious criminal alive. I helped—and—well—I became Murray, you know. Father couldn't make any headway. I'll tell you the whole story, if you like."

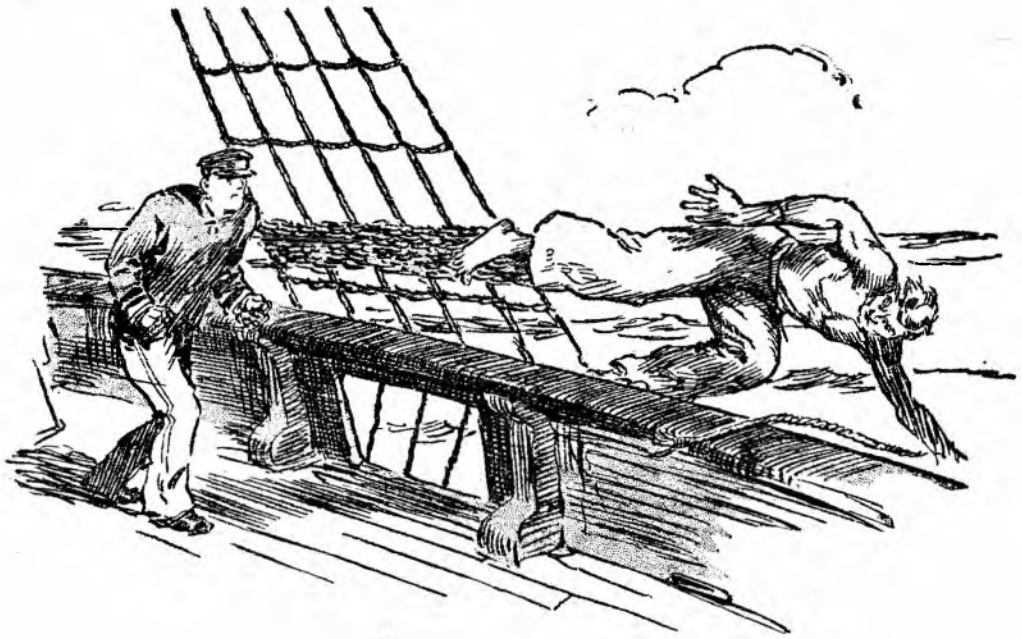
Jim held out his hands. "Come here a minute," he said.

She came to him.

Afterward—he whispered: "Would you like to tell me the story over supper somewhere quiet? Or shall we sit in your little room?"

Kitty said judicially: "I think we ought to go round and see father. I want to tell him that Murray has definitely retired—for good."

THE END



He reached the side of the vessel, wavered, looked back, and jumped

# WITHOUT THE FEAR OF GOD

By H. W. Corley

**THIS IS A STORY OF MUTINY, OF EVERY INHUMAN DEED IN THE HISTORY OF THE SEAS AND OF MANY NEW DEEDS PLACED IN THAT HISTORY**

**A Story of Fact**

"WITHOUT the fear of God before their eyes"—so ran the indictment in the ancient wording of the law of Anglo-Saxons—" Captain Adolph Pedersen, master of the barkentine Puako, and Adolph Eric Pedersen, second mate, with force of arms, unlawfully, feloniously, willfully, deliberately, premeditatedly, and with malice aforethought did kill Axel Hansen, a human being, by means and in a manner and form hereinafter set forth:

"They did beat and wound Axel Hansen, imprison him, withhold proper food and nourishment, inflict upon him cruel and unusual punishment by means of which Axel Hansen, suffering pain and anguish—in extreme weakness of mind and body, from a sense of danger and from well grounded apprehension of further attacks—did cast and throw himself into the ocean on the high seas.

" Near the stern he was crying for help, struggling to be rescued, he did grasp and cling to the logline attached to the stern of the vessel, all of which the defendants well knew and with means and appliances and duty to rescue and save him—did omit and refuse aid—did increase the speed of the vessel so that he was forced to let go the logline—did leave Axel Hansen in the ocean without sustenance and support by means of which he did drown and die."

For the first time in many a long year

the United States Government asked for a verdict of first degree murder in this case, whose charges parallel no other ever called in Federal Court.

The penalty, had the defendants been found guilty, would have been death by hanging, probably atop the old Federal Building, with United States Marshal Thomas F. MacCarthy the probable executioner. There with the sweet salt air snatched from him with his dying breath Adolph Pedersen would have swung and died.

### *Mutiny and Murder*

But the jury, out ten minutes, acquitted the Pedersens. Premeditation could not be proved they said, and the defendants, later found guilty of cruel and inhuman treatment of their crew on ten counts, wept with joy at the verdict, like youngsters freed from an hour's isolation in the nursery.

This is a story of mutiny and murder, of every inhuman deed in the history of the seas, of many new deeds placed in that history by these Pedersens, whose trial was called the most amazing in the history of the Federal Courts.

In the spring of 1918 "Hell Fire" Pedersen, as he was known along the wharves of Victoria, strode among the docks and sailors' hangouts searching for a crew to sign for a voyage to Capetown with a cargo of lumber on his barkentine, the Puako, of which he had been master for twelve years.

With Captain Pedersen on this voyage would sail his two sons—his whelps, the seamen muttered darkly when they saw the boys—sixteen and eighteen, but born with the brawn of old Pedersen and a taste of his hell fire in their black young hearts.

No crew would sign on at first, and Pedersen was forced to get together such as he could, green hands, for few able seamen had a mind to ship with three of a kind. Only old Mattson, the carpenter, who has sailed with Pedersen these seven years, had ever repeated a voyage.

But at last, on April 27, after some weeks' delay, the Puako and her crew left Victoria's harbor.

There was young Reilly, a British subject, eager to join the navy and see the world had not the Puako seemed to offer a less exacting way.

Reilly had some trouble about getting aboard because of liability of the draft, it is said, and if Reilly deserted and ran away in time of his country's need he has been well punished.

There was an old miner, William Jones, sent thither by his physician who thought the sea air would avert tuberculosis.

There was Mattson the carpenter, who ate with the captain, lived in his carpenter shop between foremast and mainmast, and enjoyed many other privileges as well.

There was Jack Joe, picked up while drifting from Hawaii, a crippled gnarled little five footer, with hands, though twisted by rheumatism, clever and agile at the wheel.

Frank Grielen; the two Campbells, one a schoolboy on a lark out of Iowa; Barney Olsen; John Henry Stewart and others. Then there was Axel Hansen, the boatswain, best sailor of the lot, but a " sea lawyer "—hated alike by officer and crew—carrying a book of rules beneath his shirt which told in black and white and no mistake where the authority of the officers ended, a book consulted deliberately on every order, no matter how serious the need of immediate obedience.

### *Young Dolph, Second*

" That crew," sneered the Pedersens later on the stand, " was utterly worthless. We worked hard to train them so that they could sail the barkentine. They did little, they cared for nothing. We had to turn the hose on them to keep them clean! One man in eighty degrees heat wore thirteen shirts on his back at one time!"

They set sail properly enough from Victoria, and in spite of the increasing bullying of the captain, and the increasing swaggering of the two mates, the men never dreamed what lay ahead.

Young Dolph, sixteen, the second mate, drunk with his new authority, loved to snap his fingers in the faces of these older men, and order them about from one task to another, no matter how the ship's progress might be retarded by this deed.

He would draw a gun and shake it playfully in their faces, threaten the men at the wheel with the tiller stick and roar at their discomfiture.

He would tell his father lies concerning what he overheard in the forecastle. For young Dolph had an imagination and a memory. He had fed them both for years on pirate tales.

### *All Sorts of Tortures*

He told his father that the men were plotting to kill him. He hinted that the I. W. W. had hired Hansen to sink the ship, that already the men had stolen arms and handcuffs from the captain's drawer with mutiny in mind.

The cabin boy, through a few well advised kicks and clubbings, bore out Dolph's stories—he supplied much detail which, he said, he had gained through eavesdropping.

Dolph did everything to torment and provoke his father's persecution complex—and all too soon Hell Fire began fearing for his very life.

His delusion increased with the miles which spun out in the wake of the Puako. And four weeks out of Victoria found him fearfully certain that the crew intended taking his life. .

Caught fast in his delusion he polished his guns, left clubs about handily everywhere on deck and below, cursed and beat members of the crew whose business brought them suddenly behind him; feared for his food, never touching it until it had been tried by some other person. One day, when the ship was pitching, a sailor accidentally jolted him as he hurried on watch and Pedersen severely beat him. One beating led to another. It added to the peace of his sleep to see even one of the crew bleeding and cowed.

Then one morning old William Jones, the tubercular miner, stood at the wheel.

"You are plotting to kill me and my innocent sons," Hell Fire snarled at him, kicking him in the shins and calling him vile names.

The second mate, standing near-by, strode up to Jones and struck him in the face with brass knuckles. "You are in the plot, you—," they both cried. They beat him with the tiller stick, dragged him from the wheel and flung him into the lazaret, the rope locker, where he lay weak and bleeding, not, you see, benefiting so much from his sea trip as his kindly physician had planned.

Then the second mate and his father seized others of the crew and beat them, too.

The long evenings in the cabin were made merry with all sorts of tortures.

"Confess! Confess!" insisted Hell Fire. "You are all in this plot to kill me, you—You are all I. W. W.'s—Black Hands!"

They made Axel Hansen eat his I. W. W. handbook while the wounded and bleeding crew stood about. They broke ribs here and there, playfully crippled Jack Joe's other hand to match his first one, trussed men up without food, worked them without sleep, handcuffed them, beat them, flung them into the forecastle, kicked them as they lay writhing on the floor.

"Confess, confess," they said, and when the men begged the tyrants to tell them what to confess to, Hell Fire roared:

"Dolph, bring pencil and paper!"

### *What Would His Mother Think?*

Can you not see Dolph with his glorious chance here? He drew up papers, confessing to Black Hand plots, payments of money by German spies in saloons in Victoria, drew up papers signing over this imaginary money to the three Pedersens. Papers confessing mutiny and piracy, attempts to poison food, attempts to toss the master and mates overboard, to sink the ship, to destroy the cargo.

"They were brave men," said Mr. Miller later at the trial in his summation. "It takes a brave man to suffer. They stood there suffering torture because they could not strike the captain—it is a serious offense. They could not refuse to obey the captain—that is mutiny.

"They could not take the command away from him — that would be piracy. They could only suffer. And those who could not endure the suffering threw themselves into the sea."

Yet, with the penalty of hanging before

them, the penalty for the deeds written, to escape further tortures most of the men staggered eagerly to confess and sign.

But one of them demurred and for the most humorous of reasons. What would his mother think if he confessed to such things as mutiny and attempted murder. He had a rib kicked into splinters for that.

But the worst of all they did to Barney Olsen, who died later in Capetown. The crew was spared the sight of the Olsen beating, but they called Mattson in, the one member of the crew whom they could trust to clean up the blood, and take the mangled body out of the way.

### *What To Confess To!*

" It looked like a slaughter-house," Mattson admitted. " They told me to shoot young Reilly dead, but I told them I would not do that or anything else for them."

He admitted, however, on the stand that he had been fairly willing to help with the water cure, to give rather than take that form of torture at the hands of the officers. So Mattson stood for hours pumping water onto half dead, half drowned men to escape these harsh measures.

" I've sailed seven year with Pedersen," he said. " I like him. I here want to tell the truth."

The Pedersens put Reilly into handcuffs and tortured him into signing a confession that he was a German spy. They starved a man giving him a spoonful of beans and three biscuits in six days, then beat and bled him into signing that the food was ample and good and that those of the crew who said otherwise were a complaining, mutinous lot.

And then the cook, John Henry Stewart, accused and punished for poisoning milk, putting ground glass into hot cakes, tobacco in beans and soap into the soup, suddenly, on May 23, went insane under their clubs and jumped overboard.

That sobered them a little, sobered them to act even more cruelly and more carefully.

" He told me to sign my name to a paper which told how well the master treated us," Frank Grielen said at the trial, " and I refused.

" ' Wake him up,' Pedersen yelled to the boys, and they began to pound me with clubs. I was in handcuffs. But they took them off while I signed.

" With the steward gone, Jim Campbell, never a good seaman, for he was used to coastwise voyaging only, was put in the galley. One night he was dishing up the beans when the captain entered, brandishing a gun and shouting: ' You are in it, too! Confess, confess!' "

He did not know the new devilment on foot, and as they dragged him forth he asked the beaten sailors over whom he stumbled to tell him, " for God's sake, what to confess to—"

" They'll tell you," sobbed one man, an eye nearly gone, with pitiful irony.

They did tell him—with the tiller stick, knives held over his scalp pricking him into submission, and hardly knowing to what he confessed, he signed.

And so it went. The confessions, fantastic, weird, wild, smacking of the pirate novels piled up. The men broken, bruised, half dead, half starved, weak, staggered about the deck or lay unconscious beneath the sails.

### *Man Overboard!*

Then one morning six weeks out of Capetown, Axel Hansen was dragged out of prison and sent on watch. His face was fearfully bruised; he had just been released from the lazaret, and was so weak from long confinement that his movements were not swift. Those of the crew who had spirit enough to turn their heads as he passed by hardly recognized him.

Because it would be difficult with bruised legs and cracked ribs, the young second mate called to Hansen and ordered him to go aloft and loose the royal sail.

The deck was high with lumber, the hold filled with lumber, too, which made the vessel slow to respond to her rudder.

Hansen came down from aloft and the mate called him to step a little livelier.

" I am doing my best, sir," Hansen said.

The first mate, Leonard, hit him with a knuckle duster. What he said then could not be heard by the crew, who told it later, but presently he reached out and slapped

the man's face and kicked him again and again.

Hansen ran down the deck stumbling, terror of too great torture to be endured written on his face.

He reached the side of the vessel, wavered, looked back, and jumped in.

That, somehow, sobered young Pedersen, who was soft, you see, because of his youth.

Jack Joe was at the wheel and Leonard called to him, bade him put the vessel about. He even lent a hand to hasten the movement, while Hansen, struggling in the water clutched the logline trailing from the stern.

### *Dolph's Little Joke*

The shouts from the crew drew Hell Fire to the deck.

"What the hell's the matter here?" he cried, with more oaths making, as Jack Joe said, "very dirty in his mouth."

"Who told you to bring the vessel round?" he asked Joe, striking him.

"The second mate, sir. There is a man overboard."

Hell Fire strode to the rail, looked unconcernedly down, spat, and returned to the wheel.

"To hell with the man overboard, you ——; put the vessel back on her course."

"I could hear Hansen crying for help," Reilly said on the witness stand, shuddering. "Out of the sea came the smothered cries, 'Oh, save me, save me!'

"But the captain ordered the crew standing about to take care of the sails. They did not move fast enough, thinking of poor Hansen there, and the captain hit them with the tiller stick. They sent the vessel on in higher speed. And at last poor Hansen let go the rope and sank out of sight."

"I didn't see a man overboard—I saw only spray," the captain maintained on the stand. "It was too dark to see." His attorney brought forth an almanac to prove that at four o'clock in that particular spot known among the seamen as "Sailor's Grave" and the "Rainy Forties," it was at dawn, too dark to see. Besides, a squall had come up. It was impossible to put about to rescue Hansen.

But the crew knew well—and the master knew they knew—that it would have been possible, had he wished, to rescue Hansen. Hell Fire did not take it as quite the joke young Dolph, the second mate, later seemed to believe it. Dolph found Hansen's rule book and thus inscribed the fly leaf:

> The Dane is now a peaceful member of humanity. He will never again preach doctrines from the little green book.

But the glib attorney hired to defend the Pedersens denied any guilt of Hansen's death on the part of the defendants.

Seven days, he said, before Hansen died —jumped overboard, committing suicide— he had signed a confession admitting guilt of mutiny. He had confessed to planning destruction of the ship. He feared the just punishment which, once ashore, lay ahead of him.

The second mate told how Hansen had confessed to wishing to destroy the ship because the Black Hand was after him, and if they heard the ship was lost they would cease pursuing him, believing Hansen to have gone down with the ship.

"But would Hansen not have gone down with the ship?" asked the district attorney mildly. "How did he propose saving himself as the ship blew up?"

### *Hell Fire Belies His Name*

The second mate who had prepared the confessions had the intelligence, as they were read in court, to look rather foolish. He was clever enough to realize that they were absurd.

Had Hansen been blowing up the ship, the government pointed out, surely he would have done so earlier. Why should a man endure months of torture if he had planned anyhow to end it all?

He was a melancholy Dane, the defendants chanted. He attempted suicide half a dozen times before he succeeded.

"Did you not know," asked Mr. Matthews, "that it is customary to toss ropes or planks to drowning persons?"

"It may be customary," said Pedersen, "but I did not see Hansen. I looked and saw only the spray. Besides there was the squall which kept us from putting about."

"Did you order any of the crew to pull in the logline?" asked Mr. Matthews then.

"No; there was a stiff breeze, the ship was in the wind," said the captain.

Now, strangely enough, on the stand battling for his life, Captain Pedersen belied his name of Hell Fire and his reputation as a swaggering bully. He spoke softly, even shyly. The jury—and it could not fail to impress them—had to lean forward to catch all he said. But his soft words were belied by another witness.

### *"My Screw-driver"*

The government called Captain John Duffy, United States Navy, master of the American transport Luckenbach. Captain Duffy took a full rigged model of the Puako and set it on the floor, where he showed plainly that no matter how the weather, the Puako could have put about to take Hansen in.

He set the sails so that they were drawing a stiff breeze. He pointed the model as the Puako was heading when Hansen jumped into the sea. The court and the jury stood up while, on his knees, Captain Duffy showed how, even in the face of the wind, the vessel might have been brought about while rescue was made.

"If Captain Pedersen cared to have done so, Hansen could have been saved," he testified.

The tortuous voyage to Capetown somehow dragged on. After the death of Stewart the master apparently feared the consequences of his death if they were reported to the American consul by the crew.

He enforced further signatures, drew up incriminating statements to discredit those who might cause trouble. This fear became even greater after Hansen's death and the brutal measures of the master and mates became well-nigh indescribable. New and awful deeds were perpetrated.

Then the master went into the storeroom where Campbell was working around and hurled a cup with all his might at his head. It was a dainty cup, such as was used on those rare occasions when ladies came aboard, and it splintered into the flesh, cutting a gash as clean as a surgeon's knife, laying the bone of the skull open.

Campbell, for no reason that he could find, was then put in irons, thrown into the lazaret, and told to "confess."

They took him out because he had no idea what to confess to, and held him beneath the water pump for the water cure.

Barney Olsen was led before the brave captain, handcuffed. The captain held up a screw-driver.

"Is this yours?" he asked, shaking it menacingly.

How could Olsen know what to answer? Yes? Or no?

He hazarded a guess—the wrong one.

"No, sir," he said. Pedersen struck him full in the face with the blunt end. "Now whose is it?" he demanded.

"Mine, sir," gasped Olsen, shaking away the blood from his face as best he could to answer.

One morning the second mate, as was his playful jest, strode up to some men trussed up in irons. "I'll blow your brains out," he jeered at them.

"Do," begged one of the men hopelessly, "I am bad enough off as it is. Death would be welcome."

### *Off Capetown*

At last the ship, after what must have seemed to the crew an interminable period, sighted the coast of Africa. The crew took heart just as the master and mates began to lose it. The Pedersens juggled the confessions rather worriedly to see if they embraced everything, and held a consultation as to how to avert trouble.

"We'll get to Capetown," proposed the resourceful second mate while his elder brother, handy only at the heavier work of beating and wounding, listened agape. "We'll beat it for the consul, say that we have a lot of mutineers on board, and ask for military aid. We'll show these confessions, get the crew jailed before they can open their black mouths."

"I do hope the authorities will hang them," said the captain, kindly.

On August 27, Captain William Howe, of Capetown, had a phone message from a naval intelligence officer. An American sailing vessel, the Puako, was in difficulty about forty miles off shore.

There was mutiny aboard; the captain asked for a tug to come and fetch him in, and for an armed party to take over the crew.

"We went out to meet this boat," testified Captain Howe. "It was dark and rainy, and although we had searchlights, we failed to pick her up until the next morning. We had twelve men, four armed with rifles, the rest with revolvers.

### *The Consul's Opinion*

"We boarded the Puako at daybreak. Her cargo, we saw, was lumber. We saw some men about the deck, but could see no indication of trouble save that the captain looked worried, very worried, indeed. We read the log and found certain contradictions. I asked to have the crew mustered upon deck, and Captain Pedersen said:

"'We must have a guard for the ship; I am afraid all the men will jump overboard.'

"So the men were lined up under guard. I expected to see a gang of cutthroat desperadoes; instead, I saw the most miserable lot of men I had ever seen in my life. Nine men, some sitting, some lying, too weak to stand. Eight of these nine men had black eyes, several, marks on their faces. The other men, I found, had not been lined up, they were too weak to bring out and had been kicked beneath sails and into lockers to avoid discovery.

"The men were fearfully thin, emaciated, bruised, shins swollen, and many in great pain. I could not get a statement from William Jones he was in such a weak condition. And these mutinying men seemed glad, very glad, to see us—we who had come to place them under arrest!

"Jack Joe was doubled up with pain. He looked an old, worried man when I saw him. Jim Campbell had an open wound red and raw between his eyes.

"I took the men off, intending to let them rest and eat for a couple of days and then get statements. I did not arrest the captain and the mates—then. But I searched their cabin.

"I found clubs, blood stained, rope ends, knotted, and brass knuckles. I found knuckle-dusters and firearms. There were rifles and repeating guns and automatic pistols in the captain's bureau. The crew began to talk and I believed them.

"I arrested the three officers. I have never seen men eat as that crew ate when we fed them ashore. One man ate fifteen biscuits after the meal—a large one—had been nominally completed."

Mr. Murphey, the consul, and the vice consul, Mr. Pizarr, went to the jail to look things over. They heard both sides of the story, observed that the officers were growing more and more worried, the crew more and more confident, stronger, as their wounds healed.

The consul and vice consul did not believe the stories of the officers, but put great credence in the stories of the crew.

"Instead of being mutinous the men were cowed, spiritless," declared Murphey in a letter to the Secretary of State. "They looked ready to do anything to escape further tortures of the tyrants. I believe that the master is practically guilty of the death by murder of the two seamen who jumped overboard."

### *The Jury's Verdict*

"We went to the jail, Mr. Pizarr and I," related Mr. Murphey later. "How pathetically glad the men were to be there! Jones stripped and showed us his body, kicked and beaten black and blue in stripes, his eyes blackened, his head wounded by clubs. We saw the outrages committed on the other men. We heard their stories, and we believed the crew—not the officers. We are earnestly advising you to do the same."

When the crew was fit to travel the entire lot was shipped back to England in custody, the officers also in custody, but having the run of the deck, shipped to England and thence to America, six thousand miles to their native land, for a fair trial.

The crew, freed from torture, was jubilant and browsed about—these cutthroats who had been accused of piracy, mutiny and fighting among themselves—like a lot of playful lambs.

But the captain and the mates did not wax calmer as the days passed, and the Rochester, on which they traveled to New York, neared the harbor.

The officers on the Rochester sent a wireless message to the district attorney's office asking for a deputy marshal to meet the boat in the harbor and take off prisoners charged with piracy and mutiny and others with murder on the high seas.

The files which had come over from Capetown were sent to the district attorney from the State Department at Washington. The charge against the crew was dismissed. You have read that the Pedersens were acquitted of murder, but the other charge, inhuman treatment of the crew, was not so easily disposed of, though the defense did their best.

It brought a policeman out of San Prado, California, who said that Hansen was the worst type of I. W. W., had been often arrested for starting riots, and had served two terms in jail.

He had even heard Hansen advocating the destruction of certain ships and cargoes going out of western ports.

There were even good words to be said of Pedersen by picturesque old salts, from "Sailors Snug Harbor." They had shipped with Pedersen, they said, and never heard tell of such tales as had been unfolded in court.

The judge averred that it would, after all, be impossible to prove premeditation in this case, and the jury, after ten minutes, brought back the verdict of not guilty of murder. Pedersen, absolved from direct guilt, wept for joy.

Then later there came another trial of all three, master and the two young mates, who, ashore, looked hardly capable of the crimes with which the government charged them.

The indictment accused the Pedersens on ten counts, "Against the peace of the United States and their own dignity, and contrary to the form of the United States that, without justifiable cause, they did beat and wound" six members of the crew, one of whom died at Capetown. The other four counts were for imprisonment.

"The master of a ship," the court stated, "is vested with almost military authority over his crew by law. With this authority he may punish his crew for insubordination, refusal to obey orders, mutiny and other offenses, but he may do so only in the manner authorized by that law.

"He may use whatever force is necessary to quell a riot or put down a mutiny. He may oppose violence with arms or weapons when necessary, but he may not, as means of punishment, beat a member of the crew who, at the time of beating, is not *himself* attempting assault on the master."

At this trial the character witnesses and the soft shy ways of Pedersen availed nothing. The stories told by the seamen, the scars exhibited and the surly looks of the boys had their weight.

Pedersen's attorney tried to make much of the confessions exhibited, but failed to do so.

"Yes, these men signed confessions," said the district attorney. "And they have signed these repudiations, too. I venture to state that even without two or three men to help me, I could take the master of the ship into a room, handcuff him and force him to admit that he was the devil himself. I venture to believe that he would be glad of the chance to sign any document.

"These seamen are ignorant men," he said further. "You have heard their consistent stories. You have seen the light of truth in their eyes; you have seen their wounds. They have not been tripped up in cross-examination. They looked the court in the eye and did not hesitate."

The jury was out two hours and fifteen minutes. Then they returned a verdict of guilty. But they asked such clemency as was consistent with the facts for the mates, on account of their extreme youth.

Adolph Pedersen was forthwith sentenced to eighteen months at Atlanta, and the boys were sentenced to six months in Essex County Jail.

Thus ends the story of one of the most fearful voyages known to truth or fiction. Even Wolf Larsen—Jack London's Sea Wolf—could not have enacted the part of Pedersen.

Brutal, yes, but fair in his brutality. He would call his men to the deck. "Put up your fists and fight," he would say, waiving the law that it was a crime to strike a master. Wolf Larsen at least gave his men a fighting chance!

He set his eyeglass to his eye and examined the case

# THE HORSEMAN OF DEATH

## By Anthony Wynne

**FROM WHENCE SPRUNG THAT SINISTER AFFINITY BETWEEN THE MASTER AND THE BEATING HOOVES OF AN UNSEEN HORSEMAN RIDING TO THE TOWER?**

### SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

THREATENING Sacha Malone that he knew her husband's death was not accidental, Barrington Bryan blackmailed her into a promise to marry him, warning that her lover, Dick Lovelace, would be the price of her refusal. Sacha went with Dr. Eustace Hailey to *The Black Tower* of her uncle, Lord Gerald Templewood, to certify to his insanity. At intervals he heard the hoof-beats of an unseen horseman, which presaged his death; and at other times he communicated with his long dead *fiancée,* Beatrice. The medium of both of these phenomena was Mlle. Ninon Darelli, who Dr. Hailey accused of being fraudulent. She administered dope to Lord Templewood, and to quiet Sacha, had also administered dope to her. Under the spell of dope and Ninon's hypnotism Sacha defied Barrington and attempted to kill him. Ninon was agitated when Barrington informed her of this, as he was her lover. At Lord Templewood's, Dr. Hailey heard the mysterious hoof-beats, and shortly after Sacha appeared, saying she had ridden up on a horse.

### CHAPTER XIX

#### "I WARN YOU"

LORD TEMPLEWOOD had half risen in his chair. His hands clutched at the arms, so that their knuckles were blanched; and he glared at his niece Sacha.

"How dare you tell me that?" he cried hoarsely. "How dare you tell me that!"

Sacha started back, revealing to Dr. Hailey, in that action, the utter weariness of her face.

"I—I'm so sorry if I—frightened you," she faltered.

The old man seemed to gather new strength. He sprang to his feet with a degree of agility of which the doctor had not supposed him to be possessed.

**This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for September 17**

"You lie," he cried. "You are not sorry."

His eyes glared. He drew himself up to his full height. His hands plucked at the front of his coat.

"Do you think that I do not know what you are about? That I do not understand your game? Ha!" He laughed, mirthlessly, displaying long teeth. "I know everything—everything." His arm shot out in a minatory gesture. "It is a plot between you and Lovelace to kill me."

"My dear Uncle Gerald—"

Sacha's voice thrilled with repudiation of a charge so monstrous. Dr. Hailey laid his hand on her hand, to bid her exercise all her self-control.

"Yes, to kill me." The shrill voice had become almost screaming in its violence. "*To kill me and to rob me.* Why have you brought your doctor here? So that he can swear that my death was due to natural causes. Why have you galloped your horse round *The Tower?*

"So that my death may be due, apparently, to natural causes." His face assumed suddenly a look of cold hatred. His violence, at the same moment was abated. "You thought," he queried with a sneer, "that, at the sound of your horse's hooves, my heart would stop?"

Sacha caught her breath in a gasp. That action seemed to whet her uncle's desire to wound her. He took a step toward her.

"Ninon was a fraud. Why? Because Ninon stood between you and your object."

He turned and strode to the bell. He rang it. A footman came to the room.

"Ask Mlle. Darelli to come here," he told the man.

He sank back into his chair, and lay for a moment as if exhausted. Then, once again, he turned to Sacha.

"Why did you come?" he demanded abruptly.

"Because you sent for me."

"I did not send for you."

"May I remind you, Lord Templewood," Dr. Hailey said, "that you consented this afternoon to my summoning your niece from London."

"What do you want her here for, anyhow?"

"I want her to look after you."

Lord Templewood banged his fist on the arm of his chair. He cried,

"She shall not look after me. To-morrow she can go to *Beech Croft* or to London, whichever she prefers. She is not to stay here with Lovelace." He lowered his voice, and added, "God knows, had she been content to stay at *Beech Croft,* with her husband, instead of always running across here, Orme Malone might have been alive to-day."

A cruel laugh escaped his lips. Sacha uttered a cry of dismay. She tottered and clutched at Dr. Hailey's arm for support. He led her out of the room.

In the corridor they met Ninon Darelli. The doctor signed to her that he wished to speak to her at once. She followed him to the gallery above the great hall. He told Sacha to go down and wait for him in the hall. He turned to Ninon.

"I have come to the conclusion," he said, in tones the menace of which was unmistakable, "that Lord Templewood's mind is deranged. I warn you that you will run a serious risk if, in these circumstances, you administer to him any drug."

"What, you think he is not sane? You will certify him?"

The girl's voice was so eager that Dr. Hailey started.

"I have not said that," he declared coldly.

He left her, and began to descend the broad oaken stairway.

## CHAPTER XX

### HE IS DANGEROUS!

"MY own reading of the case is that his sanity has been undermined by drugs. Behind that fact, however, lies another."

Dr. Hailey paused to help himself to snuff. He set his eyeglass in his eye and faced Dick Lovelace. He added:

"I feel almost certain that this second fact is the lady to whom he refers as 'my angel Beatrice.'"

Dick nodded.

"Her death was a great blow to him, undoubtedly."

"It was not her death of which I was thinking, but of what happened before her death." The doctor allowed his eyeglass to drop. "Death," he commented, "is frequently less cruel than life."

He sat with half-closed eyes, gazing vacantly in front of him. The young man puffed uneasily at a brier pipe. That sentiment, did Dr. Hailey but know it, exactly corresponded with his own mood. Now that Sacha had gone to bed, the thoughts which had been perched like ravens in his mind during the last twenty-four hours, descended once more to their roosting places.

"You do not happen to know any details of the history of the poor Beatrice?"

"I'm afraid not."

The doctor sighed.

"I fancy," he declared, "that Ninon Darelli could enlighten us, if she so desired. This galloping horseman, whom she simulated so cleverly last night, was not, I think, chosen at random as a means of terrorization."

"Oh, of course not." Dick took his pipe from his mouth. "It is a legend, you know, of the Templewood family, that a ghostly horseman rides to *The Black Tower* when a tragedy is about to befall some member of the family."

"My dear sir, family legends become insignificant when personal experiences are set against them. The last time Beatrice came to this house, she came on horseback —at night. The family legend and the personal experience on that occasion were merged in one another."

Dr. Hailey was watching his companion under his half-closed lids. He saw the young man start violently.

"You—you are sure of that."

"I have Lord Templewood's word for it." The doctor took another pinch of snuff. "What I do not understand," he added in casual tones, "is why this medium should wish to recall that very painful experience to the old man's mind. Even if we grant that she is trying to drive him mad, we have not solved the mystery. What possible benefit can accrue to her if her employer is sent to an asylum?"

Dick shook his head.

"I don't know."

"And yet, until I can answer that question, I feel the very greatest reluctance to sign a certificate of insanity. I have a strong feeling that Ninon is exceedingly anxious that I should sign such a certificate. The fact that she did her best, by means of that sound of galloping, to rouse her employer to frenzy in my presence, seems almost conclusive evidence on the point."

Dick struck a match to relight his pipe.

"If I didn't happen to know," he said, "that Lord Templewood has made a will in Sach—in Mrs. Malone's—favor, I would suspect that Mlle. Darelli must have inveigled him into leaving her property."

"My dear sir, insanity is not death. If Ninon had ten wills, she would get nothing so long as he remained alive. Moreover, the fact of the insanity would tell very strongly against her claim if Mrs. Malone chose to dispute such a will."

They fell into silence. Then Dr. Hailey asked:

"How long has Ninon Darelli been employed by him?"

"About four years. She comes three or four times a week, as a rule. Sometimes she stays for days on end."

"He is a rich man?"

"Only moderately so. He is extremely careful with his money, however, *extremely* careful."

They heard light footsteps descending the stairs. The next instant, Ninon Darelli faced them with wide-open, terrified eyes.

"I cannot stay with him!" she cried. "I cannot. It is too dangerous."

## CHAPTER XXI

### A PACKET OF TREASURY NOTES

NINON fluttered her hands outward like a wounded bird spreading its wings in the face of danger. Her hands moved in jerks and then grew rigid.

"What has happened?" Dr. Hailey asked.

"Ah, you do not know him as I know him. He has been afraid—of the horse which Mrs. Malone rode here. Now his nerves are gone." The hands fluttered again. "So." She came nearer to the doctor. "To-night he will walk in his sleep,

and then—" She brought her hands stiffly together, stiffly and eloquently together. "I am afraid," she concluded.

Dr. Hailey contracted his brows.

"You have not given him—anything?"

"Nothing. And that is why I am afraid. You, who are a doctor, must deal with him to-night, since you will not allow me to give him anything."

She sat down on one of the big chairs with which the hall was furnished. She glanced about her anxiously.

"Oh, he is mad," she murmured, "so mad."

"My dear lady, if you would tell us what has happened."

Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass, and adjusted it.

"Nothing has happened—yet. But something is going to happen—"

"If he doesn't get his dose of cocaine?"

Ninon shrugged her shoulders. "It is not cocaine which I give him," she declared abruptly.

Dr. Hailey rose.

"I will stay with him to-night," he announced. He turned to Dick Lovelace. "Perhaps you will join me for a little while in his room before you go to bed."

He mounted the stairs, leaving Ninon and Dick together. Lord Templewood was asleep when he entered his bedroom. He crossed the room to the fireplace and sat down. A few minutes later, Dick came very quietly into the room. Dr. Hailey was about to signal to him that he might go to bed, since it was unlikely that his help would be required, when, suddenly, Lord Templewood sat up in bed.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded, in tones which suggested the discovery of a burglar.

"I came to see if you were all right, sir."

"You are a liar." Lord Templewood's voice rose from one word to another. It began to screech as it had screeched when he was accusing Sacha. "You are a liar and a thief. You wish to kill me so that you can marry Sacha and get my money."

Dick did not reply. At a sign from Dr. Hailey, he began to retire toward the door, but Lord Templewood was too quick for him. He sprang out of bed and stood in front of the door, a wild figure in his sky-blue sleeping suit.

"Answer me," he shouted, "you are going to marry Sacha?"

"No, sir."

"What! You deny that, do you?"

The young man seemed to hesitate. His shoulders rose in a deep breath.

"Sacha," he said, in low tones, "is engaged to be married to Barrington Bryan."

Had he struck his antagonist a blow in the face, the effect could not have been more overwhelming than the effect of these words. Lord Templewood's knees shook beneath him. He seemed to be about to sink to the floor.

"*Barrington Bryan!*"

He caught at the door-handle. The handle rattled in his grasp. Dick came to him and gave him his arm. He led him back to the bed.

"You are not well, sir."

But, once back in bed, the old man's weakness passed as swiftly as it had come. He flushed scarlet, and his speech grew thick.

"Is this true?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Yes, sir."

There was a moment of silence. Then, suddenly, Dr. Hailey ran to the bedside. Dick saw that Lord Templewood's features were working convulsively, and that a blue tinge had come into his lips, and was spreading all over his face.

"Get me a bowl of water."

Dr. Hailey's tones were peremptory. Dick released Lord Templewood's arm and ran to the washstand. He splashed the water in pouring it. When he turned back to the bed, he saw the old man striking fiercely at the doctor with his disengaged arm. Dr. Hailey flung off the assault, and then seized his patient in his powerful grasp, and forced him back on the mattress.

"Put the bowl on the chair. Now feel in my waistcoat pocket. You will find a small phial. Open it and drop one of the pellets into the water. Shake the bowl. Now, feel in the other pocket. There's a case there."

The doctor's voice came breathlessly, for Lord Templewood's strength seemed to have been multiplied fifty-fold. The old

man followed every movement with his wild, glaring eyes. But he uttered no sound, perhaps because his lips were swollen and congested, like the lips of a man newly dead by strangulation.

Dick opened the pocket-case and saw a tiny knife. The light from the electric lamp fell on the blade of the knife and set it gleaming like a mirror.

"Put the knife in the water and then go round the bed to the other side and hold him."

Dr. Hailey retained possession of one of Lord Templewood's arms. He bared the arm nearly to the shoulder by rolling back the sleeve of the sleeping suit. Then he set his patient's hand between his knees, and secured it in that position by a method known to his profession.

He took his handkerchief, and bound it round the upper arm, until the skin below this tourniquet was duskier even than Lord Templewood's face. The veins of the forearm stood out like thick cords.

The doctor took his knife from the antiseptic solution in which Dick had placed it. The small blade flashed, as the drops of water ran over its pure surface.

Next moment, Dr. Hailey had opened one of Lord Templewood's veins.

The effect on the patient was wonderful beyond anything which Dick had ever seen before. The dusky color passed from the old man's features, and was replaced by a generous glow. The madness faded from his eyes. His expression grew gentle. He sighed deeply and then closed his eyes. He seemed to be falling into a deep, natural slumber.

The doctor bound up the vein and rose from his seat on the bed. His face was very grave. He signed to Dick to come beside him, and pointed to a tiny red mark on the patient's upper arm, just below the shoulder.

"Look at that."

The young man shook his head.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The puncture of a hypodermic needle. I thought that woman was lying when she told me she had given him nothing. She chose this site, high up on the arm, so that it might pass unnoticed."

Dick gazed at the tiny puncture mark with horrified eyes. He turned to the doctor:

"So that is the explanation?"

He broke off, suppressing at the same time an exclamation of amazement. He pointed to the carpet.

Lying just below Lord Templewood's pillow, from beneath which it had evidently fallen during the struggle, was a large packet of Treasury notes.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE WATCHER BY THE DOOR

DR. HAILEY picked up the notes and examined them carefully. They were not new. It was evident that they had not come direct from a bank. He moved away from the bed, on which his patient now slept soundly. He asked:

"Does he always keep his money under his pillow in that fashion?"

"I was not aware that he did." Dick hesitated a moment, and then added: "I don't even know where this money came from. It certainly has not passed through my hands."

Dr. Hailey made a rough count of the notes.

"There must be nearly eight hundred pounds," he announced.

He returned to the bed and pushed the packet back into its former resting place. Then he rejoined his companion.

"You had better go to bed. He is not likely to give any more trouble. Curious, isn't it, that blood-letting should have been so completely abandoned by my profession? In a case of this sort it acts invariably, in my experience, like a charm."

Dick went away. Dr. Hailey sat down in an armchair and tried to concentrate his thoughts. Why should the announcement of Sacha's engagement have exercised so profound an effect on her uncle? And who was this Barrington Bryan, to whom she was engaged? Why, again, should Lord Templewood go to sleep with wads of money under his pillow?

Could it be that it was this money which Ninon Darelli hoped to steal when its owner was taken away to an asylum? But

no, that was absurd. Had she wished, she could have stolen the money any time while her wretched victim was under the influence of her drugs.

His mind began to wander. He closed his eyes. An immense drowsiness stole over all his senses.

He awoke with a start, and instantly jumped to his feet. He turned to the bed.

It was empty.

He sprang to it and lifted the pillow, which bore, still, the indent of Lord Templewood's head. The packet of notes was no longer under the pillow.

He hurried to the door of the room. It was standing ajar. He entered the corridor and moved softly along it to the gallery above the great hall. He stopped here and listened. A faint sound of footsteps came to him from the floor above. He strained his senses. The footsteps were almost certainly those of a woman.

They began to descend the stairs. He drew back into the deep shadow of the corridor from which he had just emerged. The steps drew nearer. Was she coming in his direction? He drew back yet another pace.

And then, suddenly, the steps ceased. A light tap on wooden panels sounded across the darkness. He heard the faint turning of a door handle and then the closing of the door.

He waited for a moment or two before venturing to leave his sanctuary. A new sound of footsteps came to him, heavy footsteps this time, descending step by step from the floor above. He caught his breath and crept nearer to the open gallery. The steps lingered interminably. At last, however, they reached the landing.

Dr. Hailey's mind began to work quickly. He knew that Sacha Malone's bedroom was on the top floor, and that Dick Lovelace also had a room on that floor. Ninon Darelli, on the other hand.

He caught his breath. The sound of women's voices had reached him, unmistakably, across the space of the gallery. He moved forward again, scarcely daring to breathe lest he should betray his presence to the other silent watcher by the bedroom door.

Suddenly, a narrow beam of light was thrust out into the darkness, proclaiming that the door had not been properly shut, and had swung slightly ajar. A figure appeared in the beam.

"*Dick Lovelace!*"

There was a muttered exclamation of horror. The door was thrown open. Dick sprang into the brilliantly lighted room.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### "ORME FROM SACHA"

DR. HAILEY tried to reach a point from which he might be able to see and hear what was passing in the bedroom. But before he could accomplish that purpose, it was rendered futile. There was a buzz of whispered voices, an angry buzz, like the "piping" sound which honey bees make when their hive is disturbed, and then Dick came staggering back out of the room.

The door was immediately closed behind him. Dr. Hailey heard the key grate in the lock. Then he heard the railing of the gallery creak, as the young man grasped it, apparently to steady himself. He stood still and waited to see how this strange adventure would end. He was not held long in suspense. Dick shuffled to the stair and began to mount it with stumbling feet.

The doctor lingered until he head a door on the top story close. Then he descended to the great hall and listened again. The old house now was filled with silence. He reascended the stair and listened again.

If the women were still talking, their voices were completely muted by the heavy walls and doors. He passed his hand across his brow. What did it all mean? Why had Sacha gone to the medium's bedroom at this deep hour of the night? And why had Dick Lovelace followed her there? Again, why had he been so swiftly ejected from the room.

And where, during this time, was Lord Templewood?

He moved back along the corridor to Lord Templewood's room. As he came to the door, an exclamation of amazement escaped him. He had left it open. It was shut. He grasped the handle and turned it. He entered the room. Lord Temple-

wood was lying in bed, apparently fast asleep.

Utter bewilderment overwhelmed him. The corridor ended blindly at his own bedroom door; nobody, certainly, had passed him during the term of his vigil. He started as the truth flashed across his mind. *Lord Templewood must have been hiding in the wardrobe or behind one of the pieces of furniture.*

He crossed the room and came to his patient. The old man's sleep was as gentle as that of a child. For what possible reason had he played this strange trick?

Suddenly the doctor's eyes narrowed. He passed his hand gently under his patient's pillow. The bundle of notes had not been replaced under the pillow.

He went to the wardrobe and opened it. He glanced inside. The notes were not in the wardrobe.

He kept his vigil until the gray light of morning began to fill the room. The danger that Lord Templewood might be seized with a fit of sleepwalking was remote now; he seemed to be resting in the utmost tranquillity. Dr. Hailey rose and left the room. He went to his own bedroom and lay down for a couple of hours.

When he awoke the day had already ridden into the sky. Level sunbeams were streaming through the open window. He got up and glanced out at the delectable spectacle of this March morning, which promised a day of genial spring. Even the dark waters of the moat seemed to be kindled with laughter.

He visited his patient, and then went out into the young morning. He walked through the shrubbery where, already, almond trees were in full bloom, and came to the *Temple of Peace.* He gazed in wonder at this strange edifice, trying, as was his habit, to probe the mind of the man who had built it.

He started, and approached closer to the building, shielding his eyes with his hand from the sunlight. Round the walls there was a frieze depicting galloping horsemen. A vacant look came into the doctor's eyes. So, from the beginning, he thought, have men decorated their shrines with the object of their greatest fear.

He walked on toward the open fields. It was strange, certainly, that the old legend of the horseman should have fitted so exactly the tragedy of Lord Templewood's own life. He wondered what message of sorrow it was which the girl, Beatrice, had brought with her on that last visit of hers to *The Black Tower,* when she came galloping through the night to her lover. She had been killed the next morning.

He stopped suddenly and reached out his hand. He picked up an object which his keen eyes had detected lying among the rank weeds under one of the laurel bushes. It was a cigarette case, of silver, heavily tarnished by the weather. He set his eyeglass in his eye and examined it.

As he did so, an exclamation of astonishment broke from his lips.

On the outside of the case were engraved the words: *"Orme from Sacha."*

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WHEN IT BEGAN

HE opened the case. It was half filled with a shapeless mass of decaying tobacco.

He slipped it into his pocket, and searched carefully around the spot where he had found it. There was nothing else which might afford a clew to the manner in which it had come to this resting place. He turned back to the castle, and ascended to his bedroom.

Dr. Andrews had told him, during his visit the morning before, how Orme Malone had met his death, and had even pointed out the field in which the body of the unfortunate young man was found. The cigarette case had been lying directly between that field and the door of the castle!

Probably it had fallen from the dead man's pocket when he was being carried to *The Black Tower.* But no, that was exceedingly unlikely, because a stretcher of some sort must almost certainly have been employed. Dr. Hailey started.

Most men carried their cigarette cases in their waistcoat pockets. Such a position practically insured against loss in all ordinary circumstances. But if the owner of the waistcoat happened to bend down—

Had Orme Malone visited *The Black Tower*, then, before he met his death? Was this yet another case of a horseman who had come at night to these tragic portals?

He began to pace the floor of the room. Dr. Andrews had said that Lord Templewood's mental breakdown really dated from Orme Malone's death. On the night following Orme's death, the old man had walked in his sleep and fallen down the stairs from the first gallery to the great hall. He had been severely bruised.

*Had that attack of somnambulism originated, like the attack of two nights before, in the fear inspired by a horseman riding after dark to the castle? In that case—*

Dr. Hailey leaned his elbows on the mantelpiece and rested his head between his hands. Sacha, he knew, had been staying at *The Black Tower* at the time of her husband's death. She had come there a fugitive, seeking sanctuary from his violence and brutality.

According to Dr. Andrews, it was a kind of Providence which had intervened to prevent Orme from reaching her, since the fellow had been drinking heavily for some days, and had actually told his groom that he was going to give his wife a thrashing because of her fancied relations with Dick Lovelace.

He took the cigarette case from his pocket, and examined it again. There could be no doubt that it had lain during long months where he had found it; the tarnish was very heavy, and the contents had been subjected to all kinds of weather conditions.

A look of horror dawned in his eyes. Was it this coming of the dead man to *The Black Tower* on the night of his death at which Lord Templewood had been hinting when he ordered Sacha to leave the castle and return to *Beech Croft*, her husband's home? Was it this dreadful knowledge which had made him so wildly apprehensive about his own safety, and so sure that his niece and Lovelace were plotting his death?

He walked to the window, and looked out with vacant eyes on the smiling day. He turned sharply. Some one had knocked on the door of the room.

"Come in!"

He slipped Orme Malone's cigarette case back into his pocket.

Dick Lovelace entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Dick was in his dressing gown. His hair was still wet from his morning bath, but his cheeks lacked the glow which the cold water should have imparted to them.

"May I speak to you?"

Dr. Hailey inclined his head. He scrutinized this handsome young man as he advanced across the room with a thrill of swift apprehension. Dick Lovelace did not look the part which inexorable circumstance seemed to be assigning to him, but that, as bitter experience had demonstrated, was no proof of guiltlessness. Dick's agitation was painful.

"Last night," he stammered, "I discovered that Ninon Darelli is giving Mrs. Malone injections of drugs."

His voice shook as he spoke. This revelation, following the awful experience with Lord Templewood, had unnerved him. The doctor's expression remained rather vacant.

"I couldn't sleep. I heard footsteps passing my door. I got out and listened. Somehow I knew it was Sacha. She went down to the woman's bedroom, and I followed her. The door had not been closed; I heard her ask for an injection." He paused.

His eyes were wide with fear and dismay. He raised his hand to his brow, and Dr. Hailey saw that his fingers were twitching. The horror of his failure to prevent the injection being given was in his face.

"What does it mean?" he asked, in accents of dread.

"I don't know." The doctor spoke deliberately, as if he were weighing every word. He came to the mantelpiece and rested one of his arms on it.

"Mrs. Malone," he asked, "was very unhappy with her husband, was she not? It is just possible that, during his lifetime—"

Dr. Hailey's face was in the shadow. Dick's face, on the contrary, was turned toward the window.

"Sacha never took drugs during her husband's lifetime!" he exclaimed in positive tones. "It is certainly only since."

He broke off. A slight flush had come to his pale cheeks.

"Yes?"

"Since she became engaged to Barrington Bryan that this terrible habit has been concentrated."

"How long ago was that?"

The young man shook his head. "I don't quite know."

"Bryan is a local squire, isn't he?"

"Yes. His place, Redden Hall, is the next one to this."

Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass and set it carefully in his eye.

"Have you any reason to think—to fear—that Mrs. Malone's engagement to this man has been forced on her?" he asked in quiet tones.

"None. How could it be forced on her?"

Dick's face was innocent of any expression except that of surprise.

"I mean that—that some threat has been used to make her give her consent. When a woman is tormented by her feelings, she is very apt to resort to anodynes."

"I am sure that is not the explanation."

Dr. Hailey allowed his eyeglass to drop.

"There was no gossip, was there," he asked, "about the rather strange manner of her husband's death? No evilly disposed tongue suggested—"

He broke off. Dick's cheeks had become ashen in their pallor.

## CHAPTER XXV

### A BLACK STREAK

DR. HAILEY waited a moment until Dick had so far recovered himself as to be able to answer him. Then he repeated his question. The young man fumbled in the pocket of his dressing gown and produced a cigarette case. He opened it with trembling hands and took out a cigarette. He tapped the cigarette on the side of the case.

"There was no gossip of any kind," he said, in low tones. "Orme Malone was a drunken ruffian. Nobody was surprised that he should have been thrown from his horse."

"I was not referring to the manner of his death, so much as to the place where it occurred. Dr. Andrews told me about it yesterday."

Dick struck a match. He extinguished it with his own breath, while he was trying to light his cigarette. He struck another and waited to allow it to burn up. The flame zigzagged.

"The field where his body was found lies in a direct line between here and *Beech Croft*," he declared. "He was coming here without a shadow of doubt. He always took that short cut through the fields."

He lit his cigarette.

"Is there nothing which can be done," he demanded abruptly, "to save Sacha from this vampire?"

"Nothing. Unless you take the extreme step of calling in the police. Even then, I doubt if you would accomplish your end. I am nearly certain that it was not cocaine, but Indian hemp, the famous *hashish*, which Ninon Darelli administered to Lord Templewood last night."

Dick closed his eyes for an instant. Then he glanced at the cigarette which had burst between his fingers. He threw it into the grate.

"What are the effects of *hashish?*" he asked, in low tones.

"Illusions. A doctor friend of mine who took some small doses once, as an experiment, saw a race course, with grand stand and bookmakers complete, in the middle of Harley Street. That, however, is not the earliest effect. Most people, at first, experience a wonderful sense of well-being.

"The illusions and hallucinations come later, sometimes when the supply of the drug is suddenly cut off. Then, even the senses of time and distance may be completely lost.

"Big doses, such as Lord Templewood received, bring on convulsions, and lead to insanity. Or they may drive their victim to criminal acts, even to murder. The Malays, who run amuck and kill are all *hashish* fiends."

Dick went away. He climbed the stairs to his bedroom with quick steps. A new fear and a new excitement were in his eyes. He dressed, and then hurried to Sacha's room. He knocked sharply.

"May I come in?"

Sacha was fully dressed; she gave him her hand, in the manner of the old days, and then resumed the brushing of her hair. She brushed in long, steady sweeps which made the surface hair rise up like a golden mist about her brows and temples. She smiled into the looking glass, and so back at Dick.

He blurted out the question which he had come to ask. The brush fell with a thud from Sacha's hand.

"It is not true," she declared. "I am marrying Barrington because I wish to marry him. For that reason only."

She picked up the brush again, and leaned forward closer to the mirror, so as to command a better view of his face. He was frowning.

"Barrington Bryan is quite capable of—"

He stopped.

Sacha brushed her hair again. She knew that in a moment he would compel her to look into his face. She turned to him.

"Why should you doubt me?" she asked.

"Because—" He clasped his brow. "Oh my God! why not, why not?" She felt his hands on her shoulders, gripping them with swift violence. "Say you love Barrington Bryan?"

"I love Barrington Bryan."

"I do not love you."

With a quick gesture, he pulled back the sleeve of her dress, exposing the tiny red punctures of Ninon's hypodermic needle.

"Love," he commented, "does not fly to drugs."

Sacha closed her eyes. Her strength was so little secure, that already she had almost lost it. And yet, she must not lose it, for if she faltered, he would make sacrifice of himself. She jumped up and faced him.

"Listen, Dick," she cried, breathlessly. "I am not the good, kind, gentle, faithful girl you believe me to be. No girl could have been Orme Malone's wife and remained—uncontaminated. There is a black streak in me now. Barrington, you see, reminds me of Orme."

She broke off. Her eyes had not swerved before his eyes. She managed to smile.

"You are such a good man, Dick, and there are so many unspoiled girls in the world."

"I don't care what you may be."

"Listen; I have been taking drugs for months. I can't live now without them—nor without the sort of life to which they lead a woman, Orme's life, Barrington's life, *my life.*"

She came near him and held the top button of his waistcoat to make him her prisoner.

"Orme's father died of drink, Barrington's father died of dope. Orme died of drink. Barrington takes dope. I take dope. And so on—and so on."

Her voice sailed away on a laugh, like small ripples on a wave.

"You see, I am a bad woman, really."

"You are under the influence of drugs."

She shook her head.

"A little, perhaps. But I always am—a little." She allowed her eyes to fall, but she retained possession of his waistcoat button.

"Do you know why I take drugs?" she asked him, in tones which made him shudder.

The button was plucked from her fingers.

"Oh God, it is too horrible!"

Sacha held out her hand to him.

"Good-by, Dick dear."

She knelt by the bed when he had gone, and thanked God because he had not taken her hand. And then she wept, and when she had wept, laughed softly just as if she were crying, and then she laughed and cried together.

She started to her feet.

"Oh, Ninon, what a fright you gave me. Ninon, I have sent him away. So now you will give me some more—"

She uttered a cry of dismay.

"Dick! Why, a moment ago you looked exactly like Ninon. Now *isn't* that funny?"

Dick did not advance beyond the threshold of the room.

"Your uncle has ordered Mlle. Darelli to return at once to London," he announced. "He has refused to see her before she goes." He paused. His face was grim and drawn. "I should tell you per-

haps, that she tried to poison him last night. Only Dr. Hailey's promptness saved his reason, or his life."

Sacha sank down on the bed and covered her face with her hands.

"Oh well, what does it matter anyhow," she murmured. "Uncle Gerald has lived his life."

She did not raise her eyes, but she heard his feet shuffle on the wooden floor.

"He wishes you to go back to *Beech Croft* as soon as possible."

"Has Ninon gone?"

"No."

Sacha looked up. "I shall take her with me to *Beech Croft*. I have arranged to go to the Hunt Ball to-night. My servants are coming from London to-day."

Dick flung the door shut behind him and came to her side.

"Don't, don't," he pleaded. "She is vile, unutterably vile. It will be worse than Orme, than Barrington."

She raised her shoulders.

"She is a woman of the world, Dick; of my world."

His hands clenched till the knuckles showed white. He turned and left her.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE STAIN ON THE FLOOR

AFTER breakfast, which he ate alone in the big, somber dining room, Dr. Hailey returned to the spot where he had found Orme Malone's cigarette case. The case had been lying about a foot to the righthand side of the carriageway—exactly where it might be expected to fall if its owner's body were carried flung over somebody's right shoulder. The doctor knelt down and examined the grass in the neighborhood. He raised some of the yellow, dead tufts which the winter snows and rains had beaten down.

He continued this search for more than an hour without achieving any result. He abandoned it and walked back to the house.

The great hall was empty. He crossed it to the fireplace, and stood for a moment warming himself at the cheerful blaze. He stepped inside the high, old-fashioned fender in order to get nearer to the fire which was set in an immense iron basket standing in the center of the brick embrasure.

The embrasure was so large that there was room for him to stand behind the fire, and even to walk right round it. His eyes scanned the flagstones methodically, and then directed their gaze to the polished floor.

After a few moments, he left his position in the embrasure and drew aside one of the heavy Turkish mats which were spread on the floor. He cast his eyes quickly over the place which had been covered. He pulled the mat into position again and repeated the process with each of the others.

The floor, like the flagstones, was without the suspicion of a stain.

He went and sat down in one of the big leather armchairs which were placed near the fire. He took his snuffbox from his pocket and opened it carefully. If Dick Lovelace had not exhibited such manifest signs of anxiety when challenged about Orme Malone's death, he would have dismissed the matter from his thoughts—for, after all, it was possible that the cigarette case had been lost on some occasion other than the fatal night.

But Dick's pallor, and his refusal to discuss the subject farther than was absolutely necessary, had whetted his instinct as a detective. He took a pinch of snuff and shut the box with a snap. It was certain, at any rate, that Lovelace was himself hopelessly in love with Mrs. Malone.

He leaned forward in his chair. If one began with that fact and added to it the self-confessed jealousy of the dead man toward his wife.

"Hullo!"

He bent forward with his eyes fixed on a dark spot on the floor just below the fender. He rose and knelt down, at the same time setting his eyeglass in his eye.

The fender, and he could now see, had been shifted slightly out of its usual position, for the waxing of the floor stopped short just where the stain began. Perhaps he had moved it when he was warming himself.

He felt in his pocket and found the small

magnifying glass which was as invariable a companion of his activities as his flash lamp. He focused it on the stain.

There could be no doubt that an effort—probably many efforts—had been made to wash the stain out of the wood. They had not succeeded, because the wood at this place was unwaxed.

With his pocket knife he carefully cut away a splinter of the stained wood. He rose to his feet.

He started slightly.

Dick Lovelace was standing on the staircase, watching him.

Dr. Hailey wondered whether or not he should put his cards on the table at once, and demand of Dick Lovelace an explanation of the discoveries which he had made.

He decided against that course. The stain, after all, might not be a blood stain, and, uncorroborated, the cigarette case was too flimsy a piece of evidence on which to base so grave a charge. He slipped the splinter of wood into his pocket and sat down again. He contrived to move the fender slightly with the toe of his boot, so as to cover the mark which his knife had made on the floor.

Dick came to him and gave him an exact account of his interview with Sacha. He laid special emphasis on the fact that, on his second visit to the room, the girl had mistaken him for Ninon Darelli.

"That is *hashhish,* isn't it?"

"That is *hashish.* The effect of the dose she got last night must be wearing off."

Dick was standing with his back to the fire. He raised one foot and set his instep on the top of the high fender.

"Is all the rest *hashish* also? I mean, about the influence of her husband?"

Dr. Hailey lowered his eyes. The fender had moved slightly.

"It is possible. On the other hand, there is no doubt that a bad man can deprave even the best woman. Drugs, as perhaps you know, frequently represent what modern psychology calls a 'substitute.'"

Dick moved his knee so that the fender grated on the floor. He shook his head.

"I don't know."

"The use of them may symbolize an emotion which has not found its natural expression." Dr. Hailey raised his eyes for a moment. "I fancy, for example," he said, "that Lord Templewood took to drugs after his *fiancée,* Beatrice, was killed, though I don't think that it was her death which impelled him to that course. As I suggested to you the other night, Beatrice's last visit to this house was almost certainly a visit of tragedy."

He broke off and glanced down again. The end of the hollow, from which he had cut his splinter of wood, was just showing beyond the edge of the fender.

"If we suppose that Beatrice came to break off her engagement, violent emotions must, from that hour, have been pent up in your employer's heart. The accident next day, in the hunting field, removed forever all possibility of their release. Very well, then, those who are baulked of their satisfaction in the real world turn to the unreal, the world of dreams, of fantasies. The master key to that unreal world is dope. Dope becomes a symbol of the thing lost."

The fender grated again. Dr. Hailey glanced up and perceived that his companion was gazing in horror at the cut in the floor. He saw him moisten his lips with his tongue.

"Why did you remove that piece of wood?" Dick asked in low tones and without raising his eyes.

"Because I am interested in what is called microspectroscopy. Every stain is a fresh problem to the student of that new branch of science."

The fender grated again. The cut was covered from sight.

"As it happens," the young man said, "I can save you the trouble of making an examination in this case. That is a bloodstain, and the blood is mine. I cut my finger here one night when I was trying to cut a cigar."

Dr. Hailey rose and extracted his snuff-box.

"Even so," he remarked, "the problem should be interesting. The stain seems to be a pretty old one."

He crossed the hall and ascended the

massive staircase that led to Lord Templewood's bedroom.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE FIRST TIME THE HORSEMAN RODE

LORD TEMPLEWOOD was sitting in an armchair reading the Bible. Dr. Hailey observed that the volume was open at the Book of Revelation. He took the chair which the old man offered him with a movement of his fleshless hand.

Lord Templewood closed his Bible, and laid it on a small table beside him.

"*Behold a pale horse,*" he quoted, "*and him that sat on him was Death.*" He raised his eyes. "You have come to tell me that Ninon tried to poison me last night?"

"Yes."

The doctor concealed his surprise by raising his eyeglass to his eye. The old man sighed deeply.

"I have sent her away for good," he declared. "She and Sacha also."

"You know that she has been giving drugs to your niece?"

Lord Templewood's chair moved back sharply on its castors.

"That too," he whispered.

He put out his left hand and rested it on the cover of his Bible. The fingers seemed to clutch at the well-used pages.

"Like father like son."

He leaned toward the doctor.

"Barrington Bryan, to whom my niece is engaged, is a scoundrel, as was his father, Willoughby Bryan, before him. Ninon Darelli has told me of him." Dr. Hailey moved his chair so that his back was squarely set toward the window.

"So they are friends," he remarked; "the woman and your neighbor Bryan?"

"They know one another." Lord Templewood closed his lips. "Oh, yes, they know one another."

The doctor's chair, which was of wicker work, creaked.

"Is it permissible to ask," he queried, "whether you connect this engagement of Mrs. Malone to Bryan in any way with his acquaintanceship with Mlle. Darelli?"

He spoke in casual tones. But he watched the old man closely as he spoke. Lord Templewood's face remained expressionless.

"I have not thought about it." He lay back and closed his eyes. "Ninon's going is a heavy blow," he declared. "It will be necessary to obtain a new medium."

"She has been with you a long time?"

"Four years."

Again Dr. Hailey's chair creaked.

"Do you happen to remember," he asked, "whether or not she was staying here on the night when Mrs. Malone's husband met his death? I may explain that I have a special reason for seeking that information."

"Yes, she was staying here."

Lord Templewood's fingers dug between the gilded leaves of his Bible. An expression of fear came into his eyes.

"It was on that night," he declared, in tones of dismay, "that the Horseman of Death rode for the first time in my experience, to the door of *The Black Tower*. I heard him myself, and I was alone in this room. The next morning my niece's husband was found lying with his head battered in. He must have been on his way here when he met his death."

"That is according to the family legend, is it not?"

The old man inclined his head.

"When any member of my family, or the husband or wife of any member of my family, is about to suffer a tragic death," he stated, "a horseman rides by night to the great door of the castle."

His voice failed. His head sank down on his chest. He murmured.

"I have no doubt that it is the Spirit of Evil himself."

Dr. Hailey opened his snuffbox and took a pinch.

"Where was Ninon Darelli at that moment?" he asked, in quiet tones.

"I don't know. She was not here, in this room."

Suddenly Lord Templewood raised flashing eyes to the doctor's face.

"If you are hinting, sir!" he exclaimed, "that that woman reproduced the sound of the horse's hooves by fraud, I can tell you that you are very much mistaken. The

night was clear, with a half moon. I looked out at that window. With my own eyes I saw the horseman ride round the side of the castle to the great door."

He sprang to his feet. His cheeks had become livid.

"I saw him; but I did not recognize him. It was only the next day, when I learned that Orme Malone had never reached this house at all, that I realized who it was that I had seen."

Dr. Hailey rose also.

"I think it is my duty," he said, in firm tones, "to tell you, Lord Templewood, that there are strong reasons for supposing that your first impression of the horseman was the correct one. I am not yet absolutely sure, but I possess evidence of an important kind in support of my opinion that Orme Malone did ride to this house on the night on which he met his death."

He lowered his voice as he added:

"It was in this house, I think, that he met his death."

He sprang forward as he spoke.

Lord Templewood had fallen in a faint on the floor.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### "HOW TO DEAL WITH MURDER"

THAT same afternoon Dr. Hailey returned to London. He had definitely made up his mind that Lord Templewood was sane, and had informed Dr. Andrews, of Redden, of this decision.

As soon as he reached Harley Street, he went to the small laboratory which he had recently installed and took the splinter of stained wood from his pocket. He set the splinter in a test-tube and poured a few drops of a clear fluid into the tube beside it.

Half an hour later the clear fluid had assumed a delicate pink hue. He placed a few drops of it under his microscope.

There was nothing to be seen but a blur of *débris*, which might be anything or nothing. He rose, and with great care screwed an instrument, like a small brass telescope, to the eyepiece of the microscope. Then he looked again.

The new instrument showed him the seven colors of the spectrum, the "rainbow colors"; it showed him also that, in this case, two dark bands, placed close together, crossed the spectrum. One of these was in the orange and the other lay at the junction of the yellow and the green.

"Blood!"

He rose and took another test-tube. He poured a little of the pink fluid into it, and added to this two or three drops of a substance from a bottle labeled "Tincture of guaiac." The test-tube seemed, immediately, to be filled with milk. He took a bottle of ozonic ether, and added a little of that substance to the milky fluid. A ring of delicate blue formed around the tube, at the point where the two fluids met.

"Blood!"

He rang the bell, and ordered his man, Jenkins, to call a cab.

He told the driver to take him to 2000 Brook Street.

Dr. Hailey's impression of Ninon Darelli's waiting room was rather different from Sacha's impression. Where Sacha had seen only the simplicity of a convent, the eyes of the man detected corruption. Innocence, he reflected, which is conscious, is utter depravity.

He seated himself on one of the bare chairs that looked as if pious hands scrubbed them daily in pious service. He focused his eyeglass on the wooden arm at his side. It had been painted with clear lacquer, which, at a distance, was invisible.

There was dust on the lacquer.

There was dust, too, on the table in the center of the room, on the petals of the deep blue anemones which decorated the table, on the walls—everywhere; the more unchaste by reason of its inconspicuousness.

He closed his eyes. Suddenly he leaned forward, listening.

Quick footsteps were approaching along the corridor.

The steps came to the door of the room. They paused there, an instant, and then resumed their way. Dr. Hailey sprang to the door and threw it open. He saw a woman fumbling with the latch of the front door. Before she was able to open the door he was at her side.

"From here," he said in low tones, "I go straight to Scotland Yard. They will know there how to deal with—*murder*."

Ninon Darelli's hands fell away from the latch. She caught her breath. The door moved gently ajar, impelled by some errant breath of wind.

Dr. Hailey shut the door.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### FROM A BRANDING IRON

NINON DARELLI led the way back to the waiting room from which Dr. Hailey had just come. She stood aside for him to enter the room, and then followed him into it and closed the door behind her.

'I have some one with me to consult me in my own room," she announced.

She indicated one of the bare chairs. The doctor drew it up to the dusty table and sat down. He waited until she should be seated, but she remained standing with the tips of her fingers resting on the table.

"What do you want with me?" she asked.

"I want you to tell me exactly what happened at *The Black Tower* on the night on which Orme Malone, Mrs. Malone's husband, met his death."

Dr. Hailey's tones were gentle. He saw the pink finger tips move slightly, as though the pressure on them had been relaxed suddenly.

"I do not think that anything happened."

"You were in the castle on that night?"

"Yes."

"Did you hear anything?"

Ninon closed the hand on which she had been leaning. Then she extended her index finger. He saw her draw her finger across the dust which lay on the tabletop.

She shook her head.

"It is not easy to hear in that house."

He thought a moment, and then asked:

"What bedroom did you occupy at that time?"

"Always the same. It is at the back of the house, you know."

"But its door opens on the gallery above the great hall."

"Oh, yes."

Ninon's finger crossed the first line with a second.

"Orme Malone," Dr. Hailey said, "met his death in the great hall."

His eyes were fixed on her face. She did not flinch.

"I do not know. It was said otherwise at the time."

She withdrew her hands altogether from the table. She flung the hair back from her brows.

"I find it very difficult to believe that you do not know," he said. "Malone rode to the door of the house. He rode across the drawbridge. He knocked on the door. And he was drunk. After his death, his body was carried out of the house. As I have reason to know, the sound of a horse's hooves at the front door is clearly audible in most parts of the castle."

He broke off. His gaze was still set on her face.

"I do not know. That night I went to sleep very early."

Ninon's tones were as restrained as those of her accuser, but Dr. Hailey fancied that she had grown slightly paler. He leaned back in his chair, and adjusted his eyeglass.

"Lord Templewood heard the sound of the horse's hooves," he declared. "He told me so this morning."

"Oh, yes, of course."

The girl leaned forward and plucked one of the blue anemones from the bowl in the the center of the table. A little shower of dust fell from its petals as she did so. She pulled off one of its petals and dropped it on the lacquered surface.

"He told you?"

"Oh, yes."

A smile flickered on the doctor's lips.

"And you naturally assumed, as he had assumed, that this was a visitation by the Horseman of Death, the family ghost?"

His tones caressed her. She crushed the flower in her hand and flung it down, violently, on the floor. To his surprise, he saw tears gleaming in her eyes.

"That is what I think now, this minute."

"I see. And that, no doubt, is what suggested to your mind, in the first in-

stance, the admirable reproduction of the sounds of a galloping horse with which you entertained us all the other evening."

"*It is not true.*"

Her tones rang with repudiation of his charge.

"What is not true?"

"That I have cheated to make that sound."

She caught her brow in her hand, clasping it so that her nails grew white.

"On the other hand, it is true that the sound frightened Lord Templewood nearly out of his wits; and was very well calculated to exercise exactly that effect on him."

Dr. Hailey rose as he spoke. He allowed his eyeglass to drop. He added:

"And it is also true that last night you gave him an injection of *hashish* into his right shoulder of so potent a kind that, had not help been immediately available, he must inevitably have become insane. May I ask why you have been trying to rob Lord Templewood of his reason?"

Ninon had recoiled a step. Now, with a swift gesture, she drew the collar of her frock away from her left shoulder, exposing to him its bare contour.

"You shall see," she cried, in her contralto voice.

Dr. Hailey uttered an exclamation of horror.

Across the fair white of the shoulder was a weal, livid as the healed scar of a branding iron.

## CHAPTER XXX

### "YOU KNOW THE MAN"

"THAT is where he wounded me one night when he walked in his sleep to my bedroom."

Ninon drew her shoulders together as she spoke, defending herself anew against that hideous recollection. The breath hissed between her lips.

"On that night also, he had tried to cut his own throat. There was blood on his neck."

She moved her hand in an imperious gesture which bade Dr. Hailey be seated. She approached him with her shoulder still bared. She added:

"So he would have wounded Mrs. Malone, if I had not been with her the other night to call his Beatrice to him." Her eyes grew misty suddenly. She lowered her voice to a whisper.

"And I will tell you why. It was, thus, twenty years ago, that he wounded Beatrice in the great hall of his castle when she came to confess to him that Willoughby Bryan was her lover, and to ask his forgiveness. Each time that he walks in his sleep, it is to keep the same tryst with that frail one."

Ninon snatched at her frock, and so drew it again over the scar.

"Is not *hashish*," she demanded, "a good medicine for such cases?"

Dr. Hailey did not reply for a moment, but his expression was troubled.

"That explanation," he said at last, "can scarcely be stretched to cover the case of Mrs. Malone, to whom, as I understand, you are also giving this drug."

He raised his eyes, from which the horror had not wholly passed away, to her eyes. Ninon sighed deeply. She told him how she had rescued Sacha from the gas-filled bedroom. Then suddenly she collapsed into one of her lacquer chairs and buried her head in her arms.

She began to sob bitterly, passionately, like a child whose nerves have been utterly overwrought. Dr. Hailey thought that she looked a lonely little figure, even, perhaps, in her misguided faith, and in spite of her trickery, a pathetic little figure. He laid his hand on her shoulder in a kindly gesture.

The girl looked up at him. Her mysterious eyes were veiled by her tears.

"When people are in great trouble," she said simply, "usually they come to me. I have done for them what I could—for Lord Templewood, for Sacha Malone."

The doctor inclined his head.

"Mrs. Malone," he asked, "did not tell you, did she, the nature of her trouble?"

"No. And I did not ask her to tell me. I do not seek to know of such things."

She pressed a tiny lace handkerchief to her eyes.

"It may be that what you have said about the death of her husband is the

reason why she is afraid. It is not for herself that she fears, no; but for Mr. Dick Lovelace. *I am sure.*"

Dr. Hailey leaned toward the girl.

"She told you that?"

"Oh, yes. Listen: before I gave her my medicine, she told me, 'Dick Lovelace is in terrible danger.'"

Ninon bent her head again, and that action prevented her from seeing that her last words had caused the doctor's eyes to narrow. His gaze traveled from the miserable little figure at his side, to the bowl of anemones in front of him. It remained fixed, vacantly, on the garish flowers. Why should Sacha be so greatly afraid of Dick Lovelace, seeing that she was about to marry Barrington Bryan?

He started. He leaned toward Ninon.

"Last night," he said, "Dick Lovelace told Lord Templewood, in my hearing, that Mrs. Malone was engaged to a man named Bryan, Barrington Bryan. I understand from Lord Templewood that you know this man."

He got no farther than that.

Ninon had raised her head, and was staring at him.

She made a swift, furtive gesture with her right hand.

Dr. Hailey realized, with a thrill of astonishment, that she had crossed herself.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### LASH OF THE WHIP

NINON moistened her lips, but no words came from them. The muscles of her shoulders began to twitch. Then she shivered all over her body.

"It is very cold in this room."

She spoke breathlessly, as nervous people speak when they are anticipating danger. Dr. Hailey remembered that he had witnessed just such conduct in patients with neurasthenia during the German air raids on London—between the sounding of the first warning signal and the arrival of the enemy.

"Do you happen to know," he asked, "whether Barrington Bryan was staying at his place in Leicestershire on the night when Orme Malone met his death?"

The girl glanced wildly about her, at the walls, the ceiling, the windows.

"Oh, no," she muttered. "He was not there."

"You are quite sure of that?"

"I am sure—because on that night he spoke to me on the telephone from London. It is a trunk call."

She was still shivering and still her eyes wandered about the room.

"In that case," the doctor said, "it is not possible that Bryan could have known anything about the real manner of Orme Malone's death?"

Ninon started. She seemed to try to collect her wits.

"It is possible that some one, the servants or the peasants might have seen—something, and told him."

"No. Had that happened, the whole world would have known. Servants and country folk in England never keep knowledge of a tragedy to themselves when that tragedy has reached the coroner's court." He contracted his brows. "If what you say is true, that Mrs. Malone attempted to commit suicide—"

Ninon was not listening to him. Fear was in her eyes, in her posture, in her breath. He rose to his feet.

"I am going to be frank with you," he said. "You have told me that Mrs. Malone tried to take her own life because she feared for Dick Lovelace's safety. And I know that when she made this attempt she was engaged to Barrington Bryan.

"Why should she fear for Lovelace's safety? Why should she so greatly concern herself about it? May not the answer be that she was really in love with the man who had helped her to get rid of her drunken and infamous husband, and that this engagement had been forced on her by Bryan, under the threat of criminal proceedings against that man?"

Dr. Hailey raised his eyeglass. He had the satisfaction of observing that Ninon was now attending closely to his words.

"My difficulty," he added, "is that you tell me Barrington Bryan was not at Redden on the night of the tragedy."

He paused, giving the girl a chance to speak; but she remained silent.

"I am quite certain that Lord Templewood did not furnish any information to Bryan," he went on. "And it is incredible that either Lovelace or Mrs. Malone did so. Nor do I believe for a moment that the servants or the country folk knew anything." His voice became grave. "*There is only yourself left among those who could possibly have played the part of 'informer.'*"

He broke off. Ninon jumped to her feet.

A wild cry of fear had come ringing to their ears from a distant apartment of the flat.

Ninon Darelli sprang to the door of the room and threw it open. She ran along the corridor toward another door which Dr. Hailey saw was shut. He was by her side before she had time to open this door.

When she opened it, a cry broke from the doctor's lips.

Kneeling on a couch in the room, with her arms outstretched in supplication, was Sacha Malone. Above her eyes, across the white pallor of her brow, a long red weal extended from temple to temple. Beside the couch, on a small table, was Ninon Darelli's crystal on its pedestal of black velvet.

He glanced round the room, seeking the girl's assailant.

There was nobody in the room.

Nor did it seem possible that anybody could have escaped from it, for the windows, as he saw, were bolted, and the walls lacked so much as a cupboard to afford concealment. Ninon came to Sacha and spoke to her in low tones, her musical voice falling graciously in the silence. The girl's body seemed to relax. She suffered herself to be laid gently on the couch. Ninon turned to the doctor in mute horror.

"Somebody has been here."

She ran to the windows and examined their fastenings. He saw her clutch at the curtains which were rolled back from one of the windows. The wooden rings of the curtain rattled on their pole. She stood shivering, as she had shivered in the waiting room when he told her that Dick Lovelace had informed Lord Templewood of Sacha's engagement to Barrington Bryan.

She stared fixedly at the weal on Sacha's brow.

The doctor came and looked down at the sleeping girl. The weal was bright red along its margins, but in the center it was rather pale. A whip-lash might have inflicted such an injury. He was aware of a curious sense of uneasiness. It was incredible that the girl could have struck her own brow in this fashion.

He glanced up. Ninon was still holding the curtain.

"Did you hear anything — any footsteps?" he asked.

"No, no. There was nothing."

The curtain rods rattled again. Dr. Hailey adjusted his eyeglass.

"My God!"

He bent down over the sleeping girl. He held his eyeglass, focused, just above the weal.

The white line had become paler, much paler, between its borders of scarlet. He straightened himself, and turned to the medium.

And, just then, Sacha cried out again, shrilly, piteously. She raised herself to her knees and shrank away from him. She put up her two hands to her brow as though she would shield herself against some dreadful assault.

"*Oh, no, oh, no, please,*" she cried in accents of supplication.

Dr. Hailey laid his hand on her shoulder.

"It's all right, Mrs. Malone."

He withdrew his hand quickly, because his gesture had added to her fear. She thrust him away from her with her hands, revealing anew the streak which seemed, every moment, to be growing more vivid.

"*I swear it is not true. Orme, I swear that it is not true. Oh, do not strike me. Do not—*"

Sacha cried out again, and again shielded her face from violence. The curtain rings rattled in strange discord. Dr. Hailey turned to Ninon.

"Cannot you wake her? For God's sake, wake her if you can."

Ninon approached the bed, but her coming was the occasion of a fresh outburst. The piteous tones pleaded anew for mercy.

"*Listen. Oh, listen to me, Orme. Dick*

*is my friend, that and nothing more. You will not hurt me, Orme, you must not hurt me. You must not.*"

Suddenly, the wild eyes closed. The tense muscles were relaxed. Sacha sank down on the couch.

"*Look!*" Ninon pointed to the weal with a tremulous finger.

The white portion of it had risen above the surface of the skin, assuming a clear aspect like a blister.

Dr. Hailey caught the medium's wrist. He drew her close to him.

"Did you? Have you given her more *hashish*?" he demanded, in a whisper.

"Only a little more."

His eyes hardened against her.

"It is that."

"But the scar, I have not touched her, I swear it."

He did not reply. He stood gazing at Sacha's face, on which, from moment to moment, the weal rose more and more distinctly from its scarlet background. Not before, in all his professional experience, had he beheld with his own eyes so wondrous a reproduction of the phenomenon known to his profession as Dermatographism, or skin writing, a condition in which the lightest touch produces a great weal, so that a man may write his name on his body with a feather.

He came and knelt beside Sacha and drew his finger nail lightly across the skin of her forearm. Then he stood up and remained with his eyes fixed on the place which he had touched.

A scarlet blush spread, in sinuous line, across the white skin. Then, in the scarlet, there developed a pale streak, running centrally through it from end to end.

A few moments later, the pale streak had risen above the level of the surface of the skin.

"What is it?" Ninon beseeched him.

"*Hashish.*"

Dr. Hailey indicated the weal on Sacha's brow. He added:

"That, and the memory of the blow which her husband struck her with his whip, the memory of overwhelming fear revived under the hypnotism which your crystal has induced."

He was silent a moment; then he asked:

"Did you see her on the day following Orme Malone's death?"

"Oh yes."

Ninon started.

"It is true," she cried, "because, on that day, she was wearing, for the first time, a fringe of her hair on her brow. *I am sure—*"

## CHAPTER XXXII

### BLOWS FROM THE GRAVE

DR. HAILEY moved across the room to the fireplace. He signed to Ninon to join him.

"When did she come here this afternoon?" he asked, low tones.

"A little while before you came."

"To get you to give her another dose?"

"Yes, and to gaze also into my crystal. Yesterday, I have shown her—"

Ninon moved her hands in a semicircle.

"That means that she is still on the rack of anxiety."

He stood with vacant eyes gazing at the wall in front of him. Ninon knelt down and spread out her hands to the fire. Then she took the tongs and put some pieces of coal on the fire.

"Lord Templewood," Dr. Hailey said, "used a very strange expression when I told him that you were giving drugs to his niece."

He glanced down at Ninon as he spoke. She was in the act of transferring a piece of coal from the box to the fire. The course of the tongs was immediately arrested.

"Yes?"

"He said: 'That, too—' and then he added: 'Like father, like son.' I think in reference to Barrington Bryan, though I was not able at the time to see the connect—"

The tongs fell with a crash on to the fender.

At the same moment, while Ninon crouched at the doctor's feet, like a wild creature stricken to death, Sacha sprang from the couch.

"*Dick, Dick,*" *she cried,* "*what has happened? Oh, Dick, what has happened?*"

She came unsteadily to the small table on

which the crystal was standing. She caught at the edge of the table. Then she moved round the table until she reached a point from which the fireplace was visible.

*"Oh, Dick, he isn't—Dick, he doesn't move; he's not moving, Dick! Dick, he's not moving!"*

Sacha's voice fell to a whisper.

*"Is he breathing? Dick, I'll get a looking-glass from my room to see if he's breathing. Oh, why doesn't he move? And his face is so pale, too. His face is terribly pale, Dick. I'm sure there must be something wrong."*

She caught her breath in a gasp. Her unseeing eyes were wide with horror.

*"Perhaps he's fainted. Shall I get some water? Shall I get some water, Dick?"*

Dr. Hailey put out his hands and took Sacha's hands.

"He's all right," he said, in firm tones, "don't be frightened about him."

*"He isn't all right, Dick—"*

She withdrew her hands suddenly.

*"Oh, dear, we must do something. We must do something. He mustn't be found here like this. Dick, if he is found here—"*

The doctor put his arm about her shoulders. He led her back to the couch, and this time she made no attempt to escape from him. When she had closed her eyes again, he saw that the weal on her brow had begun to fade. That on her forearm was already a mere thread of pink. He turned to Ninon, who had risen and was standing with one elbow on the mantelpiece.

"Can nothing be done to wake her?"

The girl shook her head. He saw that she had begun to tremble again. Her lips were blue, as though she chilled for a fever.

"She has hypnotized herself with the crystal. She must sleep till she wakes of herself."

Dr. Hailey returned to the fireplace.

"I think," he said, "that it was your dropping of the tongs into the fender which roused her. I have reason to believe that Orme Malone's head struck the fender in the great hall when he fell."

He broke off. Ninon was sobbing again, as she had sobbed before in the waiting room. Her nerves seemed to be utterly unstrung.

"Will you not sit down? It may be some time yet before she awakes."

The girl sank into a chair. She rested her brow on her arm, showing him the admirable curve of her neck, with its close-cropped black hair. She was still shivering. He crossed the room to the door, which they had left standing ajar, and closed it.

*"What was that?"*

Sacha moved uneasily, as she spoke. She raised herself on her elbow.

*"What was that, Dick?"* She looked up to the ceiling of the room, appearing to challenge an invisible danger. *"Didn't you hear a door? There must be some one. Oh, Dick, if anybody should be watching!"*

She sank down again. Dr. Hailey came to her and drew a chair up to the side of the couch. He seated himself, and took one of her hands in his hands.

"You will wake up soon, now," he said in gentle tones.

He laid his hand on Sacha's brow, and pressed his fingers lightly on her eyeballs. He repeated his words over and over again, always in the same tones. The girl, however, did not respond to his attempts at counter-hypnosis.

On the contrary, she began to moan. She drew one of her fingers across her brow. He saw the weal on her brow, which had faded, begin to glow again. He watched it with melancholy eyes. Whatever might have been the manner of Orme Malone's death, there could be no doubt that the man had wrought foully to deserve it.

The weal stood out from the surface of the skin. Tiny drops of blood showed on its raised surface, like small rubies set in a coronet. Dr. Hailey was conscious of a sense of horror. What fearful memories were they which were wounding the living flesh of this girl before his eyes?

*"Dick. Oh, don't hurt him, don't—"*

Sacha uttered a wild cry which rang terribly in the silence. She sprang from the couch, and stood with outstretched hands and staring eyes, as though she witnessed a catastrophe too awful to be borne.

The next moment she had fallen prostrate on the floor of the room.

Dr. Hailey sprang to her side and lifted her in his arms. He saw that the drops of blood had become small trickles across her brow.

He saw, too, that at last she had awakened from her trance.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### FACE CREAM

DR. HAILEY laid Sacha back on the couch, but she refused to lie down. She passed her hand over her brow, and then glanced at her fingers. She exclaimed in astonishment.

"I must have cut myself when I fell."

She pressed her handkerchief to the weal. Ninon Darelli, who was watching her, rose and left the room, saying she would get a little water to bathe the wound.

"Did you ask her to give you another dose of her medicine," the doctor queried, in his gentle tones, "or did she invite you to come here to get it?"

"I asked her."

Sacha glanced at the crystal which, in the dim light, shone with an almost metallic hue.

"She left me here alone. I couldn't resist trying the crystal again. Then I suppose I must have become drowsy." She broke off suddenly, and again pressed her handkerchief to her brow. "Ninon said that I had something of the medium in me, so perhaps it was not a sleep but a trance into which I fell."

"You hypnotized yourself." Dr. Hailey's tones were rather abrupt. "Anybody can do it who cares to gaze long enough and fixedly enough at a bright object." He contracted his brows. As a rule, when auto-hypnosis is induced, the sleep is filled with pictures and images corresponding to the thoughts which were uppermost in the waking mind before the hypnosis began."

He watched Sacha narrowly as he spoke. He saw her eyelids flicker for a moment, as though drowsiness were about to return. Ninon Darelli came back to the room with a little crystal bowl and a packet of cotton wool. She bathed the weal gently with her long, sensitive fingers, the touch of which seemed as light as thistledown.

When the operation was complete, Dr. Hailey announced his intention of taking Sacha home. He bestowed her in a cab, and was about to give the driver her address in Green Street when she leaned out of the vehicle and laid her hand on his arm.

"Tell him, please, to drive, first of all, to Ninette's in Bond Street—No. 50-50; I want to buy some face cream to put on my cut."

He gave the order and joined the girl in the cab.

"The scar," he said, "will have completely vanished before to-morrow morning."

"Ah, but that is too late," Sacha cried. "You see, I am going to Redden to-night to the Hunt Ball. I have sent all my servants on already to *Beech Croft*. It was only because Mlle. Darelli refused to accompany me there that I came to London."

"My dear Mrs. Malone, you are not fit to travel to Leicestershire."

The cab came to the curb. Sacha opened the door and jumped out. He saw her walk briskly into the shop. The amazing contrast between this self-confident girl and the distracted woman of a few minutes ago, filled him with wonder. Yet, as he reflected, both these states of mind were attributable, probably, to the drug which was now circulating in her blood. The dreams of the *hashish* eater are not more astonishing than his supreme self-confidence when awake.

A look of deep anxiety came into his face. Sacha Malone was laboring, obviously, under some fierce excitement which had utterly broken down her powers of nervous restraint. Without these injections, her nerves would not be able to sustain the burden of such excitement.

Not a doubt remained in his mind, after what he had just seen and heard, that Barrington Bryan, as instructed by Ninon Darelli, was levying on the girl the most hideous of all forms of blackmail. When they reached Green Street he paid off the cab and followed Sacha up the steps of the house.

"There is something," he explained, "about which I should like to talk to you at once."

Sacha opened the front door with her key, and stood aside to allow him to enter.

The house had a curious feeling of emptiness which characterizes all untenanted human habitations.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### HALF WORLD

SACHA led the way to the dining room. "If you don't mind waiting for a moment," she said, "I'll run upstairs and take my things off."

He glanced round the pretty room, with its rosewood furniture and quiet decoration. Sacha, he knew, had rented it after her husband's death. It suggested, somehow, bereavement without mourning. He walked to the window and looked out, across the deep well of the area, on the darkening street.

The mourning, nevertheless, had come of its own accord. And the cup of mourning was not yet full. He watched a taxicab crawling along the curb, its lamps gleaming like eyes in the twilight. If only he could read the riddle of Ninon Darelli's relations to Lord Templewood.

He turned. Sacha had reëntered the room. He saw that, already, she had succeeded in obliterating the scar on her forehead.

"Isn't it funny," she said, "the mark had nearly all gone. I had no idea a bruise could heal up so quickly."

Dr. Hailey took the seat which she offered him. He waited till she also had seated herself. Then he leaned toward her.

"That scar," he said, in low tones, "was not in fact the result of injury. It came while you were dreaming."

He paused. Sacha raised her hand swiftly to her brow, shutting off, by that action, his view of the injured place. She uttered an exclamation of surprise in which, however, he detected the note of fear.

"My dear Mrs. Malone, when we have suffered any very dreadful experience involving actual injury to the body, and when, later on, that experience is recalled in circumstances of bodily weakness or of bodily poisoning, the injured place sometimes reacts once again.

"That is the explanation of a large number of so-called nervous diseases. And that, too, I think, is the explanation of the weal which appeared on your forehead, though I admit that you may have drawn your finger across the place while you were dreaming."

His tones were very kind and very earnest. But they exercised on the girl the effect of a sharp rebuke. She paled and then flushed.

"It certainly does not apply in my case," she exclaimed. "I have never suffered any injury to my forehead."

She turned her head to the door and then glanced at the clock. He saw her lips curve in a hard smile.

"Then I am at a loss to explain the cause of your scar. Unless, indeed, it be the effect of the drug which you are taking." He lowered his voice. "As a doctor," he urged, "it is my duty to warn you that in taking those injections of *hashish*, you are incurring a terrible danger."

"I am not afraid."

"Not now. Because you are still under the influence of the drug."

Sacha rose.

"I do hope," she exclaimed, "that you won't think me rude, but if I am to get to *Beech Croft* in time for the ball—"

Dr. Hailey rose also. There was a determined light in his eyes.

"Mlle. Darelli," he said, measuring his words as he spoke, "told me this afternoon that two nights ago, at *The Black Tower*, you attempted to put an end to your life. I should like you to tell me why."

"*It is not true.*"

Sacha's right hand moved in small jerks across her breast. The points of her fingers were pressed into the flesh.

"She gave me a very circumstantial account of it. She said she found you in bed with the gas turned on."

"It is a wicked falsehood!" The girl's eyes sought in vain some resting point on the wall opposite her. Dr. Hailey resumed his seat.

"Undoubtedly," he declared, "the statement, if untrue, is wicked. On the other hand, that is not the only piece of evidence

suggesting that, during the last days, some great, some overwhelming sorrow has come to you."

He raised his hand because she seemed to be about to protest again.

"There is, for example, your sudden resort to crystal gazing. There is your resort to drugs. And there are your own terrible words uttered at the moment when the weal was developing on your brow."

Sacha stumbled. She sat down and rested one of her elbows on the polished surface of the table. The doctor noticed that that surface was not encumbered by so much as a speck of dust. Daffodils in an exquisite Venetian glass added to the effect of the spotless luster.

"If you are trying to insinuate anything," she declared, in low tones, "I think it would be better to be open and above board about it."

Her eyes were steady. They glowed as they watched him. She might be afraid; but it was certainly not for herself that she feared. He decided to take her at her word.

"During your hypnotic sleep," he said, "you acted a part—a part which my knowledge of hypnosis leads me to think, to believe, you must have acted on a former occasion in real life. You called on your late husband, by name, to show you mercy. Then you called on Mr. Lovelace not to kill your husband. After that, you described your husband's death."

Dr. Hailey broke off. He moved forward in his chair.

And then, suddenly, he sat back again. Sacha began to laugh.

Her laughter rang, clear and hard, in the emptiness of the house.

"My dear Dr. Hailey," she cried, "surely it can't be possible that you have been converted to a belief in crystal gazing? You!"

"I am not speaking of crystal gazing."

"But I told you that it was the crystal which put me to sleep. Everything you have described appeared before my eyes in the crystal." She caught her breath in a gasp. "It was really most amazing.

"I saw poor Orme quite distinctly, standing dressed in his hunting pink in the great hall. He had his crop in his hands. Then I saw myself come to him, and I must say I looked terribly frightened. He lashed me across the face. The next moment Dick Lovelace had him by the throat and sent him crashing down on the floor. I thought he was dead."

She paused. Her eyes challenged him.

"And then, I suppose, I fell asleep and dreamed it all over again for your special benefit."

"I see."

Dr. Hailey's expression had become rather vacant. His right hand moved to the pocket of his coat and remained there. Sacha observed the gesture. She sighed.

"I was told," she exclaimed, "that you were an amateur detective. I didn't guess that you were quite so keen on riding your hobby as you appear to be."

Her voice was full of scorn. She added:

"Not even psycho-analysts dare to twist dreams into the shapes of reality in so grotesque a fashion."

"I do not think that it was a dream, in the strict sense." The doctor rose again. "Your uncle, as I happen to know, heard the sounds of a horse's hooves at the door of *The Black Tower* on the night on which your husband met his death."

"Not really? It is so very seldom that he hears that sound, isn't it?"

Her lips mocked him. But her eyes had not ceased their vigilance. She found her handkerchief and pressed it lightly to her forehead. He stood for a moment looking at her in silence.

"If you could only realize it," he said, "I am trying to help you. I am deeply sorry for you."

"But why? When there is nothing to be sorry for."

He contracted his brows.

"Because those things which I have mentioned are not the only evidence in my possession bearing on your husband's death. There is this also."

Dr. Hailey withdrew his hand from his pocket, as he spoke. He opened his hand, revealing to her Orme Malone's cigarette case.

**TO BE CONTINUED**

She studied the picture through her magnifying glass

# THE DRAYTON SQUARE MURDER

## By Valentine

**"THE YANKEES SAY," MURMURED MISS WRAYNE, THE ADJUSTERS' SECRETARY, "THAT WHEN THERE AIN'T NO RISK THEY DOUBLE THE INSURANCE"**

IN a small, plainly furnished room in the heart of the city of London, a room whose door bore the prosaic name of the North Western Trading Syndicate, Daphne Wrayne and the four Adjusters sat round a table and talked.

Any reporter in London would have paid fabulous money to have been present at that interview, for Daphne Wrayne was at that moment the center of public interest, and though the man in the street still knew next to nothing actually about the Adjusters, he knew that Daphne, who gave herself out as the secretary of this strange concern, had been held up to the closest possible microscopic scrutiny and had been announced to be flawless.

And therefore the man in the street, usually so suspicious of private inquiry agencies, had shed his suspicions of the Adjusters as rapidly as a tree sheds its leaves before an October gale.

Daphne's portrait had appeared by now in every paper of note. She was not only young and beautiful, but fabulously wealthy as well. Her luxurious offices in Conduit Street were open to rich and poor alike—and, more amazing still, she charged no fees!

The fact that she declined to divulge the name of her associates mattered little. For Sir Geoffrey Pender, the commissioner of police, had only recently written to the press admitting that the Adjusters had rendered him " invaluable assistance " over the Great Northern Trust affair.

So, from that moment, Daphne Wrayne had become something like a public idol.

To the man in the street she *was* the Adjusters. He loved to think that the slender, lovely, wide-eyed English girl whose photo met him so often in the magazines was giving up half her life and a good deal of her money for the benefit of others less fortunate than herself.

He loved, too, her frank avowal to the *Daily Monitor* that she had always wanted to do something with a "kick in it." And even more her statement that "our *raison d'être* is to help, without charge, those whom the law is unable to assist."

Peter Pan, her four colleagues called her—her four colleagues of whose association with her the public never dreamed. There was Lord "Jimmy" Trevitter—her lover—the most popular young peer in England; Sir Hugh Williamson, famous explorer; Alan Sylvester, best worshiped actor manager in London; Martin Everest, the great criminal lawyer who was already, at forty, reputed to have refused a judgeship twice over.

These were the Adjusters, but so well did they guard their secret that not one single member of the public had the slightest inkling of it.

They sat round a table now listening to Daphne as she talked—four knights in the presence of their queen.

"It's a simple little affair," she said. "Blackmail again. The age-old story of the man who wrote foolish letters and never told his wife. And now he's *afraid* to tell. Jimmy darling!" She slipped her hand into Lord Trevitter's with a dazzling smile. "When *we* get married you'll have to tell me *all* your murky past—and I'll tell you mine! Then we'll start level pegging!"

"He couldn't remember it all, my dear," smiled Williamson as he polished his gold-rimmed monocle. "It's so long ago."

The others chuckled. They knew well enough that ever since Daphne was sixteen Trevitter had never looked at another girl.

"*You* can't say that, Hugh," retorted Daphne with a merry little laugh.

"Don't want to, my dear. But let's hear your story."

She became serious at once.

"His name's George Pendlebury," she began, "and he lives at Hammersmith. He's a bank cashier with an excellent record, small income, happily married, one kiddie. But he tells me that he married his wife out of the schoolroom, and," she gave a tiny sigh, "she's just put him up on a pinnacle ever since they've been married."

"The letters, of course, were to some other girl, Daph—pre-marriage?" put in Everest.

"Quite so, Martin—and rather hectic ones, I gather."

"Who holds them?"

"A man called Joshua Wollstein. He lives in a big house in Drayton Square, Kensington, and the Yard tells me he's got rather a sticky reputation. They've never actually laid hands on him yet, but he's figured in some funny cases."

"D'you know how he got hold of the letters?" asked Sylvester.

"No—neither does Pendlebury. But he's got 'em all right, and he wants five hundred for them. Alternatively he'll try Mrs. Pendlebury. He appears to know quite a lot about his market."

"We'd better get 'em from him then," said Everest carelessly; "it won't be difficult."

"Ordinary methods are no good, Martin," rejoined the girl quickly; "I've found out all about that. Wollstein's one of these cautious birds who never sees strangers. And the check stunt we played on Phil Carrington over Esmé Benningham's letter is a washout now. It was all round London in twenty-four hours after the police court proceedings. We must try something entirely new this time."

"What's this man Pendlebury like, Daph?"

"About the same size and build as Hugh," rejoined the girl. "I fancy Alan could make up Hugh to resemble him very easily. By the way, Pendlebury has an appointment with Wollstein to-morrow night at nine thirty. I told him not to keep it, of course, but—"

"No, no!" interrupted Everest. "We'll keep it for him—that is, Hugh will, if he likes. In the meanwhile tell Pendlebury to do something at nine thirty to-morrow night whereby he can establish a perfect

alibi. It might not be wanted, but on the other hand, it might. Now listen to me a minute!"

## II

ON the following evening Sir Hugh Williamson, at nine thirty, presented himself at a large, somber-looking house in Drayton Square, Kensington, and rang the bell. The butler who opened the door seemed to recognize him. If he knew Pendlebury—as apparently he did—he should certainly have recognized Williamson. His make-up was well-nigh perfect.

"I have an appointment with your master," murmured the explorer.

"Certainly, sir. Come this way."

Williamson found himself in a large handsomely furnished library. Rows of books were on the walls, a fire was burning in the grate, the windows were closely shuttered. Williamson noted all this with the quick eye of the big game hunter.

Wollstein looked up from the chair in which he was sitting. He was an undersized little man with an unhealthy complexion, heavy sensuous lips and shifty eyes.

"Evenin', Pendlebury. Well?"

The pseudo bank cashier sighed.

"I—I want to buy those letters," he stammered.

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, they'll cost you *six* hundred to-night."

Williamson moistened his lips admirably.

"I—I must have them!"

He pulled out a rather shabby note case. Wollstein's beady eyes glistened.

"Come into money, eh?" with a sneer.

"I—I've managed to scrape it up. Where are the letters?"

He was fingering a bundle of notes now, and Wollstein, watching him, went to his writing table, unlocked a drawer and produced a small package.

"Now," he said curtly, "count those notes out on the table and I'll put down your letters when they're all there."

Ten minutes later Williamson, chuckling happily, let himself out into the street—the butler apparently disdaining to answer the bell. As he turned the corner of the square a policeman on point duty scrutinized him.

"Good night, sergeant," said Williamson cheerily.

"Good night, sir."

In that little office in the city the Adjusters sat once more. But the faces of them all were unusually grave. Before them lay a newspaper on which large headlines stood out:

**WEST END MURDER**

**Financier Shot Dead**

**ARREST OF A BANK CASHIER**

Alan Sylvester broke the silence:

"Who could have done it, Martin?"

Everest lighting a cigarette, paused.

"The butler possibly. At any rate we know Pendlebury didn't. But I'd like to hear Hugh's story first."

"Daph will be here in a minute," replied Williamson.

They got up quickly as the key clicked in the outside door and Daphne came into the room. Her face was a little pale, but she forced up a smile as they greeted her.

"I know. It's pretty bad, isn't it? Just about as bad as it could be, dears."

It was, and they all knew it. Their faces reflected it. Without a word they watched her as she threw back her big fur coat, and sitting down at the head of the table lighted a cigarette.

"Anything to add to what the papers say, Martin?" she queried. "I see that Pendlebury has pleaded not guilty. Has he said anything about us?"

"Fortunately not a word, my dear. Incidentally, I'm defending him!"

"Martin!"

Amazement showed in her face, but the barrister merely smiled.

"Never mind how I managed it—that doesn't matter. But I've seen him and he's said nothing. Actually I think he was too flabbergasted at the whole affair. So I told him to go on saying nothing. Incidentally, he never left his house last night and he can prove it."

"Then that means—" began Daphne eagerly, but he stopped her.

"Actually, I'm afraid it doesn't. He's only got his wife to vouch for it. We, of

course, know he wasn't at Wollstein's house, but," with a rather forced smile, "we don't want to have to say so."

"We shall *have* to say so, Martin," replied the girl in low tones, "if it's going against him."

"Obviously, my dear. However, let's get Hugh to tell us exactly what happened last night. Maybe he can let a little useful daylight into some of our dark places."

"It was on the stroke of nine thirty," began Williamson, "that I rang the bell and the butler opened the door."

"Did he seem to recognize you?" asked Everest.

"He certainly did. And he ought to have, too. Ask Alan who made me up. I was as like Pendlebury as one pea is to another."

Everest nodded.

"Did he say anything?"

"Merely that his master was expecting me. He showed me into the library. Wollstein was there."

"All alone?"

"He was. Incidentally I noticed that the windows were all closely shuttered."

Everest nodded. He had become the keen, watchful cross-examiner now, jerking out questions, picking up answers — keen brain vitally alert.

"Wollstein uneasy or suspicious, Hugh?"

"Not a bit. I produced the money and he parted like a lamb."

"Who let you out?"

"I let myself out. Wollstein rang for his butler, but he never materialized."

A momentary pause. Everest was suddenly interested.

"Just repeat that last statement, Hugh."

The explorer did so.

"You're absolutely sure of that? It's of vital importance."

"I'm absolutely sure. As a matter of fact I had a half crown ready for him. It struck me as a pretty touch—having cheated his master out of six hundred quid!"

Even Daphne smiled at that, but she became serious again in a moment as Everest went on.

"There's no possibility of any one being hidden in the room while you were there?"

Williamson shook his head.

"Not the remotest. And you know how quickly I absorb detail. There was just the pedestal table where Wollstein sat when he unlocked the drawer that contained the letters—a couple of easy chairs, a little table with coffee on it. The windows were tightly shuttered and fastened as I told you, and the curtains only came halfway down. No one else could possibly have been in the room."

Martin Everest leaned forward in his chair.

"I have seen this butler's sworn statement to the police," he said slowly, and distinctly. "This is what he says: First that he let Pendlebury in at nine thirty and admitted him to his master's room. We agree to that. Secondly that as the clock was striking a quarter to ten he helped Pendlebury on with his coat in the hall and let him out."

Amazement showed on the faces of them all.

"From Hugh's statement," went on Everest, "that is a deliberate lie."

"It most certainly is," murmured Williamson.

"Right," continued the barrister; "we'll discuss that later. He goes on to say that he went straight to his master's room—the library—and found the door locked. Failing to get an answer he ran out into the square where he found a policeman. Did you meet a policeman, Hugh, as you went through the square after you left Wollstein's house?"

"I did. I said 'Good night, sergeant,' and he said 'Good night, sir.'"

"That is on the policeman's sworn statement. He has also identified Pendlebury. The policeman returned with the butler and they forced the library door—the key being missing. They found Wollstein dead in his chair with a bullet through his heart. On his table was a letter"—he turned to Daphne—"the letter you told him to write saying he would call at nine thirty and bring the money.

"The butler went to the station, made this statement, they arrested Pendlebury and the butler and policeman have identified him. The doctor who was called in

says that death took place somewhere between nine thirty and nine forty-five. We, however, who know, can narrow it down considerably further. We *know* he was alive at a quarter to ten.

"Ergo, he was killed within a few minutes of Hugh's leaving the house by some one who locked the door after he did it. The butler was the only man in the house. The other servants were all out."

"If the police knew what we know," murmured Daphne in the little pause that followed, "they'd arrest the butler."

"I know, dear," replied Everest, "but unfortunately they don't, and what's more, we don't want to tell 'em unless we're forced to. Pendlebury had a very obvious motive—from their point of view."

"The revolver, of course, is missing?"

"It is, and the money. Their theory, of course, is—and so it very naturally would be—that Pendlebury went for those letters, paid for them, got them, shot Wollstein, and repocketed the money. And I don't mind telling you that if I was running the case for the crown I'd lay twenty to one on getting a conviction."

Sudden alarm showed in Daphne's eyes.

"You mean—they will—hang Pendlebury?"

"They *mustn't* hang Pendlebury, my dear," replied the barrister with quiet emphasis. "The Adjusters have got him into this and the Adjusters must get him out."

"Yes," said Daphne very slowly, "even if we—have to go smash to do it."

"Still," encouragingly, "we won't think of that just yet. He can't appear at the Assizes for at least a fortnight. In the meantime I'll see that he says nothing at all—just reserves his defense.

"And remember always that we're in a much stronger position than the police are. They're convinced that Pendlebury murdered Wollstein, but we *know he didn't*. Furthermore, we've got a very shrewd idea who did."

"You mean the butler?" said Daphne quickly.

"I most certainly do. The butler has gone out of his way to lie in order to get Pendlebury arrested. Why? Obviously because he committed the murder himself or is shielding some one who did. Now what we've got to do during the next few weeks is to concentrate on the butler. Let's discuss what can be done."

## III

SIR GEOFFREY PENDER, commissioner of police, got up from his table as Daphne Wrayne was shown into his room.

"Well, Miss Wrayne, this is an unusual pleasure. Probably unusual, too, in other ways. The few visits we get from you are generally exciting. What is it this time?"

Daphne Wrayne, smiling, dropped into the chair he drew up for her and pulled out her cigarette case.

"Commonplace this time, I'm afraid, Sir Geoffrey," she replied. "I merely want you to inconvenience yourself for an hour to gratify my curiosity."

"Well, Miss Wrayne, the Yard is not usually ungrateful. How can we help you?"

Daphne's eyes were innocence itself as they regarded the chief commissioner.

"This Drayton Square murder. I'm rather intrigued."

"It's rather ordinary, isn't it?" he answered. "You're surely not connected with it in any way?"

"Oh, dear no," airily; "but — well, crime of any sort fascinates me, and I've got an overpowering desire to see the room in which the murder was committed. Like to take me up there?" with a pretty appeal of her brown eyes.

"I'm frightfully busy, Miss Wrayne"—hesitating—"but would one of my men do instead? What about Montarthar?"

Daphne's eyes twinkled merrily.

"I'd love it to death. We're the greatest of pals. I always remind him of the first time you sent him up to Conduit Street! He looked on me as a sort of mixture of Cleopatra, Circe, and the Worst Woman in London rolled into one."

Sir Geoffrey laughed heartily, then he rang his bell.

"Well, he shall take you right up now. But I'm afraid there's nothing to interest you, Miss Wrayne. The case against Pen-

dlebury is overwhelming. Even Martin Everest can't help him."

The girl knitted her brows.

"The Yankees say," she murmured thoughtfully, "that when there ain't no risk they double the insurance."

Half an hour later, sitting in the library of No. 9 Drayton Square, she studied the room with obvious interest. Inspector Montarthar, big, burly, but respectfully quiet, watched her with eyes in which a certain perplexity struggled with admiration. For he was remembering the assistance she and her unknown colleagues had already rendered the Yard.

Yet now he was firmly convinced that nothing could possibly come of this visit of hers. As he watched her eyes going slowly round the room, seeming to absorb every tiny detail, he wondered what was going on in her brain.

Then suddenly he saw her eyes come to rest on a big picture that hung almost opposite her—saw her forehead wrinkle. Abstractedly she picked up her cigarette case, took out a cigarette and lighted it—but her eyes were still riveted on the picture.

"Quaint picture, eh, Miss Wrayne?" ventured the inspector. "Not the sort of thing you'd choose for your drawing-room?"

"Hardly."

It certainly was a strange picture. The artist had done his work well. It showed a masked burglar crouching in a darkened room. His revolver looked as if it was pointed directly at Daphne as she sat there. The whole thing was almost lifelike.

"The door of this room was locked when Wollstein was found, wasn't it?" asked Daphne, still gazing at the picture.

"It was."

"Key never discovered?"

"Not likely. Pendlebury probably threw it away. He had heaps of chances between here and his house."

For a few minutes Daphne never spoke. Then she rose from her chair, dived into her vanity bag and, producing a small magnifying glass, walked across to the picture. She studied it keenly—put up the magnifying glass and studied it even more keenly. Then she turned.

"Come and have a look here, inspector!" she said.

As he came across quickly she handed him the magnifying glass. When he lowered it there was something like fear in his eyes, but Daphne was smiling now.

"Is the door locked?" she queried.

"No, but it can be in a moment."

"Better do so. We don't want to be interrupted at this stage. I rather think I'm going to surprise you."

Without a word he walked to the door, turned the key in it, came back. Then:

"Miss Wrayne," he said helplessly, "were you—were you—looking for this?"

Daphne laughed merrily. Her delight was obvious.

"Frankly no! But I don't mind admitting that I was looking for *something* of this sort—though I never dared to hope I should find it."

## IV

THE Wollstein murder trial one month later brought the usual crowd to the Central Criminal Court. Even though the facts of the case, as the public had read them, seemed amazingly clear, they still remembered that Pendlebury had stoutly asserted his innocence throughout.

They also remembered, too, that Martin Everest had been retained for the defense—and that Martin Everest had an interesting little knack of springing surprises on the court.

Daphne Wrayne was present, exquisitely dressed as usual, and following the proceedings with her usual interest. But then the public had grown used to seeing her at most of the *causes célèbres*. Her being there was nothing unusual.

There was the usual little murmur of expectancy when the prisoner was brought in. There was the usual craning of heads to get a glimpse of him, the whisperings, the nudgings. He flushed a little under the scrutiny and seemed miserably ill at ease.

But his "Not guilty, my lord!" was in clear unfaltering tones, and one or two people in the court fidgeted a little in their seats. The thought of a possibly innocent man having to fight desperately for his life is always a slightly disturbing one.

The attorney general rose to open the case. He was a big florid-faced, heavy-looking man. He outlined to the jury the circumstances of the murder with that slightly superior air that prosecuting counsel so often employs—an air that always suggests that he, counsel, is apologizing for having to waste the time of twelve such intelligent men on anything so obvious.

He presented them with the facts already known. Finally he told them that a letter would be produced acknowledged by the prisoner to have been written by himself. It contained the following remarkable passage:

> . . . I will come and see you at nine thirty to-morrow night. As it seems useless to plead with a man like you, I will bring the money.

By the time the attorney general resumed his seat the spectators were engaged in mentally hanging George Pendlebury.

The first witness called was the butler, a clean-shaven, swarthy Italian, who gave his name as Tito Antonio, but who spoke English perfectly and swore his way through the case with complete smoothness.

He knew his master was expecting the prisoner—his master had said so. Heard no shot, but wouldn't have expected to hear one. He was in his butler's pantry. Besides, he was rather deaf—always had been. How did he hear the bell which summoned him to let the prisoner out? He didn't hear it—he saw it. There was an indicator on the wall of the pantry.

Where was the prisoner when he came outside? In the hall putting on his coat. Was he absolutely certain it was the prisoner? Absolutely—know him anywhere.

Martin Everest lounged up to cross-examine, hands deep in his trousers pockets, eyes on the ceiling, a slightly bored look on his handsome face.

"The distance between the library and your pantry is exactly twenty paces. The rooms, in fact, adjoin. You swear you never heard the revolver shot?"

"I've already sworn it."

"Strange, isn't it?"

"Not at all. I'm very deaf—I've just said so."

"Oh, I forgot. Of course you have!"

The spectators exchanged glances. Even the judge looked up. For an eminent king's counsel to acknowledge forgetfulness on an important point of this sort was an amazing admission. But no shade of perturbation crossed Everest's face. He seemed entirely unperturbed.

"So naturally," he went on, "you never heard a sound?"

"Naturally!"

Up to that moment Everest had been speaking loudly—unusually loudly for him. But now he turned to his junior with a smile and murmured hardly above his breath:

"I'd like to know where he keeps his own revolver."

"If you mean me, I haven't got one," snapped back the butler.

A little murmur of amazement went over the court. Not a person, outside those immediately around Everest, had heard his careless, almost contemptuous aside. They had only seen him turn—heard him mutter something.

But the butler's angry answer stiffened them into amazement in a moment—though not half as much as Everest's next question, which followed in a flash.

"I thought you told us you were deaf?"

Silence for a moment. Every eye now was on the butler, who had flushed up angrily, his hands working, his eyes glaring sullenly in front of him like a trapped animal.

"Mr. Everest," said the judge, slightly puzzled, "I heard the witness's answer, but I never heard your question."

"It was not a question, your lordship," with a smile. "It was merely a remark to learned counsel behind me. What I said was—"

The attorney general was on his feet in a moment.

"I object, my lord," he exclaimed. "I overheard the observation, and it was a most improper one."

"Might I respectfully suggest to your lordship that your lordship asks the jury if they heard it?" suggested Everest blandly.

"I object, my lord," boomed the attorney general again. "Observations made by learned counsel to their colleagues cannot be admitted as evidence."

The judge deliberated for a moment.

"If learned counsel happens to make an observation," he said, "and the witness, choosing to take it as a question, answers it"—he turned to the jury: "Did any of you hear counsel for the defense's remark?"

A hurried consultation among the jury. Then the foreman rose: "Not one of us heard it, my lord."

The judge addressed the shorthand writer.

"What have you got on your notes?"

"Merely the witness's answer, my lord. I couldn't catch the question."

"It seems to me," murmured the judge with a smile, "that it was learned counsel for the defense who did the catching."

A little ripple of laughter ran through the court.

"I'm quite willing to repeat my remark, my lord," said Everest.

"And I submit to your lordship," exclaimed the attorney general angrily, "that it is not admissible."

"It's quite immaterial to me," murmured Everest blandly.

"Of course it is—now," snapped the other.

"Don't blame *me* for your deaf clients!" retorted Everest and once again the spectators tittered.

"Mr. Everest," said the judge, apparently anxious to pour oil on the troubled waters, "as neither the jury, nor the shorthand writer for the court, nor myself heard the remark, and as you have admitted that such remark was not addressed to the witness, may I suggest that for the future you confine yourself to addressing the witness and only the witness while you are engaged in cross-examination?"

"Certainly, my lord," blandly. "May I add, as justification for having made a remark at all, that as neither you nor the jury heard it it should prove conclusively that I never dreamed a deaf witness would!"

The attorney general looked up angrily, but Martin Everest's face was as guileless as a young curate's. The judge studied him thoughtfully over his glasses.

"I must accept your assurance, Mr. Everest," he said slightly sarcastically.

"As your lordship pleases."

The attorney general flopped down angrily into his seat, for he knew the spectators were smiling. He knew too the value of the point that Everest had so cleverly made. Yet the latter's voice when he asked his next question was smoothness itself.

"Do you know the reason which brought the prisoner to your master's house on the night the murder was committed?"

"I don't!"

"You haven't any idea?"

"None at all."

"In fact you never knew of the existence of that letter to which my learned friend alluded in his opening speech, until you heard him mention it? I'm talking of course of that letter which the prisoner wrote to your master saying he would call?"

"I knew nothing whatsoever about it!" answered the butler.

Martin Everest nodded thoughtfully.

"I see. You didn't know then that your master held certain letters written by the prisoner which he was trying to induce the prisoner to buy?"

"I certainly didn't."

"Or that the prisoner bought them from your master on the night the murder was committed?"

A little gasp of amazement went up round the court.

"No, I didn't know that," replied the witness.

"Didn't know either that the prisoner paid your master six hundred pounds in bank notes for them?"

The judge looked up quickly and the spectators exchanged glances. It certainly struck them as a most damaging question for the defense to ask. Only Everest seemed entirely unconcerned at the little murmur of surprise that went round.

"I didn't," answered the butler.

"Never have seen or handled those notes?"

"I have not!"

The witness was getting a little uneasy now and not a few of the spectators noticed it and commented on it among themselves. Martin Everest, however, was as smooth and bland as could be.

"I am going to have a revolver handed to you," he said; "I want you to tell us whether it's yours or not."

"I've already told you I haven't got one," retorted the witness.

"Don't get angry," murmured Everest smoothly. "Just look at it and answer my question."

The butler took the revolver sullenly, looked at it.

"I've never seen it in my life."

"Swear it?"

"Yes—I do."

Silence for a moment. Then Everest spoke again, addressing the judge.

"My lord, I have no more questions to ask this witness, but in view of certain evidence I intend to call I am going to ask your lordship to order him to remain in court."

When the prisoner went into the witness box excitement ran high. But it faded away to amazement as he gave his evidence. To one and all it seemed that Martin Everest by his questions and the prisoner by his admissions were deliberately playing into the hands of the prosecution.

For Pendlebury not only admitted to the letter and the visit to Wollstein's house at nine thirty on the night of the murder, but he admitted having paid him six hundred pounds in notes and receiving a packet of letters in exchange. And though he gave the numbers of the notes he declined to say how he got them. So when he finally left the witness box there was hardly any one in that court who would not have said that he was a doomed man.

Yet when Martin Everest rose again he seemed entirely at ease and utterly unruffled.

## V

"MISS DAPHNE WRAYNE!" he said.

Guy Templeton, junior counsel for the defense, turned to a colleague with a grin.

"I told you we'd startle you in a minute," he said *sotto voce*.

"Gad, you have!" whispered the other. "What have you got up your sleeve?"

"You wait and see, my lad!"

Certainly this was the sensation. As Daphne made her way to the witness box the court was buzzing with excitement. Even the judge was interested.

"You, I believe, are the secretary of a concern called the Adjusters, Miss Wrayne?"

"I am!"

The judge looked up with a bland smile.

"I suppose I ought to conform to tradition and say 'Who *are* the Adjusters'?"

"That, my lord," answered Everest, "is a question quite a lot of us would like to have answered."

A little ripple of laughter ran over the court.

"Perhaps Miss Wrayne is here to tell us," murmured the judge.

"Surely it wouldn't be evidence, my lord?" queried Daphne innocently and another murmur of laughter ran round.

"Not unless you intend to produce the Adjusters, Miss Wrayne?"

"Can't be done!" answered the girl and once again laughter rang out. But it died away in a moment, for the spectators guessed that something in the way of a sensation was coming. Martin Everest went on.

"Miss Wrayne, have you visited the house of the deceased since the murder took place?"

"I have."

"When?"

"The day before yesterday."

"May I ask why, Miss Wrayne?" put in the judge.

"Chiefly curiosity, my lord," with a smile.

"Not in any official capacity then?"

"Oh dear no!"

Every one in the whole of that crowded court was watching her now with breathless interest. Her beauty, her perfect self-composure and the readiness with which she gave her answers; but above all the clear candor of her brown eyes had enlisted the sympathy of judge, jury and spectators in a moment. They saw a girl out of the ordinary, a girl with a quick alert brain and a keen sense of humor.

"Did you go alone, Miss Wrayne?" was Everest's next question.

"No! I went with Detective Inspector Montarthar of Scotland Yard."

Martin Everest turned to the judge.

"With your lordship's permission I will ask your lordship to let the witness tell her own story. I may say that I propose afterward to call Inspector Montarthar and the Chief Commissioner of Police who will confirm it."

"Very well, Mr. Everest." The judge turned to Daphne. "Please tell the court what happened, Miss Wrayne."

And in the breathless silence of that packed court, with every eye riveted on her, she told them—told them quite simply, without any attempt at effect, though with a little heightened color in her cheeks at that sea of eyes riveted upon her. And then when she had described the picture in the library in detail:

"I went over and examined it—and found, to my surprise, that it had been obviously tampered with. Exactly where the muzzle of the revolver appears in the picture, a neat little round hole had been cut—just wide enough to take the muzzle of a real revolver. The original piece of canvas had subsequently been replaced and the spot painted over—and at no very recent date. Examined through a magnifying glass it was obvious."

As she paused a little sigh of amazement went round the court. She went on:

"I drew the inspector's attention to it and we took down the picture to find that the wall behind it had recently been repapered. At my suggestion we then rang up the chief commissioner who came up immediately."

Again she paused for a moment, but neither judge nor counsel would have dreamed of breaking into that breathless, waiting silence.

"The three of us then went to the room that is known as the butler's pantry. In that room there are a lot of colored prints nailed to the walls. Behind one of them we found the wall had also recently been repapered. Before attempting to remove it we took certain measurements—the two rooms adjoin—and found that the picture in one room was directly opposite to the picture in the other.

"We then proceeded to remove the wall paper on both sides. Inside we found a large cavity opening up communication between the pantry and the library. At the end nearest to the pantry we found a revolver and a packet of bank notes."

"Those notes will be produced, my lord," exclaimed Everest, "and the jury will find that they bear the identical numbers given by the prisoner. They are the same notes that he swore he paid to the deceased in exchange for his letters."

In the deathly silence that followed the judge turned to Daphne.

"Have you anything more to tell us, Miss Wrayne?"

"No, that's all, my lord!"

'I don't know whether my learned friend who leads for the prosecution wishes to cross-examine!" murmured Everest.

The attorney general shook his head.

"Not if you are calling those two other witnesses you spoke of just now," he answered.

"Well, I am!"

The judge turned to Daphne.

"Thank you, Miss Wrayne," he said in kindly tones. "I don't wonder now that one hears such a lot about the Adjusters."

Daphne flushed with pleasure.

"Thank you, my lord," she answered.

As she left the box a little buzz of admiration rippled over the court.

Inspector Montarthar followed, corroborating Daphne's story in every detail. Then came the chief commissioner of the police, a well set up military-looking man who told the court that the Adjusters had on several previous occasions rendered valuable service to him and his colleagues. He confirmed every point of Daphne's narrative. Then when he had resumed his seat Martin Everest rose once more.

"I have one more witness to call, my lord," he said. "Will John Henry Robinson please come forward?"

In the silence that followed a short white-bearded man walked to the witness box, took the oath, faced the barrister.

"You are a gunsmith?"

"I am."

"You are in business at 942 High Street, Kensington?"

"That is so."

"Will you take that revolver in your hand," revolver handed to him, "and tell the court if you recognize it?"

"I do. I sold it from my shop about six months ago. My private mark is on it."

Breathless suspense in court.

"Would you recognize the man to whom you sold it if you were to see him again?"

"I am pretty sure I should."

"Why?" asked the judge.

"Because he came to me, my lord, and I told him I couldn't sell him a revolver without a license. I put him down as a foreigner from his appearance. He came again a few days afterward with the necessary license. I noticed then that it bore an unmistakably English name—Frederick Robinson."

"Can you see him in this court?" asked Martin Everest. "Take time."

The gunsmith's eyes traveled slowly round the court.

"May I ask that man over there." he said slowly, "to stand up? I can't see him quite clearly. That man in the gray overcoat sitting two rows behind counsel."

A little murmur ran over the court, for in a second every one had seen that it was the butler.

"Stand up, please!" directed the judge.

Slowly, very slowly, the butler rose to his feet.

"That is the man I sold the revolver to," said the witness.

As Daphne was getting into her car outside the Central Criminal Court, the center of a crowd that surged about her shouting congratulations, Inspector Montarthar came hurrying down the steps.

"Miss Wrayne, I thought you'd like to know. Antonio's been arrested."

"Splendid. You'll probably find there's revenge or something at the back of it."

The inspector leaned forward lowering his voice.

"We've found out quite a lot about him since you put us on the track. It seems Wollstein got him into his clutches, years ago."

Daphne nodded dreamily. Her eyes had a far-away look. She made a pretty picture sitting there in her big racing car, white gloved hands on the wheel. As one or two cameras clicked she seemed suddenly to come back to earth and a smile rippled over her face.

"You know I'm getting horribly conceited, inspector!" she said. "I just love all this!"

"Well, you deserve it, Miss Wrayne!"

"Do I? I wonder." Then knitting her brows: "That six hundred pounds that we found—who gets them?"

The inspector hesitated. He was obviously puzzled.

"The executors may claim them on behalf of Wollstein's estate."

Daphne shook her head.

"Their title's bad. A contract based on an illegal act is a bad contract."

"You mean that we ought to pay them to Pendlebury?"

"If I were his lawyer, I should make him sue you for them if you didn't." A smile came over his face.

"Now you mention it," he admitted, "there are one or two nice little legal points arising out of it."

As the car drew away Daphne was smiling deliciously.

"There are, my friend," she murmured thoughtfully, "and even *you* don't know how nice they are! But when you find out, as I suppose you will—though I sincerely hope you won't—that all those notes are amazingly clever forgeries—"

As she steered her car through the traffic she was still smiling.

From the corner of his eye he saw a large, heavy man dogging his steps

# PURSUIT

## By Don H. Thompson

**FAR DOWN THE MUDDY ROAD HE SAW THE EYES OF AN APPROACHING CAR, BLINKING THROUGH THE RAIN AS IT SNORTED ITS WAY TOWARD THE FARM**

CYRUS STEEP took off his frayed alpaca coat, hung it in the steel locker, donned the shiny blue serge and threaded his way through the great marble lobby of the First National Bank. The gilt hands of the clock over the doorway pointed to four. Cyrus gave them a quizzical glance over his shoulder and his narrow, pinched face took on a look of triumph.

" No more watching the clock," he gloated to himself. " No more slaving for half what I'm worth." His bony hand strayed to his hip pocket and touched a package resting there. " Fifty thousand dollars. And safe—safe as a church."

He came abreast of the railing that surrounded the heavy mahogany desk of the dignified Horace Winston, president of the institution, who was, at that moment, sitting with his long nose deep in a litter of papers.

" The old fish," muttered Cyrus. " Ice water for blood he's got."

Winston looked up jerkily. His cold gray eyes affixed themselves upon the person of Cyrus Steep like twin gimlets. Then he nodded and said in a dry metallic voice:

" Good day, Mr. Steep."

" Good day, sir," said the teller, and passed out through the archway and into the swirl of the homeward bound thousands, the blood pounding in his wrists and temples, his mind a riot of confused thoughts.

" Why did he look at me like that?" Cyrus demanded of himself. Then, with a sudden, sputtering fear: " Suppose he knows? Maybe he is having me watched. No! He couldn't know. It's safe—safe as a church like I said."

Steep drifted along with the rush of the traffic, a drab little man who looked and acted just like dozens of other beaten work-

ers in the scurrying mob. For twenty years he had been employed at the First National, stuck in a cage like a monkey in the zoo, handling vast sums of money for a monthly pittance that provided him with a furnished room, enough to eat, and an occasional cigar.

He had seen, in his time, at least twenty younger, and, to his mind, less competent men promoted over his head, while he had languished at the same old job, doing the same old thing day in and day out.

" A dependable man," Mr. Winston had said of him. " Honest, hard-working, and dependable. But no punch. No initiative. I'm afraid he's as far now as he'll ever get."

Steep had overheard that estimate of his abilities. He laughed a dry laugh like the rustle of seared leaves as he thought of it now.

" No punch, eh?" he said grimly. " I wonder how he'll take the knock-out?"

It was a pleasant thing to speculate upon. Cyrus grinned as his mind enacted the scene. Fifty thousand dollars gone. Cyrus Steep, the old dependable teller, missing.

Lord, Winston would throw a fit. He would tear his hair and yell for the police. He would offer a reward, and a reward would draw a flock of sleuths to the money trail.

" If he hadn't been so tight," quavered Cyrus, " this wouldn't have ever happened. But no, he had to grind me down. Keep me on the job for nothing. Promote the slick-haired kids. He's getting just what's coming to him."

Cyrus stopped and stared into a window filled with shoes. Indecision held him there, wavering. He could take the money back. Nobody would ever know. He would be right where he started. It wasn't too late.

" Damned if I do," he grated. Then he shook himself and hurried on. From the corner of his eye he saw a large, heavy man dogging his steps. The man wore square-toed shoes and a derby hat, articles which Cyrus immediately associated with detectives.

This fellow was probably Winston's policeman, following him, ready to reach out and grasp him by the shoulder. Cyrus shivered. Visions of prisons, iron barred windows and stripes rose before his eyes.

He came to a motion picture palace where an electric sign winked a message which he did not even try to read, bought a ticket, held it in a shaking hand and fled within.

Heads bobbed, countless feet padded over the thick carpets, the orchestra blared forth under a spray of rose-colored lights—but Cyrus hardly knew what was going on.

The friendly blackness renewed his waning courage. There was no sign of the man in the square-toed shoes. Perhaps he was waiting at the door. The thought wilted the little teller again, and he shook in his seat until the man beside him turned and peered at him curiously.

At seven o'clock he left the theater and strayed into a dimly lighted street, walking fast as he pondered his next move. He realized now that he had planned the thing badly.

He had simply made up his mind to take the money. Where he was going with it, except that he had a vague idea of Canada, had not entered into his calculations. But he must decide now. Time was precious.

He thought of a farm, two hundred miles from the city, where he had once spent a brief vacation. It was a desolate spot, far from the doings of his world. He would be safe there. Later he could make his way into Canada and lose himself under another name.

" That's best," he told himself. " Best I can figure out now, anyway."

He turned toward the railroad station, stopped, retraced his steps. The police would be watching the trains. He got on a street car bound for a suburban depot. It would be safer.

When he got off the car a new possibility came to him and sent a shudder down his spine. Suppose he should be held up and robbed? He looked into the faces of the frowzy bums who lined the curb. Any one of them would be capable of doing the job for much less than the fifty thousand which Cyrus was carrying.

" And with murder thrown in," he said to himself. " What I need is a gun."

The worn gilt sign of a pawnshop caught his eye and he went in. He had no knowledge of firearms, but he inspected several weapons critically, bickered with the bearded proprietor over the price, and finally emerged with a revolver in his hip pocket. It had a comforting feel.

Cyrus bought his ticket quietly, passed through the gates, and hurried to the train.

As he started to climb aboard he was roughly shouldered aside by a man who growled:

"Where yuh think you're going?"

Cyrus swallowed his Adam's apple. His tongue was as dry as a stick. He could not speak.

"I got here first," the man went on, "and I'm gonna get on first." He disappeared into the coach.

Cyrus smiled. Let the poor fellow rave. He probably worked for his money. Cyrus touched his hip pocket. No more work for him. He had fifty thousand dollars.

## II

WHO-EE-EE!

The wind came out of the north, whooping and howling as it bore down on the sleeping town of Hayden. It rattled shutters, growled in dark doorways, and thrashed through the trees that lined the deserted street. With it came the rain.

Who-ee-ee!

The wind caught Cyrus Steep from behind, flipped his coat tails like a bad boy, and sent him on his way, a shuffling ghost, his chin deep in his collar, his soggy hat pulled low over his eyes. A fearful ghost was Cyrus, casting timid glances at the apprehensive shadows that flickered to the fancy of the gale.

Who-ee-ee!

A tree limb, shaped like a strangling hand, reached out for him. Cyrus dodged, his teeth clacking from fright, regained his balance and fled. Immobile maples made him quake and curse. Stirring bushes brought the cold sweat to his forehead.

A stray dog, rooting in a hedge, caused him to break into a run as though he were pursued by the devil himself.

Cyrus had arrived in Hayden long after dark. The tiny waiting room at the railroad tracks had been deserted. There was no human being within sight or call, so there was nothing to do but to walk the four miles to old man Shevlin's lonely farmhouse.

Who-ee-ee!

"God!" said Steep low in his throat. "I didn't know it would be like this."

His voice sounded small and far away to his own ears.

He was in the open now, on the boggy country road, and his shoes made sucking noises in the mud. The trees had thinned out, but the wind made mournful, sighing noises in a field of waving grain.

On a far ridge the lights of a train twinkled for an instant and were lost in the shadows. Cyrus wished that he was safely abed in some dark sleeping car, speeding away to the ends of the earth. What fool notion had ever brought him to this God-forsaken place?

A flash of lightning between the oily black clouds revealed the Shevlin homestead. Cyrus stumbled to the front porch and beat upon the door with his fists. After a minute's deadly silence an angry voice boomed:

"Who is it pounding upon doors at this hour of the night?"

"Me," retorted Cyrus weakly. "Cyrus Steep."

The door was flung open. Old man Shevlin himself stood there, holding a smoking lamp, his long white nightgown flapping about his bony ankles.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"Don't you know me? I'm Cyrus Steep, the man who was here for his vacation last year. Remember?"

Shevlin's fierce eyes smoldered with suspicion.

"What are you doing here now?"

Cyrus had regained some of his confidence. He straightened himself with an effort, pulled at his dripping clothes and replied:

"I decided at the last minute to take my vacation early this year. I didn't have time to let you know. I just hopped on the train and came on out. Thought, of course, that I could get a horse and buggy

at the station, but I couldn't. So I walked. I was determined to get here to-night."

"Hump," said Old Man Shevlin. "Well, come in. We ain't fixed for boarders yet, but I guess ma can take care of you all right." He stared at Steep keenly. "A good hot cup of coffee wouldn't hurt you right now. You look like you're all tuckered out."

"I am," said Cyrus wearily.

Later he sat in the kitchen and dried his clothes and drank the fresh, strong coffee made by Ma Shevlin. It renovated his nerves, gave him new confidence in himself. He patted the fifty thousand with an air of assurance. He had negotiated the first hurdle. The rest would be easy.

"Curious time to go vacationing," said Shevlin, sitting with his slippered feet on the oven door. "What is there to do at this time of the year?"

"I needed a change," smiled Cyrus. "I was getting stale on the job. It makes little difference to me what I do. Just want to be away from everything. By the way, do you get the city papers in Hayden?"

"Nope. Folks out here aren't much on reading. A feller came through here and tried to sell 'em the papers, but he couldn't make a go of it."

Cyrus sighed with relief. He confidently expected his picture to appear upon the front pages of the metropolitan papers on the morrow.

"Oh, well," he said, "I guess I'll be better off cut off from things entirely."

"Probably," agreed Old Man Shevlin.

When the coffee pot was emptied, Cyrus was shown to his room and began to peel off his mud-stained, wrinkled clothing. Old Shevlin hesitated in the doorway.

"Didn't bring no luggage?"

"No," retorted Steep, exasperated by the man's persistence. "As I explained, I made up my mind in a hurry and had to catch the train. I didn't have time to go to my rooms for my things. I'll make out all right."

The farmer wagged his shaggy head, turned away and closed the door.

Steep sat down on the bed, sick at heart. He had bungled the job. He had made a simple affair into a complicated matter that had attracted attention. Sooner or later he would be found out. Sooner or later they would catch him, unless he changed his tactics.

What an awful fool he had been. This was the last place in the world for a fugitive, this lonely farmhouse, with its suspicious, prying people.

Downstairs a telephone bell jangled nervously. Cyrus felt the loose flesh on his backbone creep. What could this be? He was at the door listening intently.

Old Man Shevlin, muttering curses, was padding over the lower floor in his bare feet.

"Hello," he boomed. "Yes. That so?" His voice fell from an angry bellow to a tone of friendly conversation. "Sure. Come on up. I'll help you do the job. What's that? Sure, I've got a shotgun."

He hung up and moved away into the back part of the house, and Cyrus heard him fumbling in a drawer.

The little teller sat, shivering and shaking, on the bed. He was lost. Shevlin was probably sitting outside the door at this very minute with a weapon in his hand, waiting to take the life of the man who dared to steal fifty thousand dollars from the great First National Bank. And when the deed was done the farmer would get a reward for making an end of such a desperate criminal.

"Blood money," said Cyrus. "They'd do it for the blood money."

Who-ee-ee!

The wind struck a loose end of the metal guttering and it vibrated like a harsh harp. Downstairs Cyrus heard sounds of pattering feet, hoarse whispers, the rattling of chains. A half an hour passed. The teller staggered to his feet and looked out the window.

Far down the muddy road he saw the twin eyes of an approaching automobile, blinking through the rain as the machine ground and snorted its way toward the farm.

A posse. Cyrus shivered like a man with the ague. He might be lynched, hanged to one of those dark naked trees in the yard.

The machine stopped in front of the

house and several men got out, blobs in the gloom. Cyrus noted, with a catch in his breath, that they all carried rifles. The front door banged open.

"Hello, sheriff," said Shevlin. "Well, come on, let's go get our man."

Sheriff! Our man! The words burned themselves into Steep's muddled brain. In a frenzy of fright he tore the window open and leaped out on the roof. For a moment he stood there staring down into the blackness, then he jumped. He landed with a breath-taking jar, scrambled to his feet and stood poised for flight.

The door opened again. A swath of yellow light cut the darkness of the yard. The sheriff and his men, followed by Shevlin, who carried a shotgun, came out.

With a high-pitched shriek of terror, Cyrus Steep sped into the woods.

Dank leaves bogged beneath his feet. Twigs snapped, bushes crashed and stones rattled. Gasping and tripping as he plunged onward, Cyrus heard the noises of the pursuit behind. He saw winking lights, caught fragments of rough talk and many threats. He came to a thickly wooded hill and climbed higher and higher.

Rapidly he felt the strength leaving his legs. He was gasping like a fish on the bank. He could not go much farther. He turned, a weazened little animal at bay, and waited.

From below he heard the snort of an automobile. He peered steadily through the wet leaves and saw men thrusting their long rifles into the bushes.

"I'm a goner," he muttered in a husky voice. "They'll get me now, sure."

He drew the revolver from his hip pocket, fingered it nervously, raised it and lowered it again. From the black void beneath came a bellowing voice.

"Spread out, boys!" it said. "We ought to be close to him by now!"

Men were crashing through the bushes close at hand.

Writhing in his agony, Cyrus Steep lifted the weapon, stabbed its cold muzzle into his sweating forehead and pulled the trigger.

Two days later Sheriff Tebbetts sat in Old Man Shevlin's kitchen, scraping the mud from his boots.

"Just saw a detective from the city," he said presently. "Told me all about that Steep feller. Funny thing about him. Nobody at his bank knew he was gone, and they didn't have any idea that he had taken any money. Never suspected it until we found him up there on the hill dead."

Old Man Shevlin grunted, then said:

"And if you hadn't happened to come up here looking for a second-rate chicken thief, he'd a stuck it out, I guess."

"Yep. That was funny, too. When that bird got out of the jug down there in town I thought of you right away. I says to myself: 'He'll head for Shevlin's, because he used to work there.' So I rounded up a couple of the boys and we hustled right out. And we scared this banker so bad he run off up into the woods and shot himself."

"And you never did get the durn chicken thief," said Shevlin.

"No," growled the sheriff. "That feller didn't have no conscience."

Dressed in evening finery, she stood outside the building and chatted with the young men

# CHEATERS

## By Lin Bonner

**IT COST THE SOMONDOCO MINES $62,000 TO PRODUCE "A SPOONFUL OF EMERALDS," WHICH SOLD FOR ONLY $5,000, OR AT A LOSS OF $57,000**

**A Story of Fact**

GEORGE GRAHAM RICE, who on at least three occasions had found himself on the inside looking out—sentenced for breaches of the law—has every reason to heap curses upon the heads of a band of swindlers who were run to earth by the minions of Keyes Winter, deputy attorney general of the State of New York.

They not only made him an innocent party to their depredations, but they put him afoul of the Martin Anti-Stock Fraud Act; caused him to face two prosecutions on the charge of stock swindling and cost him a sum of money estimated variously at one hundred thousand to half a million dollars.

One of the most essential things to the stock selling business is a "list," called a mailing list in polite language, but more generally referred to as a "sucker list." Without such a list, the stock salesman, legitimate or otherwise, is helpless. He has nowhere to start.

Therefore, when a crew of high pressure operators, whose playground is the brightest part of Broadway, found themselves in immediate peril of being broke, they cast about for a scheme that would put them in funds in a hurry. Like the monarch who offered his kingdom for a horse, these birds of prey would have given anything, just then, for a "sucker list."

But sucker lists are the chief asset of the stock game and they are most jealously guarded by their possessors; and this par-

ticular band of workers did not happen to possess one at the moment.

The gang included Jimmie "Red" Quinn, Billy Rankin, Billy Neeley and Eddie Harrison, all of more or less unsavory repute. "Slippery Dick" Guest was named by one of the gang as the brains of the outfit, but, as on many previous occasions, he escaped capture when the trap was finally sprung on them.

Jimmie Quinn is credited with the inspiration that gave the gang their start on what looked like a chance to get a million dollars in a hurry.

### *Fixing the Watchman*

At any rate, he or some one else suggested that George Graham Rice, mining stock promoter, winner and loser of millions of public money, had fine offices in West Fifty-Seventh Street, wherein were located lists which are said to have been productive of millions of dollars for various Rice promotions.

What this list had cost Rice is a matter of guesswork, but that it had an intrinsic value aside from income possibilities is a certainty, for each name on a good list represents an expense of from ten dollars upward.

In Wall Street, it is estimated that it costs a broker an average of sixty dollars to land each market trader on his books. This expense arises from postage, telephone calls, advertising matter and time involved in personal solicitation of the individual.

Consequently, it was out of the question that Rice would lend his precious list, carrying many thousands of names, to the Broadway bandits. Ergo, they had to devise another means of obtaining it. And that means turned out to be downright burglary.

At first the boys considered bribing the watchman of the building to enter Rice's offices at night and purloin the list. But that plan had to be abandoned, for upon cultivation by one of the gang, the night watchman proved to be a steadfastly honest man, above lending himself to a crooked deal and liable to spoil the scheme by informing Rice that some one had designs upon his property.

So, on the theory that there are more ways of killing a cat than by choking it with butter, Quinn, et al, decided to make the watchman a party to their plan without his knowledge.

Thus, on a selected night, the advance man, who had been cultivating the acquaintance of the watchman, appeared at the building and engaged the guardian in friendly conversation. Then he suggested a friendly drink and, by this means, lured the man away from his post of duty. It was not long before the man was drunk, helpless and unaware that he had been betrayed by his supposed friend.

This all sounds very melodramatic, but we must keep in mind that truth is stranger than fiction and that this particular crowd of swindlers—at least one of whom was involved in the fleecing of a New York State banker, who since has gone to his grave—is given to dramatics.

While the watchman lay helpless a few blocks away, guarded by one of the gang, others gathered at the building. For lookout purposes, while two were ransacking Rice's offices, they used a beautiful young woman, a former stage and screen notable who was at that time acting as hostess in a night club.

### *The List They Stole*

She, dressed in splendid evening finery, stood outside the building chatting merrily with two young men in dinner suits, to throw off police or others who might become inquisitive. In due time the men who had committed the burglary rejoined the group on the sidewalk and all left the vicinity of the crime.

After getting the list, the swindlers hid it away for several days, then they opened an office, using names identical with those of several prominent banking firms in Wall Street.

The list which they had obtained was that of people who had invested in Idaho Copper stocks, one of several then being promoted by Rice. The attorney general has charged that Rice, owning the bulk of this company's stock, purchased at ten cents a share, had created a fictitious market for it by "rigging" it on the Boston

Curb from fifty cents at the start to as high as six dollars per share; and that in that way, he had swindled the public out of millions of dollars.

The fact remains, however, that at the time Rice's list was stolen, the stock was quoted at several dollars per share and, therefore, of immense value to the hundred per centers who had looted the promoter's office.

### *Gigantic in Potentialities*

When they had opened offices, the swindlers went to work on the persons who appeared on the list as shareholders. In complaints which were received by Winter, it was alleged that these men called their victims by telephone and represented themselves as Rice; that they represented a forthcoming drop in the market and urged the owners of the securities to send them in to such and such banker for deposit and disposal at the best possible figure.

How much stock was sent in to the swindlers probably never will be known, but it is a fact that at the time their plot was blown up they were awaiting the receipt of several hundred thousand dollars' worth.

As soon as this stock should get into their hands, they would sell it on the Boston Curb and present to the shareholder utterly valueless stock in some other proposition. Thus, whatever they received for the Idaho Copper shares on the Boston Curb was all profit.

Naturally, this was a game which had to be worked fast, because George Graham Rice is himself too shrewd an operator to remain long in ignorance of the fact that something was wrong, whether he was aware of the theft of his list or not.

Any sudden raid on the market, involving a sudden drop in price of the stock, or one complaint from one of his shareholders would be sufficient to stir him into action. And it so happened that it was an inquiry of the latter sort which did finally give him an inkling that all was not right with his world.

But, before Rice knew he had been victimized, Winter, through underground channels, had learned of the enterprise and had set his Secret Service to work to land the gang. The swindle, though only about a week old, seemed so gigantic in potentialities that he determined to try and get the gang in such a way that they could not by any possibility escape a term in prison.

He first had two of his operatives get places in the gang and these men later stood for arrest and indictment in connection with the swindle, without disclosing their real identity.

Their chief duty was to obtain some of the stolen securities and, upon pretense of selling them, to return marked money to the gang. They actually did obtain a batch of the securities, but the amount involved was so small that they were simply checked and recorded for future use as evidence and no money was turned over for them, because the operatives had been told several hundred thousand dollars' worth would be received in the mails within a few days, and it was decided to get the larger amount in hand.

For these Winter men to get into the confidence of the gang was not such an easy task, it may be imagined, and they were let into the plot only after a series of negotiations over costly luncheons and suppers.

### *The Woman Is Found*

Their arrest, also, almost destroyed Winter's plan for rounding up the real crooks, and it was only the quick-wittedness of the men in keeping their identities secret that prevented complete collapse of the structure built up by the attorney general's office.

While Winter was working on the case, Rice tumbled to the fact that somebody was tampering with his investors, and a search revealed to him that his list had been stolen. He employed private detectives to try and locate the thieves.

Then the city police came into the case and thus three agencies were out after the band, though the State's men were in the lead. It was city police who arrested Winter's Secret Service agents, though they were not aware of their connection when they took them in.

After this premature occurrence, the

gang went into hiding, and the Winter men kept in touch with some of them, still preserving their incognito. Up to this time, the real heads of the proposition had not been made known to the Winter operatives, but finally one of them learned that the hostess of a leading night club, the former luminary of stage and screen, was the sweetheart of one of the chiefs.

The man-hunters began to lay siege upon this girl. Night after night, correctly attired in evening clothes and armed with plenty of money, the operatives haunted that club, currying the favor of the pretty hostess.

### *The Rest of the Gang*

Ultimately, they gained her confidence to such an extent that she revealed to them that she would, on a given afternoon, meet Jimmie Quinn in the Waldorf-Astoria, at Thirty-Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue. At the appointed time, Jimmie was there—and so were a squad of Winter's men.

He and the girl were taken to Winter's office and questioned, Jimmie being held on the charge of grand larceny. To make sure that he should not get away, he was taken up to Bronx County, where he was wanted in conjunction with the swindling of a college professor, and on this charge was held in bail of twenty thousand dollars.

Subsequently, this was reduced to seventy-five hundred dollars and he was able to obtain his liberty. As soon as he was freed, however, he was taken to Tombs Prison on the Idaho Copper deal and spent eight weeks there before obtaining bail. As this is written he is awaiting trial, along with one of his companions in the enterprise.

With Quinn in jail, the Winter forces, with those of the United States Post Office Inspector and the city police, continued their search for the rest of the gang, and it fell to the lot of the uniformed force to apprehend Bill Rankin, one of the ringleaders, so-called.

He was taken in the office of a telegraph company where, it was said, he was awaiting the arrival of a large amount of " sucker dough." From Rankin the authorities obtained admissions giving away the entire scheme, from the time of the theft of Rice's list until the break-up of the conspiracy, following the first arrests.

Rankin, like Quinn, was able to obtain bail and his freedom, but it was not long before he was again in the toils.

In the course of their hunt, the Winter forces learned that one Billy Neeley, an ex-convict, had opened an apartment house; an exclusive apartment, it may be said, in that only proved crooks or ex-convicts could obtain lodgings therein. The doors of the place, which was located on West Seventy-Second Street, New York, were elaborately armored and secured by heavy bolts, to provide against assault by pestiferous policemen.

A keen and continued search of speak-easies, night clubs and other known haunts of the high pressure gang having failed to produce any more of the hunted men, it was determined to raid Neely's place.

Thus, one afternoon, State Troopers, Secret Service operatives, post office men and city detectives went to the Seventy-Second Street house in force. They quickly surrounded the building, and two stalwart State Troopers went to the door of Neeley's apartment.

### *On a Technicality*

They rang the bell, received no answer; then they hammered on the armored door with their automatics. Soon, with much rattling of chains and sliding of bolts, the door was cautiously opened.

A face appeared in the aperture. It was that of Rankin. Before he could close the door again the State Troopers were inside the apartment, guns in hand. Other officers followed.

A search revealed that Rankin was the only person on the premises, and he was again taken to Winter's office, for investigation on a charge separate from the Idaho Copper transaction. Like Quinn, he is now awaiting trial on the latter charge.

While Quinn and Rankin were the only two bagged in this case, their alleged activities in Idaho Copper turned the attention of Winter to George Graham Rice and his affairs. The result was that Winter began two prosecutions against him, charging him with defrauding the public through

"wash sales" of Idaho Copper and Colombia Emerald Development Corporation stocks.

In the former case, which has been treated in another article, Rice beat the case on a technicality and the State appealed from the decision of the lower court. In the Colombia Emerald case the State was victorious and Rice took an appeal. Neither has been finally decided as this is written.

### *The Wall Street Iconoclast*

In the Colombia Emerald affair, which had to do with an emerald mine in the South American country of that name, Rice was accused of taking an old and abandoned property and, by means of false engineering reports and boosting the stock in his newspaper, the *Wall Street Iconoclast,* of placing a two million dollar value on a property worth, at most, only a few thousand dollars.

With him as defendants in this action were the *Wall Street Iconoclast,* Frank J. Silva, Colombia Emerald Development Corporation, Nash Rockwood, Edmund J. McNamara and Frederick H. Lewisohn. The State obtained a preliminary injunction under which Rice and all others concerned were prevented from promoting or selling the stock, except under certain restrictions.

Part of the court record in this case is illuminating as showing the alleged methods employed by Rice in his dealings with the public. A memorandum to the Supreme Court, prepared by Deputy Attorney General Winter, first tells of the *Wall Street Iconoclast,* thus:

"The fraud in this case may be summarized briefly as follows: The periodical, the *Wall Street Iconoclast,* is published by defendant, Wall Street Iconoclast, Inc., and is edited by defendant George Graham Rice in the City of New York, with a large circulation throughout the United States." (It is said Rice sends out about six hundred thousand of each issue, paying first-class mailing charges.)

"This periodical is a 'tipster' sheet, dressed up to appear as giving its readers, who pay six dollars for the information, impartial and disinterested news and advice about securities. It is designed to establish a relation of confidence and trust between its editor—and its readers.

"It consistently and continuously, in its weekly editions, comments on the stocks of four corporations—Idaho Copper, General Mines, Belcher Extension and the defendant Colombia Emerald Development Corporation.

"To further inspire confidence and trust in its news and advice about these securities it publishes a large number of letters from correspondents appealing for information and advice, together with the editor Rice's answers to the same, in certain instances misrepresenting the value and condition of the securities held by the inquirer, and advising the sale of such inquirer's securities and the purchase with the proceeds of the four securities 'sponsored' by this periodical.

"Nowhere in this periodical is there any disclosure that the defendant Rice or the 'Rice interests' have any interest in the profits which will accrue to the defendants from the public's purchase of the four securities sponsored by this periodical; but, on the other hand, there is a studious concealment of such fact, in direct violation of the relation of trust and confidence that the periodical is calculated to inspire.

### *"Matched" Sales*

"To further inspire the relation of trust and confidence, the periodical contains inflammatory attacks upon the New York Stock Exchange in the interests of the public, and also to induce the public to purchase sponsored stocks it contains cunning references to quotations of these stocks from transactions on the Boston Curb Market, purchases and sales which the testimony of defendant's accountant, Reis, and the transcript of the defendant brokers' accounts conclusively demonstrate were 'cross' or 'matched' sales."

This latter reference means sales where a person in control of a stock sells a given number of shares to himself in the open market at a price determined by him, the transaction being intended to show an activity which the stock does not actually possess. Where the price of a stock is

progressively advanced by this method, it is known as "rigging" the market, and there have been a number of cases where big stock exchange operators have been expelled by that organization for indulging in the practice.

In addition to the boosting in the *Iconoclast,* the attorney general charged that Rice used a corps of high pressure salesmen to induce the public to invest in Colombia Emerald stock, of which he owned or exercised control over practically all that was available to the public.

### *High Finance!*

As to the emerald mine itself, the State presented a graphic historical picture, stating in part, with reference to an affidavit filed by the defense:

"The history of the Somondoco Mines, owned by the defendant Colombia Corporation, is set forth with great detail. Disrobed of its romantic verbiage, it baldly discloses that these mines, although known to history and to the public generally, were permitted to lay buried for over two centuries, until 1896, when they were resurrected by the Colombian Company, which produced nothing.

"That, in 1919, some German interests attempted a promotion which proceeded no farther than an option; that in December, 1919, the original promoters of the present project, the McFadden-Gross group, obtained options and transferred the mines to the Colombian Emerald Syndicate, 'which started to sell their stock on the New York Curb Market at fifteen and one half to twenty dollars a share in October to December, 1919, representing six to eight million dollars for the four hundred thousand shares at a time when they did not even own the property and even their options were of dubious, if of any value.'

"This promotion, according to Breger—a witness—went on the rocks and that corporation—Colombian Emerald Syndicate—was petitioned in bankruptcy in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York; as a result of which proceeding, the trustee in bankruptcy, in the latter part of 1924, sold its entire assets, including the two mines, the canal and other paraphernalia, together with a stock of unsold emeralds to a dummy for McFadden for seven thousand eight hundred dollars.

"Thereafter, according to Breger, in 1924, the Chivor Emerald Corporation was organized by McFadden and took over the identical property now owned by the 'Lewisohn interests' and again promoted a stock jobbing proposition on very little production.

"After this unhappy career, according to Breger, the 'well-known Lewisohn interests' were introduced into the picture and organized the defendant Colombia Emerald Development Corporation to take over and operate this unfortunate property. The two mines were thereupon, in the latter part of 1924, transferred by the Chivor Emerald company to defendant Colombia Emerald Development Corporation for the entire capital stock of that corporation, consisting of one million shares of no par value.

"The Lewisohn interests thereupon paid defendant Colombia Emerald Development Corporation fifty-one thousand dollars cash and receive five hundred and fifty thousand shares of the stock, leaving four hundred and fifty thousand tied up in escrow for the benefit of the Chivor Corporation.

### *A Spoonful of Emeralds*

"Shortly afterward one hundred thousand shares of this stock was returned to the treasury of the Colombia Emerald Development Corporation, fifty thousand from the Chivor Corporation and fifty thousand from the 'Lewisohn interests.'

"According to Breger, therefore, the entire history of these Somondoco mines was one of failure, and as the record established, it ran true to form up to the time when this action was filed against these defendants."

The brief then outlines "operation" of the mines from December, 1924, until May, 1926—a period of seventeen months—and states that "during this period only a few hundred carats of saleable emeralds were produced, which subsequently realized not over five thousand dollars, and that the great mass of the production was practi-

cally worthless because of the flaws and the light green color.

"This spoonful of emeralds," the State continues, "was produced at a cost of sixty-two thousand dollars, a net loss to the company during that period of fifty-seven thousand dollars, without including sales expense and the cost of cutting—three to five dollars per carat."

The statement is then made that Lewisohn put approximately one hundred thousand dollars into the enterprise up to February, 1926, and had sold to the public, in a period of about fifteen months, only about twenty-five hundred shares of stock.

### *The State's Contention*

It was at this time that Rice came into the picture, the State alleging that his agents obtained an option on the hundred thousand shares of treasury stock previously mentioned, he agreeing to pay one dollar per share, and also an option on the four hundred thousand shares, more or less, held by Lewisohn.

With that held in escrow for the Chivor Corporation and others, it was charged that this deal left only twenty-five hundred shares out of one million free in the hands of the public.

Within a few weeks, it was charged, Rice, operating in the name of A. B. Brown, began to sell the stock, starting it off at one dollar fifty per share. Soon it rose to two dollars, due, the State charged, to manipulation by Rice.

The attorney general cited one day's trading wherein a witness alleged that Rice sold on the Boston Curb seven hundred thousand shares of stock, and that it was all bought by the *Wall Street Iconoclast*, his newspaper.

The State contended that this huge transaction, representing several million dollars and commissions to brokers of fourteen thousand dollars, was made possible through Rice lining up seventeen hundred investors to purchase Colombia Emerald, General Mines and other "sponsored" stocks; that he obtained their purchase money in advance and just made the market gesture as a matter of form, although the brokers were instructed to make out the stock certificates in the names of the seventeen hundred investors, and did so, sending the certificates by registered mail.

Rice's culpability, it is the State's contention, regardless of any other consideration, lay in the fact that he guided them to buy stock controlled by him, at prices fixed by him, without disclosing that he was the seller.

"The relation between Rice and his customers," said the plea to the court, "was one of confidence and trust. They were his clients, looking to him for his advice in the purchase and sale of stock, and for the selection of independent brokers who would represent them in the negotiations on the Boston Curb Market to procure the best price in that market. Such a broker would need to be free to select the highest price.

"Instead of this, Rice selected brokers on the Boston exchange who admittedly represented him, and dealt with him as the principal, buying stocks from other brokers employed by Rice to sell Rice's own stocks.

"This arrangement offends one's ideas of common honesty and decency, placing, as it does, Rice's customers in a helpless position of being obliged to take what Rice has already predetermined that he shall sell to them, and depriving them of the independent services of a broker who may negotiate at arm's length with his antagonists."

### *A Skillful Fighter*

In other words, the State charges that Rice was playing both ends against the middle, operating his newspaper as a "come-on" to bring lambs to the shearing table.

How much Rice or anybody else reaped from these operations, originally revealed through the theft of his list by the Broadway "dynamiters," is not known, but it is said to have run into millions.

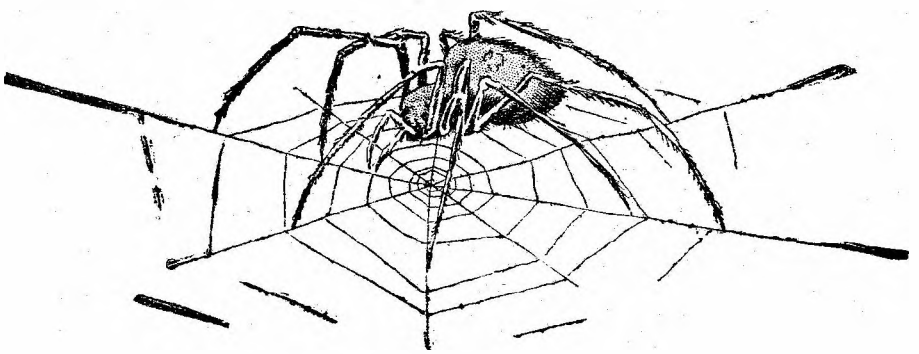
Lewisohn, the State pointed out, made one dollar on every share of his four hundred thousand which may have been sold after the first one hundred thousand shares of treasury stock optioned to Rice had been disposed of.

Assuming that all were taken over by Rice, the net return to Lewisohn, after deducting the original hundred thousand dol-

lars he had put into the ingenious proposition would be three hundred thousand dollars.

Few men in Wall Street are more skillful in market affairs than George Graham Rice, and, despite the fact he has been behind bars several times in his career, he has put up one of the stiffest fights in this and the Idaho Copper affair that Winter, in his enforcement of the Martin Act, has encountered.

He has surrounded himself with an array of brilliant lawyers, has spared no expense to prove his operations were legitimate, and probably, if necessary, will carry the fight to the Supreme Court of the United States.



JOHN STEPHEN STRANGE is a new name to readers of FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION. In our issue of October 1, "The Fortescue Affair," a novel by Mr. Strange, has its beginning. You may be sure the story is in the magazine's best manner.

In the same issue John Ames begins a series of short detective stories that are different. Mr. Ames, himself an aviator of no small distinction, has built his stories about the exploits of Jim Reading, a flying detective. "The Flying Ghost" will introduce you to Reading.

Charles Somerville offers a special article, "The Death Kiss." And Frank Price presents a new yarn of Barrow of the Citadel in "Mama Doll."

There will be a complete Tug Norton novelette by Edward Parrish Ware, "The Hole in the Hill"; and Robert W. Sneddon will present the true facts in the case of Ronald True, who flew too close to the moon. In addition there will be stories and articles by Faulkner Conway, Harold de Polo, Henry Gollomb, J. D. Kerkhoff, M. E. Ohaver, and others.

William J. Flynn

"As for Marsh—he'll live longer than you, McArthur"

# DEFENDERS OF THE LAW

## By Mansfield Scott

**AN OCCULTIST PROPHESIED HIS DEATH AT THE WHEEL, SO HE DEFIED IT EVERYWHERE ELSE: AT EACH TURN HE FLIRTED WITH THE GRIM SPECTER**

### CHAPTER XLIII

#### THE MAN IN THE GRAY COAT

THE buzzer on Steele's desk sounded twice. He took up the telephone.

"Steele speaking."

A quiet, deep voice answered. "This is District Attorney O'Neil."

"Oh, yes! Good afternoon, Mr. O'Neil."

"A matter has come to my attention which I think may interest you. A man identified as Charles F. Drohan, a well-known bootlegger and gangster, died at the City Hospital this morning from hydrophobia, caused by having had his hand bitten by a dog. He made a number of statements which were taken down and sent to my office. In these statements are unmistakable references to the death of Stone."

"Indeed?" said the head of the agency, with quick interest.

"The man also mentioned your name, Mr. Steele; and, although much of this is incoherent and is evidently in reference to some money he had upon his person, it occurs to me that it might mean more to you than it does to me. I am sending a copy over to you."

"Thank you very much, Mr. O'Neil."

"Drohan evidently believed that he was talking to some one whose name was Artie," the public prosecutor added. "You don't know of any gangster whose first name is Arthur who was in the cabaret on the night of the crime?"

"Artie—" Steele repeated thoughtfully. "I don't believe I do."

"Well, I'll send the paper over. If anything does occur to you, I'd like to hear from you, as I am very anxious to throw some light on that crime."

The private investigator thanked him.

**This story began in FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION for August 27**

In the morning the statements arrived at the office of the agency. Steele examined them in his inner room for more than an hour, and also read the short newspaper account of how Drohan had been found stricken. At eleven o'clock he went out and drove in his gray roadster to station ten, where he learned that Officer Barnes would be on duty on his regular route during the first half of the night.

Returning to his office after luncheon, Steele called the State's prosecutor.

"Steele, of the National Detective Agency," he told the secretary.

"Yes, Mr. Steele?" the district attorney answered presently.

"Mr. O'Neil, I have examined Drohan's statements very carefully. I am not sure how much help they will provide in the Stone case, but there are certain references which should be kept from reaching any of the other gangsters. I—" He hesitated. "What do you think the chances are of keeping the contents of the paper from reaching them?"

"What do you mean?" asked O'Neil, slightly puzzled.

"Well, it is of the utmost importance that the Castle gangsters be kept from learning what Drohan said. In fact, it may possibly be a life or death matter, involving a man who has obtained evidence against them. Do you think it likely that any one at the hospital has talked?"

"As to that, I can't say, Mr. Steele. I suppose Drohan's family or friends have taken the body, and they may have asked some questions. I'll send my officer right over there this afternoon, to caution the physicians and nurses that they shouldn't say anything about the statements."

This, the investigator felt, was none too reassuring, but it seemed the best that could be done. His manner was grave as he hung up the receiver.

Important matters were awaiting his attention. One was directly connected with the Harrison case. He touched a button and summoned Thompson to the room.

"I want you and Brown to go to court at once about that Edwards warrant. Call at police headquarters first, and ask for Special Officer Bennett."

"We—we didn't get any more evidence, sir—" the operative ventured.

"No, I understand that. Present what you have."

The two young detectives went immediately to headquarters, where they found Bennett, the leader of the raiding squad, and explained that Steele desired to have a warrant sworn out for the arrest of a man on a liquor complaint. As liquor prosecutions were part of Bennett's duty, he consented to go to court with them and to take charge of the warrant.

Judge Epstein was sitting when the operatives gave their testimony. Edwards, named in the document as "John Doe," had been keeping and selling liquor in one of the best residential districts, and Steele's concern had been engaged by several citizens to prosecute him. But the magistrate refused to grant the warrant, stating that there was not sufficient evidence.

"I told the boss we didn't have enough!" Thompson fumed, as they left the courthouse.

He turned to Bennett. "We'll have to see what Mr. Steele wants us to do—"

"All right," the raiding officer agreed. "Tell him I'm ready whenever he is."

They returned to their office and reported the judge's adverse decision.

"Very well," was their employer's only comment.

In the early evening Steele drove up Albion Avenue for some distance, and talked with Officer Barnes of division ten. The policeman willingly repeated his story about the discovery of Drohan's condition. Asked about the man who had been with the bootlegger, he described the other's appearance and his clothes, and added that no trace of him had been found since.

The automobile, he said, was at the nearest service station awaiting disposal. He was emphatic upon the point that Drohan had not made any remark in his presence; he had been in convulsions until the ambulance had arrived.

Steele thanked him and visited the service station, hoping that he might learn something more by examining the car. He was disappointed in this, for the sedan had been claimed and taken away, but he re-

ceived considerable information from the attendant on duty.

"You know," he declared, "I couldn't figure what was wrong with the poor chap. His radiator was burning up for want of water—he hadn't filled it for days, I guess—and he almost had a fit when I went to fill it. 'Fear of water,' eh?" He shook his head.

"Did you notice the man with him?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Queer about that fellow, too—the way he ducked out of sight so quick." He gave Steele a good description.

Early in the morning the investigator called Marvin to his office. The latter had come from New York in response to his telegram. Bolton had not arrived from Chicago, but was expected in the late forenoon.

"Marvin," said Steele, latching the door, "I have a question to ask you. I want you to think carefully. About the search warrants for Harrison's. Have you ever told any one, any one at all, how you obtained them?"

The younger man met his glance. "No, sir."

"You are positive? You've never mentioned it?"

"No, sir, I have not," declared Marvin, still looking at him frankly, although there was perplexity upon his face. "I'm certain that I've never even spoken of it—except, perhaps, once, in a half joking way, in New York while I was lunching with Art Williams. Why, Mr. Steele?"

Without answering, his employer rose and walked to the window, where he stood looking down at the traffic in the street. Marvin was deeply curious, but he did not question him again.

He wondered why Steele was so quiet and so solemn.

## CHAPTER XLIV

### TO WARN MCARTHUR

DURING the noon hour Steele went to police headquarters in company with Thompson and Brown.

"Mr. Bennett?" the head of the agency inquired.

"Mr. Bennett is out to lunch, Mr. Steele," said LeClair, one of the raiding squad. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No, thank you; never mind now. My operatives applied for an arrest warrant yesterday, and Judge Epstein wouldn't grant it. You might tell Officer Bennett, if you will, that our client is in a hurry, and I'm going to ask McNulty to take the warrant if he's upstairs."

The headquarters building adjoined the courthouse. Ascending to the second floor, the three men found Special Officer McNulty of the district attorney's office waiting for them.

"Mr. O'Neil says you'd like me to get out a warrant."

"Yes; if you will, please, Mr. McNulty."

Judge Epstein's court was at recess, and they took seats.

After an interval, a court officer swung open a door at the end of the room. "The co-o-ourt!" he proclaimed; and all rose while the justice entered, glancing around over the tops of his spectacles.

McNulty had already obtained a blank. He nodded to Steele, and they stepped to the bench, leaving the operatives seated. In the buzz of preliminary matters, scarcely any one noticed them.

"If it pleases your honor," Steele requested, quietly, "we desire a search warrant for the premises at 142 Warrington Street, on the grounds of illegal gaming and gaming implements."

"What evidence have you that there is gambling on these premises?" the court asked.

Steele turned and raised a finger. Two men who had been seated in a corner approached. Bolton told the judge what he had seen in the house.

"My evidence is the same, your honor," said Marvin.

"I have two other witnesses with more recent observations—" At the investigator's nod, Thompson and Brown rose.

Judge Epstein dismissed it with a gesture. "I grant the warrant," he stated—and gave his attention to others.

The clerk completed the document, and they left the court.

Steele had lunch, sent several telegrams connected with other cases, and returned to his office. As soon as he entered, Somers informed him that the district attorney had been trying to reach him by telephone.

The head of the agency frowned. What had developed now? He called O'Neil's office, only to be told that the prosecutor was at a special sitting of the grand jury.

At four o'clock, Steele had not obtained communication with him. He called police headquarters and asked for Special Officer Bennett.

"This is Steele, Mr. Bennett."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Steele."

"I left word to-day about a warrant I planned to apply for."

"Yes—I was at lunch. Did you get the warrant?"

"McNulty of the D. A.'s office has taken it," the investigator replied. "He says he may need a little assistance in serving it. Can you let us have one or two of your men?"

"Certainly. When do you want it served?"

"We thought of to-night—"

"All right, Mr. Steele. Where, and what time?"

"Suppose we meet in the drug store beneath Huntington Hall at eleven."

"That's O. K. with me," declared Bennett. "I'll have two men there, or else come myself. I have another little job to-night."

"Thank you, Mr. Bennett."

After another half hour, Steele tried the district attorney's office once more. This time he was successful.

"Yes, I called you early this afternoon," O'Neil answered. "McNulty probably didn't say anything to you this noon about his visit to the City Hospital, because I told him it wasn't to be spoken of."

"No, he didn't."

"Well, he explained carefully to them that they shouldn't talk to any one about Drohan's statements. Of course, we don't know that they haven't let slip something already. But I'm positive there has been no leak here.

"McNulty and my secretary are the only ones who know anything about the matter. I have locked up the original paper, and there are no copies except yours and the ones I sent to the superintendent of police and the captain of division five. I—" He hesitated. "I don't know how much help division five will be able to give me on the case, but I don't want them to say I am keeping them in the dark."

"I see," said Steele.

He thanked O'Neil for his interest, and sat gazing thoughtfully at his desk.

Then, taking up the telephone again, he called another number—a man who lived in the South End, an informer. The authorities had many stool pigeons. Since his connection with the district attorney and with James Ward, Steele had had a few. He asked the man several questions, and the answers were disquieting.

Steele came to his decision quickly. He must finish without Dizzy McArthur. The inventor would be bitterly disappointed, but it was the safer and saner course. At least, he must let him make the choice with his eyes fully open, not blindly—must tell him the peril, not leave him unsuspecting.

It would mean abandoning certain plans which had already been worked out in detail. That was, if he could induce the inventor to withdraw. But it was safer. He called McArthur's home.

There was no answer. He tried his club, but the inventor was not there.

The clock on Steele's desk showed five minutes after five. From beneath his windows ascended the noise of traffic homeward bound. He pressed a button.

Somers entered, wearing his coat and holding his hat.

"Don't let any of the men go home for a little while," the investigator ordered. "I may need them all."

The youth went out, puzzled. Harper, an older man who was in charge of the local branch, entered Steele's room and sat with him, hesitating to ask questions. At five thirty the head of the agency tried McArthur's home again. There was still no response. He called the club. McArthur was not there and had not been there.

"You may go to dinner," Steele told his men. "Be here at seven."

At that hour they returned—Marvin, Bolton, Somers, Thompson, Brown, and Harper—and found their employer alone in his office, telephone in hand, his face expressionless.

"I want you to scatter through town and look for a man," he told them. "All of you except Harper; he has to meet the train, and he doesn't know the man, anyway. Bolton and Marvin, it's the chap who took you into Harrison's. Thompson, Somers, and Brown—it's the man you've often trailed through the South End at night.

"He has promised to be on hand at eleven. However, that doesn't mean meeting us. He may go home or to his club before that, but I can't risk it. I'll send a man to cover his house. Find him if you can. If you can't—come back here at ten. We must reach him some way before he goes into the South End to-night."

He gave a few more rapid instructions to his operatives, and they scattered. Harper shook his head when they had gone. The law of averages was heavily against them. He remained with Steele until nine; and at every half hour the latter made his telephone call to the club.

Shortly after Harper had left the office, Harris, the man on night duty, entered from the outer room.

"Williams is on the line, sir, to ask if you want him to work to-night."

"Tell him I'll not need him," Steele replied.

At two minutes before ten, all of the operatives had returned to the building. The gravity of the situation had been sensed by each. It was a quiet, tense little group which faced the director-in-chief. There was no need for them to tell him of their failure.

"Did you watch the theater district?" Steele asked.

"Yes, sir—until eight thirty," replied Somers. "After that we watched the railroad stations."

"Well," the head of the agency said, simply, his countenance still inscrutable, "I don't think we can do anything more for the present."

There was silence, broken only by a church clock which slowly struck the hour, like a bell that was tolling.

## CHAPTER XLV

### FROM SOUTH WYNDHAM

DIZZY McARTHUR had been obliged to spend the entire afternoon at the State House, looking up records and making certain applications connected with his business. It was after six o'clock, and nearly dark, when he walked uptown and entered a telegraph office about a half mile from his home.

There he spent an hour and forty minutes dispatching two messages to his business agent in Washington and awaiting a reply. When he presented his second telegram to the young woman in the office, she paused as she was turning back to her desk.

"Is this Mr. Kendall McArthur, of 36 Winthrop Street?"

"Yes."

"We have two telegrams here for you, sir. They came late this afternoon, but we received no answer at your home, and the messenger was unable to deliver them at the door."

McArthur opened the telegrams. The first was from his brother, who was in New York, sending word that he was detained. The other was from South Wyndham, and read:

> KENDALL MCARTHUR:
> Please come to South Wyndham this evening. Urgent matter to confide, and I feel there is more danger. ELISABETH C. WARD.

He blinked. From Mrs. James Ward, who had been in a critical state at the sanatorium since the chief had died. For days, the inventor had heard, she had not spoken. What was the reason for this request?

Perhaps some important instruction, which the chief, at the very last, had wanted given. The chief, who had trusted him! And what did Mrs. Ward mean by "more danger?" Was it hanging over her son?

At all events, Mrs. Ward needed help and advice immediately.

But McArthur could not go until after midnight. It was impossible; he was sure

that the chief's wife would not wish it if she knew the circumstances. What could he do? He couldn't ask assistance from Steele—for Steele and all his men were to be busy, also. Where was Harold Ward?

He stepped to a booth in the office and called Ward's home, but received no answer.

His reply from Washington had not come. He seized a third blank.

MRS. JAMES WARD:
Will come. Starting midnight. Cannot possibly leave earlier. Have courage.
KENDALL MCARTHUR.

The inventor drew a long breath as he paid for the message. He had done all that he could until twelve o'clock.

No—not all!

The answer from his agent came at last. Hurrying out of the office, he went rapidly up the street to the next corner, to one of the new " drive-yourself " automobile rental stations.

"What kind of cars have you?" he asked.

The clerk named several popular makes, and McArthur selected the fastest.

" I'll want it at nine thirty, and I'll keep it all night or longer."

" Very well, sir," agreed the man, offering a contract blank. " If you'll sign now, we'll reserve the car for you. And your license, please."

The inventor frowned. " Oh, Lord!" he murmured in disgust.

" What's the matter?"

" I didn't take it when I changed my clothes. Can't I get by? It's very urgent—"

The clerk shook his head. " I'm sorry, sir. The regulations are strict."

McArthur went hastily down town and tried another rental station, but without any better result. In desperation he visited a garage.

The manager did not rent automobiles. He referred McArthur to another establishment.

At length the inventor found a man who promised to have a first-class touring car and a skilled driver ready in an hour. His rates were reasonable, but he insisted upon a substantial payment in advance. Fortunately, McArthur had enough.

He had intended to call Steele, and ascertain if everything had proceeded according to plan, but he realized that it was now too late to find the investigator at his office. At a small restaurant he had dinner. After all, Steele's voice had been confident when he had told him that he believed this would be the last night.

One night more! His chief, James Ward, had said that, when he was near death. He had said it with little thought of the long, long series of failures and disappointments to follow. With his whole heart, through the many nights and weeks afterward, McArthur had tried to bring the words into reality. Now, at last, Steele, too, had said it; the head coach in the game of peril had predicted—one night more.

The inventor fully realized the difficulties. He had learned the secret ring of one —four—two on the doorbell, but inside the house were four other doors—heavy doors —one in each hallway. How had Steele planned to prevent the sending of advance information? McArthur did not know. It wasn't his part to know. He could only go ahead and play the game himself. And he must not forget his signals!

Eleven-fifty. Three times four.

He paid for his dinner and returned to the garage. The car was ready, but the driver had not arrived. McArthur surveyed the machine critically. He was satisfied. After another half hour, the chauffeur came, eating the last of a sandwich. He was a big, stout fellow with good-natured blue eyes.

The proprietor introduced him as Mr. Keady, and McArthur gave his instructions.

" I'm going to South Wyndham, by the shore turnpike, starting about midnight, and you'll have to step on it."

" I can do that, sir."

" All right. Until then, you'll have to wait for me. I'll show you where to wait."

The man touched his cap and rolled the car out to the street. A headlight bulb was defective, and he paused to replace it. McArthur got into the front seat beside him.

" Ain't that a beautiful motor, sir?" the chauffeur asked.

"It's smooth," the inventor agreed. "Tires all good?"

"Almost new."

"What about the exhilarator?"

Mr. Keady looked at him. "The accelerator, sir?"

"I call it the exhilarator."

"No, sir, the accelerator," the man explained. "It accelerates the motor."

"Oh?" said McArthur politely.

The chauffeur threw in the clutch, and they glided away. As they passed a church on the first corner, the clock was striking ten.

## CHAPTER XLVI

### THE FORCES GATHER

AT twenty minutes before eleven, Steele called for Special Officer McNulty at his home. He was alone in his roadster. The white-haired policeman came out immediately, bundled in his overcoat, and the private investigator carefully adjusted the side curtains to keep out the wind. They proceeded across town to Huntington Hall.

There Steele parked his car across the street, and they entered the drug store beneath the auditorium. A few customers were in the store, but none whom they recognized.

They waited until the clock on the wall showed eleven, but did not see Bennett or any of his men. Steele compared the clock with his watch.

"They're usually late," McNulty grumbled.

At five minutes past the hour a large, new, high-priced sedan glided to a stop at the curb in front of the door. There were three men inside. Special Officer Bennett of headquarters alighted, puffing languidly at his pipe. Followed by his companions, he entered the drug store.

He smiled as he saw the private investigator.

"Good evening, Mr. Steele."

"Good evening, Mr. Bennett."

"Well—we're here."

"I'm certainly very much obliged to you."

No one in the store paid any attention to the group. Bennett, clean-cut and neatly dressed, would have passed for a real estate broker or a star salesman. Fortner, who usually drove the raiding squad's fast automobile, was not a typical policeman, although he was large and heavy. The third man, Haley, looked more like a professional gunman than a plainclothes officer. He was small and of dark complexion, with a broken nose.

"Mr. McNulty has the ticket, I suppose?" Bennett asked.

Steele touched his arm, and they moved to a secluded corner.

"Yes, Mr. McNulty has the warrant, although I don't want him to have to take any very active part in serving it."

"What is it, John Doe, or in the man's name?"

"Oh, it's a search warrant," replied McNulty, fumbling in his breast pocket.

"A search warrant!" repeated Bennett, in surprise. "I didn't understand that. We haven't men enough, have we? What's the nature of it?"

"We probably haven't officers enough," Steele answered, "but, according to the words of the warrant, the complainant or his witnesses are authorized to render the officer serving the document any necessary assistance, provided that the officer asks for such assistance. Mr. McNulty, do you wish assistance from my men in serving this warrant?"

"Yes, Mr. Steele," replied the elderly policeman, still looking among papers from his pocket. "I think we'll need it."

"Where are your men?" asked Bennett curiously.

"Here is one." The private investigator nodded toward a youth who had joined the group. "I believe the others are outside."

The raiding officer moved to the door, and caught his breath in amazement. Behind his powerful sedan, a line of four closed cars had drawn up, and each car was filled with men.

"For Heaven's sake! Where did you get them all, Mr. Steele? What kind of a job *is* this, anyway?"

"As for obtaining them," the head of the agency replied, "the majority are regularly in my employ. I have Harper, Thompson,

Brown, Somers, and Harris of my local office; Marvin, Bolton, and Freeman of my office in New York; Clapp and Rawley, who are stationed in Chicago; and the others are men I have borrowed from local detective agencies. They all have firearms permits, and I think we can render you and Officer McNulty capable assistance."

"But where on earth are we going?"

"Did you find the warrant, Mr. McNulty?"

"Yes; here it is."

He passed it to Bennett, who opened it and looked at the address designated. For a moment Bennett did not speak. He stared at the paper as if he had seen a ghost.

"Harrison's!" he attempted finally.

"That's it, Bennett," said Steele in an expressionless voice. "We are planning to knock it to-night."

## CHAPTER XLVII

### LITTLE EVELYN'S MESSAGE

WHEN McArthur and his driver, Keady, had arrived at the corner of Columbia and Dartnell Streets, on the outskirts of the South End, the former suggested that they stop.

"I have an appointment," he explained, "but it isn't quite time for me to keep it. When I do keep it, I'm going to have you wait for me on Oliver Street.

"All right, sir."

Entering a store on the corner, McArthur purchased a box of his favorite cigarettes. He placed one in his holder, took it out, put it back in the box, and entered a telephone booth.

He called the news room of the *Record*.

"Mr. Brown, the sporting editor, please.

"Hello, Jimmie? This is Four-Ace McArthur. How late are you working to-night?"

"Oh, not very late, Mac. About a half hour more. Why? Going down to H's?"

"Are you going?" the inventor asked.

"I thought I might. I haven't seen any of the boys for over a week. Or the girls, either," he added, laughing.

"I suppose the Ice Palace riot is keeping you late?"

"The Ice Palace riot!" repeated Jimmie.

"Yes—the riot up there to-night."

"What was this?" demanded the other quickly. "We haven't heard anything about it!"

"Good heavens," declared McArthur, "I thought it was all over town. The whole visiting team arrested for assault upon the local goal tend; thirty-six spectators arrested for throwing pennies and nickels; fifteen arrested for throwing nails; six for throwing eggs; and one for throwing a monkey wrench. They're going to get grand jury indictments."

"For the love of Pete! Say, Mac, are you kidding me?"

"Go up to the Ice Palace when you get through and see," returned the inventor.

"I will! Thanks for the tip!"

McArthur lit his cigarette and stepped outside, exhaling thoughtfully.

Across the street, two girls were standing. They were painted, and expensively dressed. The inventor recognized both—Rose Mantha and Diamond-Tooth Marjie. It occurred to him that they were looking at him intently and oddly.

Presently a red cab stopped, with a single passenger, a man. The taller girl, Marjie, ran to join him, and they rode down Columbia Street in the direction of Warrington. The other, Rose Mantha, crossed and approached McArthur.

He thought she glanced around cautiously as she came, and he was certain that she was looking at him strangely.

"Mr. Mac," she ventured, in her rich, soft voice, "you're not such a bad sort, in spite of all they say. Evelyn wants to see you."

"In spite of all who says?" asked the inventor, blinking.

"Oh, I don't know—but honest, Evelyn wants to see you. She's down in the Canton now. She told me if I saw you, to be sure and tell you. She wants to say something to you."

"Indeed?" said McArthur. "In the Canton—"

Rose left him and walked up Dartnell Street.

So Little Evelyn was in the Canton again! Also—a fact even more surprising—she was asking for him! McArthur had no

intention of going to the cabaret to learn what she wanted. He knew that he hadn't time to become involved in another situation like the last.

He remained on the corner and smoked for fifteen minutes, failing to see any one else whom he recognized. It was a clear night, although quite cold; and automobile traffic was heavy. An ideal night for the final effort!

Throwing away his second cigarette, the inventor stepped to his car.

"We'll go down Columbia to Mountfort," he directed.

"Yes, sir."

As they passed the Canton Cabaret, McArthur glanced back sharply at sight of a slender form in a light fur coat by the entrance. It was Little Evelyn, watching the automobiles which passed. For an instant McArthur thought that she had seen him.

At Mountfort Street, which was the last before Warrington, he told Keady to turn to the right, and they stopped just beyond the second corner, on Oliver street.

"Now," the inventor said carefully, "I don't expect to be back until twelve o'clock, but I want you to stay here in the car all the time, in case I should."

"I will, sir," the chauffeur promised.

McArthur walked back along Mountfort Street to Columbia. He looked at his watch as he reached the intersection. Four minutes of eleven. Within an hour, the whole, long issue would be settled—the work finished. Unless Steele had been over-confident.

He felt oddly apprehensive in regard to that.

From where he stood on the corner of Mountfort and Columbia, he could see one side of Harrison's house, its four stories apparently in darkness. House of death! It had brought death to more than one of its regular visitors. Death to Wesley Stone. To James Ward, who had worn out his life trying to close it. Was it to claim another victim on this final night?

McArthur glanced carefully up the street, then down. There was not a sign of Steele's men in the neighborhood, or of the raiding squad or any other police. He felt strangely alone in the gang district. It was the first night that he had ever been conscious of this feeling. But he knew that he had his own part of the work to carry out—a vital part.

Eleven fifty. Three times four.

In one respect, the plan was similar to the previous one. McArthur must enter the house, and must make certain that Harrison was there. He believed that he could gain admittance once more, for he had left the way open for this on his last visit. If Harrison should not be there, he must come out, before the appointed time. If Harrison *was* there—

"Eleven fifty. Three times four," he repeated. He said it over and over. "Eleven fifty. Three times four. And don't you forget it, McArthur, unless you want to go into the time-box and stay there."

And what of Little Evelyn? Could he delay long enough, after all, to go back to the Canton and invent some pretext for sending her out of danger? He glanced again at his watch, and strode rapidly up the street.

On the way, he considered what he could tell the girl, what ruse he could employ. Not the same one he had devised earlier, or she might suspect what it meant! He might tell her—

With a screech of brakes, a red cab stopped at the curb beside him.

Duke Andrews was the driver. Inside were two men and a woman. McArthur recognized one of the men as Kirke, a friend of Drohan. Kirke was grinning at him, saluting him. He stepped closer, and saw that the other man was a Greek known as Frankie whom he had seen in the gaming house. The heavy, cow-eyed woman in the cab was called King Solomon.

"H'lo, Mac—where you goin'?" greeted Kirke.

"Oh—nowhere in particular—"

"Comin' in to see Brick to-night?"

The inventor thought quickly. This might be his one best chance to get inside.

"I was, later," he answered. "Why—does he want to see me?"

"Yeah—he does, Mac," said the gangster, grinning again.

"I told him I'd be around in a few days," McArthur offered. He was slightly

puzzled by the fact that Kirke continued to laugh while the Greek kept looking at him intently.

"Let's take a run up now," Kirke proposed amiably. "Duke will slide us up. Brick's got a little proposition he wants to make you. I'd sure like to see you accept it.

"What d'you say? Get in, Mac!"

A trifle uncertainly, the inventor complied. The Greek turned down a seat for him. There was something about the whole procedure which seemed a little odd. He could not quite understand their interest or their extreme friendliness.

King Solomon looked soberly at him as he sat down. "Hello, Mr. Mac!" she rumbled.

Duke Andrews turned the cab.

"Well, Mac," observed Kirke, "poor old Topper's gone, eh?"

"A dreadful death," McArthur nodded.

"I'll say so! When hydrophoby gets a guy, he goes out quick."

"Out quick is right, papa," said Frankie the Greek.

They were at the corner of Mountfort, the last street before Warrington. Andrews slowed suddenly as another machine came out from the right. Both drivers stopped for an instant. The inventor saw that the car was a small sedan, carrying three men.

One of them, in the back seat, thrust his head from the window. His face was familiar, and he looked straight at McArthur.

"Say, Jack," he called, "which way is Beach Street?"

## CHAPTER XLVIII

### M'ARTHUR GOES THROUGH

THE inventor did not need to consult his notebook. He knew this signal, this one of all others: it meant he was in danger of his life.

It explained the strange way in which Kirke and his friends—and Rose Mantha, too—had looked at him. It explained their eagerness to take him with them in the cab. Gangland had found him out at last!

The message from Steele was probably intended to warn him that he must give up his part of the program. Give it up—if he could! In the cab with three men, counting the hostile driver, escape would be difficult. McArthur was not even considering it. He had spent too many cold, dark nights, too many long weeks, to withdraw at the finish. He hadn't carried to the mouth of the goal only to wilt under pressure.

Did the gangsters really wish to take him into Harrison's? The move perplexed him. But it was true, for the cab turned the corner and stopped at the door.

"Thanks, Duke," said Kirke. "Come on in, Mac."

When the inventor had alighted with the others, he saw the purpose of their action. Inside Harrison's, with its sound-proof and sight-proof arrangements, he would be much more completely at their mercy than on the street. He wondered what else he would learn in the house. Had they also discovered the secret of the proposed raid, and would he find the place deserted by all except a special committee for his welcome?

He brushed a few cigarette-ashes from his coat, and entered the vestibule with his companions.

The Greek rang the bell. Seven rings; once—four times—twice. A bolt was shot back, and the bullet-headed individual admitted them.

The man paused, in the act of closing the door, and stared hard at McArthur. His glance, with no friendliness in it, followed him to the foot of the stairs.

The big bolt was slammed back into place.

On the way up the stairs, McArthur expected at every instant to be assaulted by Kirke and the Greek simultaneously, or to feel the stunning thump of a blackjack. But, to his great surprise, they proceeded without violence to the third floor, where Kirke rang for admittance.

The gaming room was crowded and noisy. All of the usual activities were in full swing. The four newcomers entered without attracting any attention.

After a few seconds, however, one of the players at a near-by table caught sight of McArthur, and glared at him sharply. He

said something to the others at the table, and all turned their heads. A roughly dressed man of thirty, who was seated watching the game, spoke quickly to them, and they resumed their playing.

Others presently became aware of his arrival, and there was a general abatement of conversation and laughter in the vicinity of the door. Many of the players obviously did not know McArthur, but at each table there were some who looked at him with open hostility.

"Here's Brick—" said Kirke.

Harrison, who had been standing by the largest roulette wheel, had sensed something unusual. He was approaching.

"Well, well, Mr. Mac!" he exclaimed, his face twisting into a wide grin—a little too wide a grin, the inventor thought.

"Hello, Mr. Harrison," he returned, blinking.

"Well, how's Four-Ace Mac to-night?"

"Flourishing. How are you, Mr. Harrison?"

There was a tense quiet now throughout one end of the room.

"Goin' to stay a little while to-night. Mr. Mac?"

"I can't stay very long," McArthur apologized.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry. We can show you a lot of action to-night." The manager was still smiling.

A youth at one of the tables laughed harshly. The inventor threw a half glance in his direction. He recognized the youth, who was watching a large table but not participating. It was one of the Castle brothers.

McArthur glanced at his watch. "I may be able to stay a few minutes," he ventured.

"Yeah—do," urged Harrison hospitably.

The inventor put the watch back in his pocket. Eleven thirty-eight.

At first he had thought that he would have to fight for time. But he understood the gangsters' intention now. They had discovered, in some unknown way, his connection with Steele; but they did not know that he had been warned of their discovery. Their purpose was not to deal with him here in their stronghold, but to keep him here until late at night, when only the members of the "big mob" and their friends would be on the streets. The affair was to be almost exactly a repetition of the Wesley Stone matter.

"You know, Mr. Harrison," the inventor declared, returning his smile, "I've been thinking about that proposition you made to me one night."

He had stepped closer, but others were still listening.

"Have you? Well, that's fine!" answered the big man. "Fine, Mr. Mac!

"You're a good sport, you are, Mac! A regular fellow!" He slapped him jovially on the back several times—then on the hips, to see if he carried a weapon.

"Yes. To tell you the truth," the inventor added, "I've been losing quite a little sleep thinking about it."

"Haw!" said Harrison. Kirke and some one else chuckled.

"But I've decided that I wouldn't be able to swing a game of that kind."

"No? Afraid your conscience would bother you, eh?"

"Well, it might," McArthur admitted.

"I suppose so. Some people have awful queer consciences."

"Besides, I wouldn't be any good at that kind of thing, anyway. I'm only an entertainer. But I'll tell you what I did think of doing—if I could come to satisfactory terms with you."

"What's that?" asked the other, in a curious tone.

"Why, I'll teach your bunch how I do the stuff—then you can send some of them upstairs, and pay me ten per cent on all profits."

Harrison winked at Kirke. "How would you know we wasn't holdin' out on you?"

"Oh, I'd trust you," the inventor assured him.

Kirke snickered.

"I'll drop around in a few days and arrange the contract," McArthur suggested, glancing at his watch for the second time.

"Don't go yet, Mr. Mac," returned his host.

"I really must, Mr. Harrison—"

"Aw, be a good fellow and stay a little while."

"Well, if you insist—" McArthur surrendered. Eleven forty-six.

He must not look at his watch again.

"Sure. Sit down and make yourself at home."

"All right, thanks. And if any of your boys would like to know my stunts," he added, blinking, "it won't take me five minutes to show them the secret."

They looked at him uncertainly.

"You wouldn't really show us?" asked Kirke, with some interest.

"Certainly. I've no more use for the stuff."

"Humph. I dare say that's true," observed Harrison.

"Four-Ace Mac," the Greek commented, without mirth.

"Oh, is that the one you want?" the inventor responded instantly. "Surely—I'll give you that trick in no time."

He took a pack of new cards from his pocket. Several of the players, observing his act, turned, in curiosity.

"Come on, boys!" Harrison invited, loudly. "Our friend Mr. Four-Ace Mac is goin' to show us his secrets. You better all take it in, for it may be your last chance to see him perform."

A murmur of surprise filled the room. Chairs scraped here and there as men rose and came forward, amused and puzzled.

"Four-Ace Mac!" some one else said—but it was a jeering tone.

The inventor stood facing them, smiling and bowing.

"Gentlemen," he said, rising his voice a little, "on this, perhaps my last appearance among you, I have agreed to show you the secret of some of my mysteries."

A few more of the men came forward, until they formed a half circle before him. McArthur noticed the difference in the way they watched him: the patrons, who did not know of his connection with Ward and Steele, and whose interest was in his exhibition; and the gangsters, whose glances held either ridicule or burning hatred.

He wondered which members of the crowd had guns. Castle, undoubtedly. The Greek, undoubtedly. The man who sat near by at the end of his table, probably; he had been in the cabaret with Stone.

"Now, the little four-ace trick," he explained, "is very simple. You simply lay down the aces, face up, this way. Shuffle the deck, and cover each ace with three cards, face down. Gentlemen, do you all follow me? Then take one of the four piles"—he took the one with the ace of spades—"and put it aside. Then pick up one of the three remaining piles, and show every one that the ace is still on the bottom."

He showed them.

"But, presto!—you throw down the cards, one by one, and the little ace is gone. One—two—three—*four!* It's so simple!"

There were shouts of amazement from many of the gamblers.

"But, gentlemen, don't you see it?" McArthur asked, in professional tones. He stood blinking at them all while some of the watchers returned unwinking stares. "You make your mistake, I think, when you look at me instead of at the cards as they fall on the table. Now we'll try it again."

More players had left their games and pushed forward. McArthur took up one of the two remaining piles, showed the ace, and threw them down face upward.

"One—two—three—*four!*" he counted. The ace had disappeared.

There were fresh exclamations. Others crowded forward in wonder—many of the gamblers leaving their money on the tables.

"Now the last!" cried Dizzy McArthur. "Watch the table, *watch the cards,* and you can't miss it! See! There's the ace!"

Up and down went his arm with the final pile of cards, and with each gesture his voice rang through the room!

"*One—two—three—*" Crash!

A splintering impact shook the house to its foundation. All along the wall, for the length of the hallway outside, a row of ax-blades knifed through the partition. The heavy door itself burst back into the room, shivering on its hinges; and after it came Steele with a sledge hammer, Bennett and Fortner with drawn pistols.

There was an oath, a cry of terror, a volley of imprecations. McArthur lifted the table and charged with it against the nearest gunman, trampling him to the floor. From above and below came the crash of

other doors going in. At the back of the room a gun roared—once—twice; another barked from McArthur's left; a third spoke sharply from the door. Frankie the Greek gave a scream of pain and stumbled to his knees, dropping his weapon.

"You're all under arrest!" shouted Special Officer Bennett. "Don't any one else move!"

## CHAPTER XLIX

### THE GOAL

WITH a savage oath, John Castle leaped over a fallen chair and ran to the corner beyond the roulette wheels, followed by several others. Fortner of headquarters fired a shot at the floor to stop them, but they raced on without heeding it. In the extreme corner of the room a section of the wall sprang back, revealing a small rear stairway.

It had long been agreed that if ever there should be a raid, Harrison and his assistants might escape by these stairs and by the back alley. The staircase extended from the fourth floor to the basement. Harrison, however, was too stunned to take advantage of it. He was livid.

"Bennett, you double crossing sinker," he bellowed, "you're the last man that ever ought to raid my joint—"

Steele, seeing a half dozen or more of the men disappear through the hole in the wall, ran to one of the back windows. He ripped off the heavy curtains and shade, raised the sash, opened the outer slide, and shouted down a warning. Taking a whistle from his pocket, he thrust out his head and blew several long blasts.

Meanwhile, detachments under McNulty, Harper and Marvin had forced entrance to the rooms on the other floors. At the top of the house, the players and attendants were so surprised that there was not the slightest attempt at escape or resistance. McNulty entered the lower rooms and the basement, placing every one under arrest, but many of the drug addicts refused to obey him and crowded out by the special exit at the rear. An aged Chinese and another man followed them, carrying boxes which held nearly all the narcotics.

But officer Harvey of division four, standing on the corner of Columbia Street as usual at eleven-fifty, heard the notes of a police whistle in the alley at the back of the house. He crossed hurriedly, and as he approached he saw three men emerge and race down the street. Turning his flash light into the alley, he discovered others running out.

Haley of headquarters and Somers were already stationed at the back, but the former had no flash light and mistook the fleeing men for Steele's operatives. Somers grappled with one, and a fight ensued. Harvey, standing squarely at the mouth of the exit with his light, was visible to all. The gangsters halted. Two guns flashed, and the bullets zipped past the policeman's head.

Harvey sprang instantly to a crouching position behind several ash barrels, drawing his pistol. He fired three times, the angry spurts of flame stabbing into the dark. In the alley there was a choking curse. Others emptied their weapons at Harvey, but he remained in the shelter of the barrels.

Then appeared the far-reaching results of his having gone outside of his division to investigate the whistles. Another patrolman of division four, hearing the fusillade, ran to the nearest box and sent word to his station that there was a gun battle in the vicinity of Columbia Street. The lieutenant dispatched the patrol wagon, with every man in the station, and put in a call to headquarters for the riot squad.

Special Officer Bennett seized all the money in sight in the main gaming room, then hurried upstairs, where other large amounts were taken. When this cash was counted later in the district attorney's office, it was found to total more than one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars.

The Chinese and his helper, being told by men in the alley that escape was blocked, gave up trying to dispose of the narcotics; and several thousand dollars' worth were carried away by the police.

Eighty-one prisoners were conveyed to headquarters in wagonloads. Fifteen were charged with being present where opium smoking was in progress; forty-three with being present where gaming implements

were found; and eleven with gambling. Frankie the Greek, wounded, was held on additional charges of assault and of carrying a concealed weapon; and another man, the one upset by McArthur, was held on the latter charge.

The aged Chinese was charged with selling narcotics, and with assisting at maintaining premises for their use. Muir, the man actually responsible, was not found in the house, for a reason which will appear. A man on the fourth floor was held for assisting at maintaining a gaming house; Brick Harrison for maintaining the whole establishment.

All this was directed by McNulty, who held the search warrant. Outside the house efforts to escape by the back alley had been abandoned entirely.

A few men succeeded in scaling the wall of a garage at the blind end. They crossed the roof and dropped into a neighboring yard. John Castle and Kirke were two who did this. Another was the doorkeeper from the third floor. Another was Dizzy McArthur.

The inventor had taken the "back way out" because he couldn't wait for Steele to identify him. It was twelve o'clock, and away down on the south shore the chief's wife needed help. Dropping lightly from the roof of the garage he found other men close at hand, and recognized them. He turned and sprinted.

"There he is! There's the stool pigeon!" screamed Kirke.

"You damn snitch!" Castle snarled.

They leaped forward in pursuit; while a third man, after hurling something, joined them. There was a spatter of glass against the side of the house, and a tinkle of fragments. McArthur gained the street, darted to the right, put down his head, and raced away from the gangsters in great, leaping strides.

"Stool pigeon! Stool pigeon! There he goes! Croak him! *Croak him!*"

There were no shots, either because the men feared arrest or because their pistols were empty. He ran on across Warrington Street, toward Mountfort and Oliver. At Warrington some of the gangsters' friends took up the chase, close behind.

They could not overtake McArthur, but he glanced back, shaking his head. It was going to be close. His driver, Keady, probably wouldn't have the motor warmed. Through Mountfort he flitted, his pursuers cursing and panting behind—then out into Oliver—

He caught his breath. The touring car was there, but it was empty. Mr. Keady had gone, attracted by the uproar of the raid.

The motor key was in the switch, however—

McArthur laughed.

## CHAPTER L

### M'ARTHUR'S THIRD RACE

THROWING himself into the driver's seat, McArthur jammed the starter button. He switched on the bright lights, watching their rays grow brighter as he raced the motor.

In the mirror at his left he could see the corner. Two men turned it—then another, and another. They hesitated a second, and dashed toward the car.

The inventor pulled the choke lever away out and let in the clutch. The machine leaped forward. It gathered speed rapidly. Shouts and imprecations followed him. He turned to the left.

A half minute told him that he had shaken off pursuit. But he couldn't go back to look for Keady. The gangsters knew his number now; and his return to the district would be a signal for missiles and bullets. Besides, he hadn't time.

Through Fessenden Street to Ipswich, up Ipswich to Dover, down Dover to the avenue, he fled on, knifing his way toward the start of the turnpike and the South Shore.

It was incomprehensible to McArthur how the gangsters picked up the trail again. He was far out on Broad Street, traveling at high speed, when he noticed a pair of dancing lights in his mirror which were keeping the pace. They were more than keeping it; they were gaining. But even then, the inventor didn't guess that the car belonged to his enemies, because it seemed impossible that it could.

As the machine, a big sedan, drew abreast, he saw them, all too plainly—Duke Andrews driving, another man in front, the tense forms of Castle and Kirke behind.

They had caught McArthur by surprise, and had all but crowded him to the curb. He plunged the accelerator. The touring car, much lighter than the other, responded with a dash which pulled him free.

A stream of foul curses told him unmistakably that the gangsters' intention had been to force a halt or a collision. He was not in doubt as to their purpose. They had followed him with a single thought—revenge—and it could be obtained satisfactorily in only one way.

There was little traffic on Broad Street. McArthur pulled the throttle open, then pushed it back, abandoning it for the foot accelerator, and raced ahead. The bright lights in the mirror were close, losing ground slowly. He looked sharply for police officers who might stop the chase, but saw none. Ahead, however, at the end of Broad Street and the start of the South Shore Turnpike, burned the blue lamps of station eighteen.

Here was refuge, beyond question. He could enter the police station and remain under protection until the miscreants had left the neighborhood. But meanwhile, what of Mrs. Ward?

"Are you going to be yellow this time, McArthur, when the chief's wife needs you?"

He flashed past the station and through the square, out over the road beyond. The big, sedan followed.

Through the early miles of the turnpike, within the limits of Brookford and Plainsfield, there was little change in the relative position of the cars. Both were flying in defiance of all regulations, at the risk of pursuit by police. Once, between the two cities, the gangsters fired four shots, and McArthur heard one bullet strike the body of his car.

Had it punctured the gasoline tank?

Outside West Plainsfield the rows of street lamps ended; the dark, winding, lonely highway began. The inventor sank lower in his seat, settling down to the struggle.

Once again the myriad objects of the night sprang to life before his headlights and flitted past like phantoms. A brisk wind, sharp and invigorating, swished through the curtain from the west and fanned his face. The whirl of the motor rose to a peculiar, tremulous note which told of power. The figures and tiny dots on the dashboard crept around, farther around, mark by mark.

The turnpike was bare, washed clean by the rains and swept dry by the wind. McArthur plunged around two long curves and down a steep hill, his motor trembling and singing. A danger sign stared out at him, with its warning of a railroad crossing. His car struck the tracks with a resounding bump and went bouncing on.

He blinked, and looked at the mirror. The dancing bright specks were smaller.

A cat paused in the road, its pale green eyes gleaming at him, then scurried for safety. Up a hill, around a third curve, down another sharp incline, he dashed along with his foot against the floor. He looked at the mirror again. Its face was dark.

It was on the long, hard, winding hill which snakes upward into Kensington that he first felt the motor skipping. Near the foot of the grade, it was scarcely noticeable. But as he climbed farther he lost headway rapidly, and narrowly avoided having to change the gears. He was sure that it wasn't a shortage of gasoline. There was a leak in the high-tension wire, or a corroded battery terminal.

He pulled on through the town; and when he reached the next dark stretch, there were bright specks in his mirror again.

For more than ten miles the battle went on in exactly the same manner. On level road, downhill, around dangerous curves, the inventor left his pursuers far behind. With each upgrade the motor began to miss its throbbing beats, and he speedily lost all he had gained. Faulty ignition always shows its tricks when the pulling is hardest.

McArthur laughed as he swept through Plympton. He had asked for it, hadn't he?—the peril creeping toward him out of the dark.

He wondered what would happen if the

electricity should fail entirely. Or suppose that he should suddenly stop at the side of the road, extinguish the lights, and hide in the woods? If the pursuers should speed past without noticing the automobile, he might emerge, ask for a ride from some other motorist, and proceed with his whereabouts unsuspected. But if the gangsters should see the car, and should stop—

The wind was stronger when he reached Middleton. The defective ignition was still troublesome, but did not seem to have become worse.

Beyond the town, McArthur thought of other possibilities. He wouldn't have to stop the car at the side of the turnpike. He could seize a moment when he held sufficient lead to escape observation by his adversaries, and turn sharply off into some small road, permitting them to pass. Then, if he could obtain a ride—

But how long would it take to find a friendly motorist? The two machines were almost alone on the highway.

Besides, if he should adopt that course, it would be an admission that he was beaten, wouldn't it?

At Jeffries, the inventor was a half mile ahead. At Dunstable Hills, the distance had been cut to less than a quarter. At Dunstable and the fork, he had increased it slightly. At Hillbury, it was about the same. Between Hillbury and North Rockford—

The first warning was a brighter glow from the dashboard. It was followed by darkness there.

McArthur blinked. The dash-light bulb had burned out.

He found the circumstance somewhat disquieting. As he sped on, he watched the spreading path of the headlights. Presently he decided that the rays were being thrown on the right side only, and that they were unusually strong on that side.

The left headlight had gone out, also.

There was no longer any doubt as to the trouble with the electricity. A battery terminal was loose or badly corroded, and unless remedied it would soon burn out every bulb in the system. The inventor knew that it was only a question of minutes before the other headlight would flash.

He thought of dimming it as a preventative. But as he reached toward the switch, the shimmering rays in front grew clear and strong for a second—then winked into darkness.

He was racing over a pitch-black road.

In desperation he snapped on a spotlight beside the windshield. It flooded the highway with dazzling white light for nearly a full minute. With a final flash of brilliance, it was gone.

The race seemed ended. The inventor was following the hazy outline of the turnpike more by instinct than by vision. The road itself was dark gray, while the woods on either side of it were black. There was total darkness all around, except in the face of his mirror, where two shining spots were growing larger. Reaching again to the switch, he turned off the tail-light. If it hadn't burned out with the others, it could serve only as a target.

He laughed again.

"Stay with them, McArthur—you'll get a break yet," he exhorted, plunging forward through the dark.

The finish was inevitable. The marvel was that McArthur could dash on without lights as far as he did, for he had not diminished his pressure on the accelerator. He came at length to a place where something a shade lighter than the road jumped into view, straight in front. He decided that it was a bridge, but realized at the last instant that it was a fence. There was no hope of avoiding it. To lessen the impact he applied the brakes.

There was a splintering and crackling, without noticeable shock of collision, and the car slid downward for a short distance, then jolted and ploughed to a standstill.

McArthur alighted, and found himself up to his ankles in mud and decayed cornstalks.

## CHAPTER LI

### FUMES OF DESTRUCTION

INSTANTLY the inventor glanced upward. On the trees along the road, a yellow-white haze was flickering in and out with fantastic effect. There came the roar of a high-powered motor, the whine

and screech of the tires as they gripped the curve—and the big sedan flashed on, its tail-light twinkling.

McArthur watched it until it had turned another bend in the distance, and its racing hum had died away.

He struck matches and investigated the easiest way out of the cornfield. The touring car was of no further use to him, although it did not appear to be badly damaged. He left it in the mud, and floundered up the embankment to the highway.

How soon would the gangsters miss him? Would they continue in the belief that he had gained a long lead? How far would they go in the hope of sighting him?

To South Wyndham, probably. They knew that James Ward had died there.

He busied himself by trying to set up the broken fence.

He could find only half of it, however, and had not succeeded in bracing that when he became aware of more lights playing on the tree-tops. Listening intently, he found to his delight that this car, also, was coming from the north.

It was traveling at considerable speed, with a rattling and sobbing which told of a motor in need of repair. McArthur knew the difficulty in persuading motorists to stop on lonely roads at night. Waiting until the psychological instant, he rushed squarely out on the road, blocking it with the splintered section of fence.

The machine stopped.

"Don't shoot, neighbor," a voice requested uneasily. "I ain't got no money here. Just hens."

"Say, brother," the inventor requested, throwing aside the piece of fence and blinking into the lights, "I've got to reach South Wyndham on a serious matter, and my car's gone over the embankment. Can you help me out?"

"Sure thing. Get in."

Advancing, he saw a little, wizened man with a winter coat-collar turned up and a soft straw hat. He took the seat beside him, expressing thanks.

"How fur was you goin', neighbor? I'm only goin' down to North Rockford depot. Got to get these reds on the mornin' freight."

McArthur saw crates filled with hens in the back of the car. "Is there any one at North Rockford I can hire to drive me?"

"Sure. Tom Springer'll be glad to do it."

Springer did not have to be awakened. He was working at the railroad station. He had a closed car, and he started with the inventor at once. The latter kept a sharp watch for his enemies all the way.

Between Rockford and Wyndham they met the gangsters' large sedan. McArthur recognized it instantly; and a swift glance assured him that all four men were inside. He felt certain that they had not seen him in Springer's machine, for they continued northward. They were proceeding at moderate speed.

At the entrance to the sanatorium he paid the man and thanked him. He hurried up the winding driveway to the entrance. A few lights were burning upstairs. He rang. An orderly answered.

"I had a telegram from Mrs. James Ward—"

The man, a short, dark fellow, looked curiously at him. "Yes, sir. Come in."

McArthur entered—then started. He recognized this orderly. It was the burglar who had broken into his laboratory at home, presumably upon another's instigation, and had later jumped bail.

"Collins!" the inventor exclaimed. He did not finish. He was conscious of something which crashed down upon his head.

McArthur was surprised by his swift return to the laboratory. He couldn't quite understand how he had arrived there so quickly. He remembered traveling to South Wyndham. It was bewildering.

Yet it was true. All around was his apparatus of physical and chemical research. No—not *his* apparatus, after all. He hadn't three racks of test tubes. He hadn't a distilling system set up. No—this was the laboratory on the grounds at South Wyndham.

And who was this man? A small, thin, pale man, with glasses and watery eyes. This wasn't Collins, the orderly, the burglar. But he had seen this man in court, too—

"Muir!" said McArthur.

He blinked, and attempted to rise. He failed. Presently he perceived the reason. His arms, knees and waist were tightly lashed to a chair and the chair was fast to a sink behind his back.

"What the devil?" he muttered uncertainly. His brain had not cleared.

"Don't shout—the walls are thick," advised Muir, in a toneless voice. He was busy mixing something in a flask. An acid bottle and several other containers were at his elbow.

"What's the idea?" McArthur ventured.

"You'll see pretty soon. You gave the boys a nice run for their money, didn't you? Pretty smooth customer, you are. But I think you'll realize in a few minutes that you'd have been better off if you'd let Brick alone." Muir went on working.

The inventor looked around. There were ground-glass windows, still dark, and the door was closed. He recalled that the laboratory stood at some distance from the sanatorium.

"So I'm indebted to Edgerly and Marsh for this favor?"

"Edgerly doesn't know anything about our little party," returned the other. "He's gone South for a rest. As for Marsh—he'll live longer than you will, McArthur."

He had begun to grind something with a mortar and pestle.

"Yes, we know you now," he added. "We've looked up all about you. You're Dizzy McArthur, the ex-hockey player, ex-aviator, and ex-speed-demon. I rather think you'll find that fighting the Fritzies was tame compared to bucking the main mob in our burg."

McArthur made an effort to free his arms. But they were securely bound, and the rope was heavy.

"Yes; I'll give you credit, McArthur. You've knocked Harrison's. It was some little stunt. I'll shake hands with you before you go out. Do you know what I have here?"

"Cyanides, and some other compounds, and $H_2 SO_4$, haven't you?"

"Yes, and H Cl, and another acid," replied the drug seller. He turned his watery eyes upon the prisoner. "Now don't give Edgerly credit for any of this. It's Bosworth's lab, and he's a goody-goody, a research nut. If he knew what I'm mixing here he'd fall out of bed. Ever see a generator like this, Dizzy Mac?"

The inventor frowned at it. There was a large glass receptacle with a delivery tube, and a smaller basin of metal was fitted in at the top.

"Not so bad for a half hour's work," Muir suggested. "If I knew where his nibs keeps all his stuff, I'd rig up a little hood for you, too, my boy. I hate to make you take it with your eyes open." The quiet, methodical precision of his voice was alarming.

"Cyanogen?" McArthur asked, with interest.

"You hit it," said the other. "Possibly there'll be a little hydrogen mixed with it. Prussic acid gas. Generally supposed to be rather poisonous, Mac. However, it has a very pleasant odor, and one tiny breath is all you'll need."

McArthur knew that he was not exaggerating. It was the most deadly, the most quickly fatal, of all gases.

"Now, this pan at the top is made of zinc. I'll put the acid in there, the other mixture in the flask underneath. That will give you five or ten minutes, you see—until the acid eats through the zinc and runs down into the flask. Of course I don't plan to be in here with you when that happens. Then we'll start up his nibs's patent ventilator system"—he pointed to the roof—"and draw off all the air in the lab through the top. I suppose we'll be drawing off your last breath along with it, but that can't be helped."

He took the compounds which he had ground with his pestle and put them in the bottom of the flask.

"This reaction will soon go to an end through exhaustion of the solvent, and it will last long enough. We'll take you back up the line before daybreak and leave you in the driver's seat of that car you drove through the fence. I thought you were a driver, McArthur.

"When they mistake cyanogen poisoning for heart failure in ordinary cases," he added, "I guess they will when you've just gone over an embankment. The boys won't

be blamed for your spill, either—they're dusting it back to town for an iron-clad abili.

"Now, don't be alarmed—"

There was a hissing and foaming as he poured the acid. He set the generator on the floor near McArthur's chair.

"That's only the acid attacking the zinc. That liberates hydrogen, you know. For five or ten minutes—gentle hydrogen. Afterward—cyanogen, $C_2 N_2$. What do you say; are you a real sport?" With a cold smile of victory, he offered his hand.

"I'm a sportsman," replied McArthur, extending his fingers.

The drug seller reached behind the chair and gripped his palm. He took a final glance at the hissing generator; then walked rapidly to the door. He opened it, letting in a breath of the cool, clear night air.

"So long, Dizzy Mac," he said, with another quiet and rather terrible smile. "I'm sorry, but you have too much evidence. You understand—"

He went out, and slammed the door.

## CHAPTER LII

### $C_2 N_2$

WHEN Muir had gone, McArthur sat gazing thoughtfully at the dull black windows of ground glass.

It was of no use, he saw. He couldn't reach them. He had nothing to throw. And, anyway, cyanogen was too swift, too certain. He felt a conviction that this time he had come to the end.

The inventor really couldn't say that he was afraid. He did not quite understand fear. But he was disappointed, even though he had invited it all. So many more exciting conflicts he might have waged! So many more chances he might have run!

*Was* there a chance now? He could see none. He knew cyanogen—instantaneous, merciless yet merciful. The rope which bound him to the chair and to the sink was large. He felt sure that in time he could loosen it, but not in ten minutes, with this engine of death hissing beside him like a serpent ready to strike.

He was glad that Muir had left the lights on, whether by accident or design, instead of leaving him alone with the thing in the dark.

The light, of course, must be showing through the windows. Was there any hope that Dr. Bosworth would awake and investigate why it was burning in the dead of the night? Or would the orderly simply explain that it had been forgotten? Beyond doubt, Collins had already been sent to guard against interruption.

He thought of Steele—who, in time, might guess that he had come to South Wyndham. But in a little more than five minutes now the vessel of zinc would be eaten through, and no power under heaven could save him after that.

Not in the driver's seat, after all; yet, strangely, that was where people would believe it had happened.

All at once a sense of protest, of the superficiality of the whole thing, rushed over him. Was this the real meaning of the prophecy which had hung over his life for years—that in the end his lifeless form was to be placed behind a steering gear, victim to the lowest men of society? Or did it mean that he would go as James Ward had gone—in the fight, without surrender or compromise, *at the wheel?*

With a sudden effort he lunged forward, straining at the cords which held him fast. The chair back creaked and scraped as the rope tightened. He couldn't break free—he knew that; he couldn't loosen the cords enough in five minutes; but it was better to battle, even though death waited, measured by a dwindling piece of zinc. That was the one great lesson that his wild, mad game of life had taught him—to keep on fighting.

As the minutes dragged past, he fought in silence—fought because he had never quit before the final whistle, and because there were men who would go free if he couldn't testify.

"Stay with them, McArthur," he said again.

He never knew how he received the inspiration, the memory. It flashed in like a ray of light from a source unknown.

Cyanogen—so deadly that even a small

percentage in the air would be fatal. All this time he had been thinking of its effect. He had forgotten its other properties. An equation from past years leaped back to his mind:

$$C_2N_2 + 4O = 2CO_2 + 2N.$$

The dreaded vapor, cyanogen, was a compound of carbon and nitrogen, two common elements. A simple process, a mere rearrangement, would change this gas into two other gases, carbon dioxide and nitrogen—harmless gases, present in every breath of air.

What process? The equation told it. "Plus four oxygen." Adding oxygen. Oxidation. Combustion.

McArthur wrenched his body to the right. At the same time he tried to bring his arm forward, across toward his chest. It seemed impossible. But again and again he persisted.

The stout rope creaked and rasped, above the hissing of the acid on the metal.

An inch separated his fingers from a pocket of his vest. He gave a heavier twist.

The tips of his fingers found the pocket. They reached something inside. With extreme care he eased the object out until his grasp upon it was secure. It was a match. He relaxed the pressure against the cords.

He was none too soon. A louder hissing and boiling began in the generator. Glancing down, he saw that the acid had found its way to the chemicals in the bottom of the flask. The thing had begun operation. Undoubtedly the first colorless fumes of cyanogen were already issuing from the tube.

He struck the match on the arm of his chair.

Could he, backhanded, his wrist still held by the cords, flip the burning match near enough to the mouth of the tube from which the vapor was coming? He must succeed with the first effort. There wouldn't be time to obtain another match—

He gauged the distance, blinked, and sent the match flying from his fingers.

Po-o-ough!

The sound thrilled his heart. The end of the glass delivery tube burned with a deep, reddish-purple flame.

A minute passed—two minutes—five; and the dark flame continued. It increased, as the reaction in the generator became more rapid. Then, after a short time, it began to grow smaller. The sizzling in the flask quieted, the flame died away. It went out altogether.

The reaction had "gone to an end."

There was no perceptible odor in the laboratory. Carbon dioxide and nitrogen are always in the air.

Meanwhile, the inventor worked feverishly to loosen his cords. If Muir and Collins should return and find him unharmed, they would quickly remedy the matter. But unless they had already had a view of the interior, they wouldn't enter until they had first drawn the air in the laboratory skyward by means of the doctor's ventilating system. McArthur listened for the sound of this device in operation.

After about twenty-five minutes he slipped a loop over his elbow. From there it slid down to his wrist, and one arm was free. The rest followed rapidly. He stood up, chafing his muscles.

The door had a spring lock. Catching up a steel ruler, he turned the latch and stepped out, coming face to face with four men who were advancing.

"Ah—here's Mr. Mac!" Steele's voice exclaimed.

The others were indistinct in the dark, but the inventor recognized Marvin.

"What's been going on?" the head of the agency asked, with a keen glance at McArthur from his gray eyes.

"Yes—what brought you down here?" Walter Clapp inquired.

"I received a telegram."

"Oh—so that was it?" said Steele. "From Harold Ward, I suppose?"

"From Mrs. Ward."

"Better yet. Of course it was a fraud. Harold Ward took his mother to New Hampshire yesterday morning."

They stepped into the laboratory.

"Well, Mr. Mac, we thought we had lost you for a little while. Most of us went to police headquarters with the prisoners. Clapp and Bolton stayed with the officers who discovered Ed Castle. They found him in the back alley, shot through the

throat. Some one brought a priest before he died, and he confessed that he had shot Wesley Stone."

"It was sheer luck how Mr. Steele learned about you, though," said Clapp.

"Yes," the investigator explained, "I was at headquarters waiting to use the telephone when a man named Keady reported his car stolen from Oliver Street. He told the police that a certain Kendall McArthur had engaged him to drive to South Wyndham at midnight. Of course he gave the number of his car.

"Marvin certainly burned the road for us this time. Not the way you do, Mr. Mac, yet rather fast. Beyond Hillbury I noticed a fence broken on a curve, and I thought I'd investigate."

"We just saw our friend Muir up here," Somers offered. "Did you see him?"

"I did," McArthur answered.

"By the way," remarked Steele, "when I examined your car in the cornfield, I found this note lying on the front seat cushion."

On a sheet of note paper had been penciled hastily:

DEAR MR. MAC:

I am leaving this with your driver and I hope he will give it to you. Don't go into that house to-night. They know what you are, and their going to kill you.

I shouldn't tell you this. I should hate you, because you made a lot of trouble for me. The cops say I must leave town for awhile or else take a rap. But the doc tells me I'm in for the moka finish pretty soon, anyway. I don't hate you, because your the only man that's ever treated me with respect.

I don't hate you. Honest, I don't. Good-by. EVELYN.

Muir was given five years, despite all the eloquence of Keenan. Harrison received two years. The Chinese was sentenced to one year; and the assistant on the top floor to nine months. The patrons escaped with fines or defaulted bail. Not such a big result, considering all the effort and hardship involved; but the owner of Harrison's house broke the gambler's lease, and the joint on Warrington Street is closed forever.

Special Officer McNulty has been sent to a beat in Hyde Oaks, a remote district of the city. With him is Officer Harvey.

As for McArthur, he is still playing the game. What game? Any game that's hard enough. He stands for thirty minutes at a time before a glass, blinking at himself, adjusting and readjusting his necktie to the tiniest fraction of an inch. And from the pennant above his mirror the chief smiles down at him.

THE END

It was dark and lonely, and Robert slipped into another recess and waited

# THE TWO MRS. THOMAS

## By Robert W. Sneddon

**IT HAD BEEN BETTER HAD MRS. THOMAS OPENED HER DOOR TO A TIGRESS WITH FOUR LEGS THAN THIS ONE WITH TWO**

**A Story of Fact**

RICHMOND is one of the most beautiful of many beauty spots near London. Poets have sung of Richmond Park and the wide sweep of the Thames spanned here by a noble five arch bridge.

On the terraces which rise one above the other, with their rows of houses overlooking the river, elderly gentlemen and ladies sun themselves in summer and look down on the river alive with lovers in punts, canoes and other river craft. These spectators are mostly retired tradesmen, old maids and widows, who struggle along on tiny incomes and make a brave showing on very little.

Mrs. Thomas lived in a semi-detached two-story villa in Park Road, which she rented from her next door neighbor, Miss Ives. She had a nice little garden in which she pottered about with her plants and flowers, and everything was quite "genteel," though there was a horrid public house, "The Hole in the Wall," just a little way off.

Mrs. Thomas was a widow whose two marriages had brought her just enough to live on comfortably, though foolishly she led her neighbors and tradesmen to believe her fortune was greater than it really was.

She dressed well in black silk, with a cameo pin, wore a number of rings, a gold watch, and had other jewelry and some silver plate. Her relatives thought her eccentric and flighty, for she loved changes and refused to stay put. She never stayed long in one house but had to be up and away.

She had a habit of packing up suddenly and neglecting to let friends and relatives know where she went. It was little wonder they lost interest in her and let her go.

She was a smallish brisk lady, rather more prim than her adventurous movings would indicate, and timid in many ways. In her home she was a martinet for cleanliness and order. There must not be a speck of dirt in her drawing-room with its draped mantelpiece, its wax flowers under glass, its crocheted mats, and on its wall the portrait of the late Mr. Thomas by an unknown artist.

Woe betide the wretched servant who did not sweep under the sofa, or moved the family photograph album from its appointed place. Mrs. Thomas, who had little to occupy her mind and time, was excitable and easily annoyed.

### *"Come in, Won't You?"*

When she was this way her tongue would run away with her, and she would have to be looking for another servant. She could not live alone, and no one in her position in life could be servantless and hold up her head in society.

In January she was lamenting the departure of a maid, and her friend Miss Loder who had dropped in for tea and chat was sympathetic.

"Don't worry, my dear," she said, "I know just the woman for you. She's strong as a horse. She's lodging with her little boy—"

"Little boy!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomas in horror. "Is the woman married? Where's her husband? I couldn't think of having a child here."

"Oh, you needn't. She's living with my Mrs. Crease, you know, my charwoman, and she will leave the child with her to board. Several times when Mrs. Crease has been unable to come, Webster has come in her place. She's most reliable—I don't think you could do better. Irish—"

"I've certainly got to have some one right away," Mrs. Thomas confessed. "I can't stand being alone. And you're sure she's married—she's not—not—you know."

Miss Loder shook her head.

"Of course, she's married. You know me. I wouldn't have her in my house if she wasn't. I'll ask her to see you at once."

That evening there was a ring at the front door of No. 2 Mayfield Cottages, and timidly turning up the hall light Mrs. Thomas went to the door and opened it.

There on the step stood a tall, bony woman in a dark dress with a long jacket, its pockets trimmed with rubbed fur, and wearing a bonnet. In the gas light she had a dark complexion and her teeth showed white and prominent.

"Mrs. Thomas, ma'am?" she asked in an Irish brogue.

"Yes—"

"Miss Loder said you were looking for a 'general,' ma'am."

"Oh, you are Webster."

"Mrs. Webster, ma'am. Kate Webster," said the caller grimly, as she surveyed the shrinking little lady.

"Come in!" said Mrs. Thomas with a gasp. What a queer woman—with those slanting eyes and that hard mouth. She felt like shutting the door in her face, yet for the life of her she couldn't. She hadn't the will to do it, with those eyes looking into her.

"Come in, won't you?"

### *A Sinister Maid*

Kate Webster stepped inside, and the door closed. It had been better had Mrs. Thomas opened her door to a tigress with four legs than this one with two. One swift paw stroke and all would have been over.

In the drawing-room under the painted eyes of Mr. Thomas, Kate was hired, without references. Miss Loder had spoken for her. And Mrs. Thomas had dismissed as absurd the feeling of repulsion which had come over her at first.

The poor woman with a child to support—she seemed capable and willing, and there was a reassuring strength about her which was comforting in a house without men. If a burglar came Kate would not faint away and leave her mistress unprotected.

Mrs. Thomas showed Kate over the house and detailed her duties. They went into the kitchen with its washhouse.

"That's a nice boiler you have, Mrs. Thomas, ma'am," said Kate as she looked at the copper boiler set in a brick foundation with its fire grate beneath to heat the water. "I'll be getting anything that

goes in there nice and clean, I'll be thinking."

"Then that's settled, Kate, you'll bring your box here to-morrow morning."

Next morning Miss Ives announced to her mother who lived with her that their neighbor had a new maid. She was hanging out clothes in the garden. She was odd-looking—so—what was the word—it was on the tip of her tongue—"sinister" that was the word. She gave you the creeps.

### *Kate Is Given Notice*

The weeks crept by in that house tenanted by two women, in whose souls a strange ferment was stirring. Not on the surface at first; no bubbles came to the light to betray what was passing beneath. Kate was subservient almost. It was "Yes, ma'am!" and "No, ma'am!" and strict attention to business.

There was no running down to Mrs. Crease's to see her son, young George, a lad of twenty who had fallen under the spell of this strange woman. He had been helper to the barman in the King's Hotel, Twickenham, near by, and Mrs. Thomas's trusted Kate had been in the habit of going drinking with him in a public house and taking him from his work.

True Kate used to drop in to see Mrs. Hayhoe, hostess of the Hole in the Wall, but it was done discreetly and without offense to the ladies in the Mayfied Cottages.

And Mrs. Thomas kept her irritation in check, though Kate was no model servant. She was careless and sloppy, untidy and unattractive.

This state of affairs could not last long, and Mrs. Thomas gave Kate notice to leave at the end of February. This was the first or second of the month.

Kate heard her dismissal in silence, but there was a look in her oblique eyes which sent a stab of apprehension through Mrs. Thomas's heart, none too strong. And there had been a twitch to Kate's fingers as she crumpled up the apron in them that had been horridly suggestive of violence.

At night in her soft bed Mrs. Thomas lay awake, beset with unaccountable fears. She made up her mind to get some one to stay with her, but all to whom she applied for this support had excuses and reasons for not coming.

Finally she got a mother and daughter to lodge with her for a fortnight, and no doubt fortified by their presence gave expression to her feelings toward the inhabitant of the kitchen. Her lodgers stayed their appointed time and then left.

Mrs. Thomas was now in a panic. She sent a frantic appeal to her friends to come and share her house, but none would come. It was only one more of the poor dear's odd ways. Why this desire for company all of a sudden?

Meanwhile Kate went about her business, marketing, dusting, sweeping, washing and ironing, getting her clothes ready to leave.

On February 25 she went to see a friend of hers or, more correctly, a woman who made her bonnets, Mary Durden a straw hat weaver, and in the course of trying on a bonnet, told her she was soon going to Birmingham to see about some property an aunt had left her—furniture, a gold watch and chain, jewelry, *et cetera*.

### *Like a Beacon Light*

"You ain't 'arf lucky!" sighed Mary Durden. "Wish some aunt of mine 'ud pop off and leave me summat nice."

It was probably to hear more about this legacy that on Friday, the twenty-eighth, the day set for her leaving, Kate humbly begged Mrs. Thomas to let her stay on a few days longer. She hinted that Friday was a bad day to start on a journey or make a change.

Her mistress hesitated, then weakly agreed. She knew of no other servant she could get at once, and well—yes—Kate could stay.

You may be sure that Miss Ives next door heard rumors of Mrs. Thomas's Kate leaving and was surprised to see her still there on Saturday, March 1. But there she was, and there was Mrs. Thomas in the garden attending to her plants.

On Sunday mistress and maid went different ways. Mrs. Thomas rustling in her silk gown went in the morning to church.

Kate went out in the afternoon ostensibly to see her child, whom she really adored, but fell by the wayside. She dropped into a "pub" and laughed and chatted with several men. What there was in this woman to attract men, as she undoubtedly did, no one can definitely say. She was in many ways repellant, yet this repelling quality which to some was a signal of danger, was to others a veritable beacon light to destruction.

### *The Sound Next Door*

She was anything but good-looking or well dressed, there was nothing feminine about her, she had a forbidding aura of sullen darkness. Yet on occasions she could laugh and joke, she was a skilled actress of emotions she was far from feeling, and a glib liar. She could lie her way out of most traps. An extraordinary primitive passionate creature of no apparent charm she awakened in the men with whom she came in contact an almost instantaneous passion.

The afternoon sped on. When Kate got back to her kitchen, she found Mrs. Thomas much annoyed, all dressed to go to evening service. Mrs. Thomas gave Kate a piece of her mind and the servant flew into a terrible passion.

Mrs. Thomas hurried from the house—it would never do to be late for church, and when she reached her pew, she was all shaken and upset. A former servant, Julia Nicholls, saw her and noticed how white and frightened-looking she was.

"Whatever is the matter, ma'am?" she whispered.

"Oh, Julia," said Mrs. Thomas, clutching her arm nervously, "I had to speak to Kate and she acted like a crazy woman. I wish I had you with me again."

Quite a number noticed Mrs. Thomas in church, but few guessed what courage it took for her to go back to her home alone.

It was quite dark. Only a peep of light showed in the fanlight over the front door. As Mrs. Thomas opened the door a lurking shadow stirred and slid against the wall.

As the feet of her mistress reached the landing on the upper floor a black mass disengaged itself from the shadows and Kate ascended the stair. It was well that no other was there in the house to see the expression of her tigerish face.

In the next house Miss Ives looked up from her book.

"Did you hear that, mother? It sounded like something fell next door."

The two women listened, but all was silent.

Monday morning dawned. The chimney over the washhouse in No. 2 smoked lazily. One might have said greasily.

"What a strong smell," sniffed Miss Ives. "I wish that Irish servant wouldn't burn rubbish under the copper. Hum, there she is in the garden hanging out clothes, for two pins I'd speak to her, but after all, she's Mrs. Thomas's maid, not mine."

In the afternoon Mr. Deane, a coal agent, who was passing, thought he would drop in and see how Mrs. Thomas's coal supply was holding out.

"Missus at home? I'm taking orders for coal," he said to the maid who came to the door.

"No, she ain't home, and there's no coal needed."

"All right, miss. You needn't bite me 'ead off," remarked the wounded Mr. Deane as he turned away.

### *A Passion for Work*

"Wonder what that gal was up to," he mused to himself. "Seemed fair upset, snapping at me. I guess missus ain't home and 'er ladyship is sampling the port wine and sherry."

Scarcely had Mr. Deane gone than the front door opened and Kate came out carrying a parcel. She turned in the direction of Twickenham. Whatever her mysterious errand it did not take her long, and when she came back she was minus the parcel.

She dropped in at The Hole in the Wall.

"What's yours, dearie?" asked Mrs. Hayhoe.

"A drop o' gin. Sure, and it's glad I am to have a rest. The missus has gone on a trip, and I'm all my lone in the house."

At eight o'clock the guardian of Mrs. Thomas's house got home, but not to

dawdle. No, she set to work washing and scrubbing floors and paint work, cleaning the kitchen implements till meat cleaver and carving knife shone.

She seemed to have acquired a passion for work, for next morning, which was Tuesday, March 4, she was seen cleaning the windows.

She had a caller, a Miss Roberts, sent by Miss Ives to say that she would like to know when it would be convenient for Mrs. Thomas to have the men come to repair the leak in the roof she had spoken of.

### "A Widow, Father"

Kate met this lady at the door and told her there was no need for any repairs, and, besides, Mrs. Thomas had gone away for a visit.

This was a strange statement to make, for at three o'clock Mrs. Thomas came out of the house, or if it was not Mrs. Thomas it was some one who certainly wore one of Mrs. Thomas's silk gowns, had on her gold watch and chain, and her fingers adorned with several rings.

This person, who was taller and bonier than Mrs. Thomas, locked the door carefully. There was something in the house which she was determined no one could get at.

In her hand she carried an oilcloth bag containing a carefully covered parcel.

She was going to make a call in Hammersmith, a section nearer to London City.

Mr. Porter, house painter, had just come home from his work and washed up. He was waiting for his tea or supper, and Mrs. Porter was bustling about the stove frying a pan of "bloaters." Their two sons, Robert, a boy of sixteen, and William, somewhat older, were standing near the door of the little brick house when a splendidly dressed lady in silk gown, mantle and bonnet, and carrying an oilcloth bag appeared in the street and looked at the numbers. She came near the door and looked at Robert.

"Sure, and you must be Bob. How you have growed, my dear. Is your pa and ma in?"

Bob called his mother.

Flustered, Mrs. Porter came to the door.

"Don't you know me, mother?" said the visitor.

"Well, if it isn't Kate. Come in, my dear. You're just in time for tea. 'Ow long since I saw you last—six years, yus indeed."

"Look 'oo's 'ere, pa," announced Mrs. Porter triumphantly. "Kate w'ot used to lodge next door to us six years ago."

Kate smiled and put her arms about the astounded Mr. Porter.

"I've simply been longing to see you again, father."

"Changed a bit for the wuss, I am, eh?" smirked Mr. Porter. "But, bless me soul, you're an 'owling swell nowadays. Married, eh?"

"A widow, father. Mr. Webster passed on, poor man."

The party sat round the table, and the visitor told her story. She had been left a nice little house at Richmond by her aunt, who had just died, furniture and all effects. It was too bad she couldn't live there, but she was going to her parents in Scotland.

She flattered Mr. Porter greatly by asking his advice about selling the furniture. Could he recommend an honest agent who would buy it?

### A Job to Do

Mr. Porter rubbed his chin and thought he could find some one. In fact he had some one in mind, a neighbor. He'd speak to him about it.

Kate rose to go, and picked up the bag which had been resting between her feet at the table. She asked if Mr. Porter wouldn't like to walk with her to Hammersmith station, and if Robert could be permitted to see her home to Richmond.

Porter insisted on Robert carrying the bag, and the boy, finding it strangely heavy, lagged behind. His curiosity did not lead him to investigate, though it might have been well had he done so. He caught up with his father and Kate outside a public house at Hammersmith Bridge.

Kate hesitated and said she had to deliver the bag to a friend at Barnes, and would her companions wait in the bar for her. She was back without the bag in

twenty minutes, an incredibly short time for her to go and come back from Barnes, but she gave Porter and his son no time to remark upon this but caught their attention with a case of rings and some photographs she had. They all had a drink, and then Mr. Porter left them at the station.

When Kate and the boy reached the villa in Park Road, Kate unlocked the door and made her companion go in ahead and light up.

"A drop o' rum will do you no harm," she said, "and I could do with it myself, for we have a little job to do, Bob. I want you to help me carry a box to Richmond Bridge, where I am to meet a gentleman."

### *The Body in the Box*

The box was upstairs, a hat box about a foot square, hinged and padlocked and tied about with a cord, and the pair brought it down. They had another drink, and Kate ran her fingers over the piano keys as though used to playing, and asked Robert to notice the "foine tone."

They left the house, carrying the box between them. It was a good weight, and several times they changed hands. One of the handles was missing, and Robert had to carry his end by the rope and grazed his knuckles. That graze was later to make him remember the absence of a handle.

Half way over Richmond Bridge, Kate asked Robert to set the box down on a bench in a recess, and then to go back the way he had come and wait a bit while she handed over the box to the gentleman who was to meet her.

Robert obeyed her, but did not go far. It was very dark and the spot was lonely, so he slipped into another recess and waited.

All at once he heard a splash and a gentleman passing looked over the parapet.

In a moment or two Kate came hurrying back and said she had seen her friend and everything was all right. She took the boy to the Richmond Station, but the last train was gone. There was nothing else to do but to go back to the villa and stay all night.

Hogarth alone could do justice to the scene. On one side of a round table Kate with her gleaming eyes and rat trap mouth, on the other an open-eyed boy growing dizzier and dizzier as he swallowed down the rum with which his glass was kept continually filled. Overhead a spluttering gas jet. Beyond, in the kitchen, an atmosphere from which the horror had not entirely been filtered.

When the boy's head slid to the table, Kate put out the light and went upstairs to the comfort of her mistress's soft bed.

The morning came. Kate stole downstairs, glanced into the kitchen, then into the dining room, and smiled with satisfaction as she saw her guest had not stirred all night. She shook him awake and fed him. She sent him on ahead of her to his mother's, with whom she spent the evening and stayed the night.

In the morning the newspaper boys were shouting:

"'Orrible Discovery at Barnes! Mysterious body in box!"

"Wot's that?" asked Mrs. Porter.

"Just a catch penny, mother," said Kate calmly. "You can't believe a word they say in the papers."

A number of people in London and all over the country were, however, deeply interested in the story.

### *The Doctor's Decision*

Shortly before seven o'clock on the morning of March 5, Henry Wheatley, a coal porter, was driving a cart along the banks of the Thames. On arriving opposite Barnes Terrace, some thirty yards from Barnes Bridge, he saw an object half in half out of the water, and, going closer, saw it was a wooden box.

With the aid of the man with him he drew it ashore, a corded box. Wheatley cut the cord and gave the box a kick, when it fell apart, disclosing a mass of flesh. His friend thought it was butcher meat, but Wheatley thought different and set off to the police station. A surgeon summoned pronounced the flesh to be human.

Pieced together, it constituted almost the entire body of a woman, and from the parchmentlike look and absence of decomposition Dr. Adams concluded it had been boiled. The head, one foot and several

minor parts were missing. There was nothing to identify the murdered woman.

Kate returned to the villa, but this time with William, the elder of the Porter boys. She said she had forgotten her keys and had him climb in through a window. There was evidently some underlying purpose in her use of the boys.

No one seeing Mr. Church, proprietor of the public house known to the residents of Hammersmith as The Rising Sun, could have mistaken his calling in life. He oozed prosperity as he walked down the street in his light tweeds, field glasses over his shoulder as he went his way to the races.

### *Kate's Late Husband!*

Behind his bar, in shirt sleeves, a heavy gold chain across his vest, and a twinkle in his eye he made a genial host. An ex-cavalry man, he now wore a sandy beard and mustache, and had his hair brushed up into a curl over his bold forehead.

He had a laugh and a joke for all, especially for the ladies, though his wife swore there never was a better husband had been born. His gallantry was all on the surface, in the way of trade, and it paid. Mr. Church was well to do, and highly esteemed, a member and official of several clubs.

On Sunday evening, 9th of March, Mr. Church saw his friend Porter come into the bar with his wife, William, and a strange lady who gave him a smile and a nod as though she knew him.

"This is Mrs. Thomas, old boy," said Mr. Porter, "and we'll all 'ave a drink."

Mr. Church took the hand extended to him and noted the rings.

"We're old friends, I think," said Kate.

Mrs. Church looked at her blankly.

"First time I've had the pleasure of meeting you, ma'am," said Mr. Church. "However, there's no time like the present. Happy to know you, Mrs. Thomas."

"Lived next door to us six years ago," said Mrs. Porter.

"W'ot I've missed in them six years!" said Mr. Church gallantly. "W'ot's it going to be, friends?"

Mr. Porter soon brought up the subject of Mrs. Thomas's furniture, and Mr. Church, after consideration, said he'd run over and look at it, and if he fancied the stuff would make an offer for it.

When the party broke up Mrs. Thomas was callin, Church by his first name as if she had known him all his life, and he foolishly responding, was calling her Kate.

On Monday another item was added to what was now known as the Barnes Mystery. A working man found in a rubbish heap near Twickenham a neat parcel containing a woman's foot. This was found to belong to the dismembered body found a few days before.

On Tuesday Church went to inspect the furniture. He found his hostess all dressed up for the occasion and the table set with eatables and drinkables. Though she pointed out the portrait on the wall with the statement "That is my late husband, Mr. Thomas," Kate did not seem to revere his memory.

She summoned all her secret charm to entertain Church and he spent several hours smoking and drinking. He agreed to pay her sixty-eight pounds for the furniture and advanced her eighteen.

### *"Where is Mrs. Thomas?"*

Whatever his reason we do not know, except that he found something exciting in her company—this model husband—but Church visited Kate every day up to the seventeenth when he superintended the packing of the furniture.

The morning of the eighteenth came and the moving van drove up to the door. Church and Porter, who was to assist him, were already there, and the removal began.

At this point Miss Ives, who had been attracted by the stir, looked out. Her first thought was—Mrs. Thomas is moving—and she hasn't given me notice. She sent out a servant to ask what was happening, and the van proprietor said he was moving the things to Hammersmith on "Mrs. Thomas's" orders.

Kate overheard the conversation and asked Porter who was asking, and he told her the lady next door. Drawing herself up and with a determined expression Kate went next door and saw Miss Ives on her steps.

"Where is Mrs. Thomas?" asked Miss Ives.

"I don't know," answered Kate, and turned away.

"What's wrong with the woman? She can hardly speak," thought Miss Ives, but aloud she said: "Can you give me her address?"

"No!" snapped Kate.

"Indeed!" said Miss Ives sharply. "Then you must excuse me, I will have to attend to it; I must see my agent." She shut the door.

In a few moments she came out hastily and, after a scathing glance at Church who had overseen but not heard this talk, went off to the agent's.

### *Without Leaving an Address*

"W'ot's all this?" asked Church suspiciously. "Anything wrong? I don't like the looks of it, Porter. If she owes rent we've no right to move out her furniture; best call the bargain off. Play safe, eh?"

"I'm sorry, Kate, Mrs. Thomas," he apologized, "but—"

"Yes, yes," Kate said excitedly; "send the van away!"

"But my money, Kate!"

"I'll pay you it back. Here, you can take these dresses."

She threw some dresses she had sent Porter to get, into the van, in her agitation neglecting to go through the pockets.

"All right, Joe," said Church to the van proprietor, "nothing more to be done 'ere. Drive us back. See you later, Kate."

The van drove off with Church and Porter. Ten minutes had not passed before Kate appeared dressed as for a journey. She hastened down the road and got into a cab, for cabs and strong drink were her passion.

She drove to Church's and got there ahead of the host, but Mrs. Church was there and from her she borrowed a pound.

Tigress as she was, she had the tigress's love for her offspring. Even in that moment she could not leave her boy. She ran into Porter's and got him.

Robert dressed him and brought him downstairs. Another cab to the suburban station at Hammersmith. Train to King's Cross, the boat train to Liverpool, a coal boat to Ireland.

In her uncle's house at Killane, her birthplace, near Enniscorthy, in County Wicklow, she thought she had found a refuge from the doom which was pursuing her.

Church when he came home and found Kate had borrowed a pound and then learned from the Porters that she had removed her child began to be worried. It was not so much the loss of his money, but the feeling that he had been made "a blooming mug." So he hied himself off to see Miss Ives, who refused to see him. She had no use for publicans and sinners.

Kate had gone without leaving any address, but Church thought he was lucky when in one of the silk dresses he came across a letter to Mrs. Thomas from a Mrs. Menhennick with whom she appeared to be on intimate terms.

He went to see what he could learn at the address given in the letter and saw Mr. Menhennick.

Mr. Menhennick heard the story with growing amazement. It's not at all like Mrs. Thomas to do a thing like that—a child, indeed—she has no child. Tall, bony, sallow. Why, Mrs. Thomas was small and fair. There was some mystery here which ought to be looked into.

### *Mystery No Longer*

The two men went to see Mrs. Thomas's lawyer to whom Church told his story without any attempt to disguise his part in it. Church went with Porter to the Richmond police station and accompanied Inspector Pearman to Mrs. Thomas's villa.

Scrubbing and cleansing had not been able to remove suspicious stains from the floor of the kitchen and the kitchen table. Under the copper washboiler were ashes and calcinated bones. In the copper itself was a greasy deposit.

The hostess of The Hole in the Wall almost fainted away as she recalled that the missing servant had tried to sell her two jars of rendered fat. The suggestion was too horrible for human contemplation.

"And to think," Mrs. Hayhoe wailed, "as 'ow when she called 'ere 'er missus was cooking in the copper."

In the villa kitchen Inspector Pearman found the missing handle of the box, the box of the Barnes mystery—mystery no longer. The remains were plainly those of Mrs. Thomas. Robert Porter, brought forward by Church, who had just learned of the expedition the boy had taken with Kate, identified the box. Cord similar to that which bound it was found in the villa.

### *Her Criminal Past*

The case was clear. The following notice was published:

**WANTED**

for stealing plate, *et cetera*, and supposed murder of mistress, Kate ——, aged about thirty-two, five foot five or six inches high; complexion sallow, slightly freckled; teeth rather good and prominent; usually dressed in dark dress, jacket rather long, trimmed with dark fur round pockets; light brown satin bonnet; speaks with Irish accent, and was accompanied by boy, age five, complexion rather dark, dark hair; was last seen at Hammersmith.

On March 28 Kate Webster, alias Webb, alias Shannon, alias Lawless, alias Lawler, was arrested at Killane, Ireland.

It was discovered that the servant whom Miss Loder had recommended to the murdered mistress had a notorious criminal past.

Born in Killane of the farming class in 1849, she began by serving a short term for larceny. She moved to Liverpool where she became expert in robbing lodging housekeepers.

She was a glib liar and a consummate actress. She would take a room somewhere and move out in the night with all the goods she could lay her hands on. Traps were laid for her, but she was slippery as an eel.

She was caught, however, and served three years. She then went to London as a general servant, and lodged next door to the Porters who knew her as "Kate," an out of work servant. It was there she met the man known as "Strong," among other names, who betrayed her and became the father of her child. She set up house with him and passed as a sea captain's wife.

She played the game of getting goods on credit and selling them, and once more fell into the hands of the police, getting eighteen months this time. She lived again with Strong after another imprisonment for one year, but left him to have an affair with young Crease. It was shortly after this that she went into service with Mrs. Thomas.

No sooner was this scheming woman arrested than she began to accuse Church, and on her arrival in Richmond made a statement which led the police to arrest the host of The Rising Sun.

She said she had known Church for seven years, having first met him when she was living next door to the Porters, and he used to take her into London and treat her at various public houses.

She had renewed the friendship, and when she took service with Mrs. Thomas he came to see her one night much the worse for drink. Her mistress came home and she told her Church was her brother and introduced him. A few days later he came again and he said: "Couldn't we put the old girl out of the way?"

Kate said: "What do you mean?" and Church's answer had been: "Oh, poison her."

### *The Story Unfolds*

Kate's answer had been: "You must do that yourself. I'll have nothing to do with that."

Church said: "We would have her things and go off to America together and enjoy it. I'm getting tired of my old woman."

Church came again on Monday night, March 3. "He had tea with Mrs. Thomas. I waited on them. After tea I asked to go out and see my little boy. When I returned late in the evening I noticed the light was turned down. I knocked three times at the door; the third knock Church opened the front door when I saw Mrs. Thomas lying on the mat in the passage, struggling and groaning, and he said 'Come in.'

"I drew back on the step, frightened to go in. At this time there was a policeman standing on the opposite side of the road, a tall dark man. Church catched me by the arm, pulled me in and closed the door.

" I said, ' Whatever have you done?' He said, ' Never you mind, I have done for her, and if you say a word about it I'll put this knife into you up to the handle.' That was a carving knife belonging to Mrs. Thomas. I said, ' No, John, don't. I won't tell.' "

The story then ran that he took her to Mrs. Porter's, and himself returned to the villa. He told her to go with young Robert Porter to the house and get the box. She met him on Richmond Bridge, and asked him what he was going to do with the box. He said, " That is my business." She heard a splash. She had seen blood on the carving knife, but noticed it had been cleaned. Church was always about the house.

### *Kate Goes to Trial*

He gave her his photograph and a card with his address, and said when she went away that he would stay home and " braze it out." She was to stay three weeks in Ireland. He would then send her money and they would go to America together.

" I never laid a hand on Mrs. Thomas," she concluded, " and had nothing to do with murdering her, but I knew Church had done it. I intend to tell the whole truth, as I don't see why I should be blamed for what Church has done."

Church was able to prove a complete alibi. On the evening named and at the time stated he was present at a meeting of the Slate Club. The various members swore to his presence.

He was one of the three men in charge of the keys required to open a fund box. The books of the club were produced bearing his signature, signed that night to certain entries. There was not the slightest doubt that he had not been near Mrs. Thomas's villa.

Kate was undaunted. She said she had made a mistake. Church had committed the murder, not on Monday but Sunday night, and added that Porter had been a party to it.

Both men were, luckily, able to prove a most manifest alibi for Sunday night. Church was discharged at once and was hailed by the cheers of hundreds.

He did a roaring trade for days at The Rising Sun, and basked in the light of popularity and prosperity. He became a famous character, and prints of both he and Kate Webster were sold everywhere.

On July 2 Kate Webster was brought to trial. The defense tried to prove that it was in no way clear that Mrs. Thomas died by violence, or that the remains found were those of her.

Dr. Adams, who first examined them, thought the body belonged to a woman eighteen to thirty years old. Mrs. Thomas had been subject to fits. She probably had a fatal one. Kate had found her on the mat.

The police evidence as to charred bones, bloodstains, *et cefera*, was ignored. The defense could advance no theory as to what had become of the body.

The prosecution had an easy task. Miss Ives gave highly incriminating evidence that the boiler in the house next door had been in use the morning after the murder. The two boilers were back to back, and there was only a thin wall between.

The box with the remains was proved, without a doubt, to have been prepared in the villa and taken out by Kate with the innocent assistance of Robert Porter.

### *The Shadow She Cast*

That she had premeditated the murder was proved by the evidence of Mary Durden, the bonnet maker.

Public opinion was all against Webster. She was hooted and booed in transit from prison to court. The trial ended on July 8, the verdict was " Guilty," and the sentence " Death by hanging."

On July 10 the prisoner made a long and rambling statement in which she said the actual murderer was a certain man who was the father of her child, and that he had been assisted by a woman whom she did not know.

Webster belonged to the Roman Catholic faith, and persistence of her confessor induced her to tell the truth at last.

Her confession was given only in part to the press, the details being the most horrible narrative of ghastly facts ever poured into human ears.

"Mrs. Thomas came in and went upstairs. I went up to her and, after a violent quarrel, I threw her from the top of the stairs to the ground floor. I ran down and, to prevent her screaming and getting me in trouble, I caught her by the throat, and in the struggle she was choked.

"I then became entirely lost and without any control over myself, and looking on what had happened and the fear of being discovered, I determined to do away with the body as best I could.

"I laid it on the kitchen table and chopped the head from the body with the assistance of a cleaver. I also used the meat saw and carving knife to cut the body up. I prepared the copper with water to boil the body—"

But there is no use continuing the actions of a frenzied fiend. The head, never discovered, she dropped into the river, in the oilcloth bag, weighted.

At a quarter to nine on the morning of Monday, July 29, 1879, the bell of Wandsworth Jail began to toll, and the prisoner came out into the yard leaning on the arm of her confessor.

They descended a flight of steps to the place of execution, where Marwood, the hangman, was waiting. He pinioned the prisoner's arms and placed her in position.

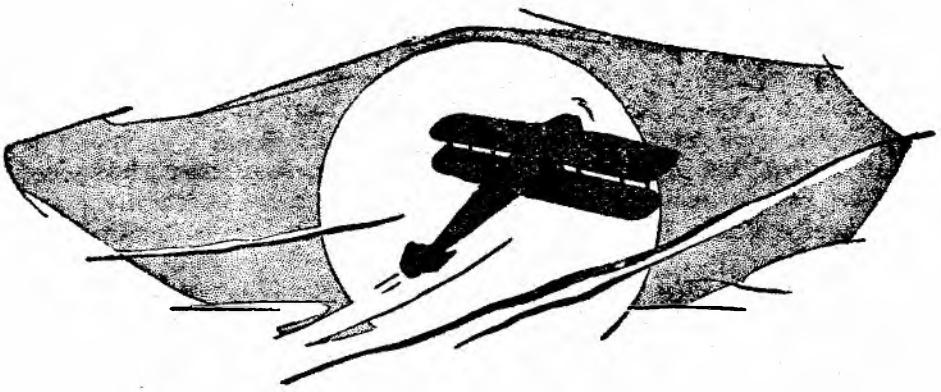
Shortly after the black flag was run up to the head of the flagpole, and the crowd of curious persons waiting outside the prison walls knew that Kate Webster had paid the penalty of her crime. They quietly dispersed.

It is a curious commentary on the case that when Mrs. Thomas's effects were auctioned off there was a large and jovial crowd present.

Popular Mr. Church was there, with his usual genial laugh and joke, and bought a number of things. One collector bought the meat saw and cleaver, and another paid as much as five shillings for the fatal carving knife.

And for years maiden ladies and childless widows were scared to death to hire servant maids who did not come provided with a whole portfolio of sworn and attested references.

No servant applying for a place dare admit to the possession of the name of Kate or its several variations. Such was the dark shadow which the name of Kate Webster cast upon English homes and their fabled security.



He pulled a sheet of paper from his pocket and flung it on the table

# WITH HIS OWN WEAPON

## By Harold de Polo

**NO CROCODILE TEARS WERE SHED FOR AMOS CROCKER—BUT A GIRL IN DANGER IS A GIRL IN DANGER—AND MEN, AFTER ALL, ARE MEN**

"I LIKE to see you a minute, Whitcher," said Crocker ingratiatingly, stopping his car in front of the sheriff's dwelling just as Bemis stepped out and closed the door behind him.

"Make it a short 'un, Amos," Whitcher rather discourteously suggested. "'Most four now, 'n' I aim t' git me in a hour 'r so wadin' the Stony 'fore dark comes!"

Pausing, he wheezed a bit petulantly and fumbled with the buckle that held the strap of his wicker creel over his shoulder. He began puffing, then, and had to lay down the aluminium case that protected his three-ounce split bamboo rod before he satisfactorily adjusted his trout basket. He seemed, suddenly, to have completely forgotten his broad if not bald hint of being in a hurry.

"Wisht I was 's lean 's *you* be, Amos," he complained. "Judas Priest, I got me on the scales down t' Del's store, yes'd'y, 'n' I clumb a heap sight nigher t' the two seven'y mark 'n I did t' the two sixty, I ain't denyin'. Have t' try me some o' them reducin' diets some o' them tony lady summer campers uses, I reckon, do I hanker t' slim me down m' figger. Yessir, Amos, I'm gittin' right—right *obese,* I cal'late the word is, I be!"

He chuckled as he finished, his great china-blue eyes going very wide and the thumb and index finger of his right hand traveling to his huge nether lip with his characteristic gesture.

"I—"

"I just wanted to see you, Whitcher," cut in Amos Crocker, rather nervously wetting his lips and blinking behind his silver-rimmed spectacles. "to ask if—"

"*I* know w'ot y' want t' ask me—want t' ask me w'ere the best troutin' is, now the end o' the season's comin' 'long," in-

terrupted the sheriff with a genial grin. "Shucks, I ain't one o' them miserly fellers, neither," he went on, pulling out his lip and letting it go back with a hearty plop.

"Don't keep the good places f'r m'self, I don't—like t' share 'em. Yep, Amos; the Stony's the stream this time o' year, w'ere I'm a goin' now. Lemme git y' a rod 'n' y' c'n traipse up there with me now."

He looked at the man behind the wheel eagerly, his eyes shining as they always did when the topic of conversation was troutin' or birdin' or else his stamp collection.

"W'ot say?" he cried jovially, as the other hesitated and fidgeted in a search for words.

"I—I *didn't* want to see you about fishing, it so happens, although I certainly know you'd be the man to come to about it," replied Crocker. "I wanted to see you about—well, about my Essie, to tell you the truth! I—she—"

Amos Crocker stumbled in his speech, bringing it to a mumbling end with a gulp. He looked appealingly at the sheriff, his eyes a trifle moist, and went on in a choked voice:

"Whitcher, my Essie's a little gay, a little giddy, like a lot of these young ones are to-day. Oh, no harm in her, I guess, but just careless and all the time talking about wanting to have a good time. Brought her up myself, you know, seeing her mother died when Essie was born.

"I—well, I've done my best, and it's been a hard job. Took to running up to the lake here, in that old flivver I gave her, this summer. Afraid—oh, I'm afraid she's been meeting some of those college boys, at that camp up near the headwaters. She's only seventeen, you know, Whitcher."

He stopped rather pitifully, with a sigh, biting his thin lips that looked as if they had suffered much from this habit.

Whitcher Bemis nodded slowly—very slowly and solemnly—and muttered an "Uh-huh" that sounded sympathetic. It brought out, at least, further confidences:

"What I'm getting at, Whitcher," he explained, "is that I'm darned worried, and that this private worry is mighty hard on a man who's got plenty of it hanging over him in his business. Hardware ain't what it was, in a one-man store, what with all this mail order business that's sweeping the country.

"Been in business close to forty years, there in East Chatham, and I—but there I go wandering off on my other troubles, don't I?" he wanly smiled, brushing a hand over his forehead.

"I just wanted to ask you, Whitcher, to please maybe speak to Essie for me. Lots of times, when a girl won't listen to her father, she'll listen to some one that ain't related. Tell her—well, tell her to watch her step, sort of. Those college boys wouldn't be serious.

"I—I'm coming to *you*, Whitcher, because every kid in most of the whole county thinks such a heap of you. You—you seem to kind of have a knack of being chummy with 'em. Anyway, I know my Essie's always said how much she likes you, Whitcher."

He ended up with a quaver, this time, did Amos Crocker. He looked the picture of the usual despairing parent who is bewailing the actions of a recalcitrant offspring. A sad enough sight—and growing sadder and unquestionably more universal in this hectic era.

Yet Bemis, invariably so comforting to every one under stress, merely opened his eyes wider and stared vaguely at this disturbed father. He remained silent, nodding his head just once, as if intimating that he perfectly understood.

"You—you see, Whitcher, I'm more upset to-day than usual, I suppose," Crocker went on with a rush. "I—Essie left early this morning, saying she was going to visit Joan Wells, down at the Landing. I called up there on the phone a couple of hours ago, to ask her to stop at Jim Trott's farm on the way home and bring me some corn. She—she hadn't been to see Joan at all, Whitcher. She—she probably—"

He gripped the steering wheel, as his voice rose, and became almost hysterical.

"She's probably gallivanting off with some of them damn city boys from the colleges, and that's why I came out here to-

ask you to help a crazy father and try to talk reason into her, Whitcher. She—she's *always* said how much she liked you, Whitcher," he finished, with a choking gulp.

"Allus liked Essie, Amos," said the sheriff of Noel's Landing with one of his grave nods. "Have a talk with her, I will!"

II

CHET THOMAS and Boyce Hutchins had always displayed an ingenuity that amounted to positive genius when it came to garnering information concerning Whitcher Bemis. This precious pair, anyway, drifted into Del's store at the Landing not two hours after the sheriff and Crocker had met—and they were wearing the sleek and satisfied grins that unfailingly brought unrepose to Whitcher's old cronies.

They were not kept long in suspense, either, were these adherents of the sheriff. Briefly, Chet and Boyce used their time-honored method of attack, the one maligning Bemis and the other defending him until his position was broken down by the laughter of the crowd and he grudgingly had to admit that he had been wrong.

There was a fair-sized gathering there, too, for it was the hour of the evening mail and mid-August summer residents were clustered profusely about the window. Anyway, the crux of the argument was to the effect that it was a downright shame for a feller like Amos Crocker to bother the sheriff.

Wasn't he pestered enough, already, with having his official duties cut in on his troutin' 'n' birdin' 'n' philat'lin' without being worried about looking after frisky young gals?

Del Noel and Walt Trowbridge and Jeff Moseby, after the pair had left and the last of the summer people had straggled out, looked at one another and demanded to know how in the name of sin Chet and Boyce were able to get hold of their gossip.

Whitcher, they concluded, must have been making a fool of himself again, somehow—and when he himself ambled in some twenty minutes later they instantly accused him of it.

"Sure, cal'late I was, boys," he confessed somewhat wearily, his eyes rambling. "Seems t' me I'm *allus* a makin' a fool o' m'self, lately. I—shucks, I dunno. P'r-haps mebbe I *am* gittin' ol'! Sh'u'dn' 'a' tol' Lem Sprague, I s'pose—"

"*Tol' Lem Sprague?*"

In unison, literally, this trio of old moss-backs cried out the phrase—cried it out in hoarse and horrified accents.

"Uh-huh—uh-huh," nodded the sheriff.

"Y' tol' Lem Sprague suthin' 'at were s'posed t' be *private?*" Del groaned.

"'N' y' f'rgot the fu'st thing he allus does 's t' whisper a secret t' Chet 'n' Boyce?" chimed in Jeff.

"Fool 's right 'n' old 's right, the Lord knows *I'll* say," was Walt's contribution.

"I—I *did* kind o' think Lem might go 'n' talk t' Chet 'n' Boyce, as a matter o' fac'," Whitcher sadly soliloquized, his hand instinctively going to his lip.

"Then—then—"

The postmaster couldn't put it into words, though—not for a moment or so, at least. Finally, after he and Jeff and Walt had exchanged more helpless glances, Del managed to find speech:

"W'itcher, don't y' know y' jest keep a playin' 'n' a playin' into the han's o' Chet 'n' Boyce. Got a great laugh here, this aft'noon, they did—'n' they got a laugh fr'm some o' them summer people that's li'ble t' be voters, w'ot with more New York folk claimin' res'dence on account o' Maine havin' no State income tax.

"Said, Boyce did, 'at w'en his brother Ned licked y' f'r the office o' sheriff they was another oc'pation y' c'd take up t' make a livin' at. That same oc'pation, W'itcher, he opined 'ud be actin' nursemaid t' flighty flappers, like he put it. He—damn 'em both, they sure got the laughs, the dum young squirts!"

"Yes, sirree, Bob, W'itcher," added Walt Trowbridge, "they was no cause t' give 'em that openin' 'n'—"

But Whitcher Bemis, his hands on his sides, had thrown back his head and was chuckling—a free and hearty chuckle that graduated into a gale of joyous laughter:

"Ju—Judas Priest, boys," he got out, "but didn' Chet 'n' Boyce go 'n' *earn* a laugh? Lawsy, tickles *me*, it does, thinkin' o' me playin' nursemaid! Shucks, fellers,

ain't you ol'-timers got no sense o' humor?"

They didn't seem to have—they most assuredly and decidedly didn't give any evidence of it. With their jaws dropping and their eyes plumb and plain disgusted, the worthy and loyal trio gazed at the man they had championed for years as if nothing could be said or done.

Lugubriously, they shook their heads—until Jeff, always the most inquisitive, thought to get *some* sort of reward:

"W'ot *is* all this trouble 'bout Amos Crocker 'n' his gal Essie, anyways, W'itcher?" he asked. "Couldn' learn no real noos fr'm Chet 'n' Boyce!"

Mr. Bemis laughed again, although this time there was a certain slyness in the sound of it:

"Shucks, no, fellers," he stated, "y' don't 'xpec' me t' make the same mistake *twice*, do y'? Made a fool o' m'self talkin' t' Chet 'n' Boyce, didn' I? Yeah, Del, gimme m' mail 'n' lemme traipse 'long home!"

Del complied grimly, for he and the others knew from long experience that when Whitcher Bemis elected to withhold information nothing in the world could possibly pry it loose from him.

## III

WHITCHER himself, however, surely received further information anent Essie Crocker. He received it, indeed, at an exceedingly early hour the next day—at, to be precise, somewhere pretty close to three o'clock in the morning.

Amos, at that time, drove up to the sheriff's house and began wildly to honk his horn. After Bemis had responded, opening the door in his voluminous nightgown, the hardware man from East Chatham unbridled his woe:

"It wasn't them damn college boys, after all, Whitcher," he excitedly wailed. "It—it was them damn road workers! Probably some of that crew that's fixing the road down to Gorham. Always said they looked suspicious, with their black eyes and polite smiles. Always thought this foreign labor—"

He broadened out into a rather plausible New England attack on the Latin, then, reverting in his nervous condition to the idiom of the backwoods:

"Cuss 'em, Whitcher, a bad lot, they be. An'—an' here I been blamin' my dear little Essie f'r—f'r—"

He blubbered, then—positively blubbered—and before he could at all master himself the sheriff had to repeat several times in his soothing voice:

"Shucks, Amos—shucks! Git holt o' y'rself, 'n' come on 'nside 'n' tell a body 'bout it all!"

After they were in the house, and the gasoline lamp was lighted on the kitchen table with a red and white checked cloth, Amos was prevailed upon to explain more fully:

"There it is, Whitcher—there it is. Read *that* cruel message that was slipped under an aching father's door, not two hours ago, in the dead of night!"

He pulled a crumpled sheet of paper from his pocket at that, and savagely flung it on the table—a piece of ruled paper, such as might have been plucked from a school notebook. It bore large printing, in pencil, that might have been done by a child:

> AMOS CROCKER:
>
> You love your daughter, and we love money. We have kidnaped her and are holding her as collateral, for ransom. Unless ten thousand dollars in small bills is placed in Porcupine Cave on Creepy Hollow Mountain before Saturday morning, her fate will be worse than death.
>
> There is a smart man managing this proposition, we think we should tell you, that is a good American business man.
>
> AVENGING SOCIETY.

"Gosh," said Whitcher, when he had read it, "y' sure do run into bum luck, eh, Amos? Run into it every w'ich way, seems like t' me, 'f it's true—"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing stopped, abruptly, sheepishly. He flushed and coughed, looking as if he had caught hold of himself before saying something that might embarrass the other man. He fidgeted on his feet, growing more nervous.

"I—I—" he started—but the hardware man from East Chatham cut in anxiously:

"If *what's* true, Whitcher?"

"Well, I mean—I shouldn' 'a' spoke 'bout it—but I've heered tell that—shucks, y' know how gossip is, Amos—but I've heered tell business wa'n't s' good with y' lately, neither! I—I didn't like t' mention it—slipped out—didn'—"

A strange expression that was akin to eager relief came to the pale eyes behind the thick lenses, and this was also evident from Crocker's voice as he spoke:

"It *is* the truth, Whitcher. As I said in the afternoon, hardware ain't what it was, what with this mail order stuff and all, chiefly. I *have* had hard sledding, these last couple of years mostly, and I— Great God, Whitcher," he added in a wail, "that's what's *worrying* me so much. *I* can't scare up any ten thousand dollars! I—Lord, I guess between two-three thousand is about *my* limit!"

Bemis said nothing. He merely stood there, gazing vacantly at his companion, and shaking his head in a saddened way as he clucked his tongue against the roof of his mouth in that manner that seems to denote sympathy.

Crocker, after a moment, threw his arms wide, rising from his chair:

"Whitcher, I can't pay that money—I—they might just as well ask me for a *million*. I'm putting myself in your hands. As a father—as a man—I ask you to try and save my little girl.

"Be—be careful, though, Whitcher. Don't antagonize them so that they'll go and do something terrible and desperate to her. I—oh, there's no use giving *you* advice, though," he finished with a wan yet admiring smile, "for I know you're shrewd enough to unravel anything."

Mr. Bemis accepted the compliment gravely. His thumb and index finger went to his lip, and as he stared dazedly about the room with his wide eyes he finally pulled it out and let it go back with a decidedly sharp plop.

"Reckon p'r'aps mebbe I *will* be able t' *on*-ravel this here kidnap myst'ry," he said slowly. "Work hard at it, leastways, I aim t'. Funny thing 'bout me, Amos," he smiled whimsically. "Allus put up a tougher scrap, I do, w'en I'm fightin' f'r a—well, w'ot y' might call a polit'cal en'my.

"I mean, y' know, a feller that's c'nsist'ntly gone 'n' voted dead ag'in' me! Like t' win noo votes, I do," he explained simply, "'r else put bad 'uns out o' the runnin'!"

Amos Crocker looked so uncomfortable that it was really pathetic, but as the hardware merchant finally found his voice and started to explain Whitcher airily waved for silence:

"Shucks, that's all right, Amos. Jest speakin' 'bout it, I were, t' impress y' I'd natchrally be workin' hard! 'N' now 'bout them roadmen. Tell me, was Essie—"

For an hour—for a good two hours—Whitcher Bemis sat there hunched over the table, grilling Amos Crocker with such a mess of stupid, aimless questions that the man from East Chatham was pretty close to a nervous wreck when the thing was over.

## IV

IT made quite a stir, did this first kidnaping case for ransom that the region had ever known. The news, too, was scattered far and wide quite early that first morning, for Whitcher seemed to have deviated from his usual policy of keeping things dark.

Indeed, he was willing to talk about the affair to any chance gossip who happened to come along and ask for information. By doing this, he told every one, he would have more people on the lookout for that poor, dear, innocent little Essie Crocker, who was likely to meet a fate that was worse than death.

But no clews seemed to turn up, during the next exceedingly hectic forty-eight hours, for either the sheriff or the dozens of other folk who had busied themselves with the affair.

Essie had left home, in the flivver, at about eight o'clock on Monday morning, and the last any one had seen of her was when she had passed a house a few miles out of East Chatham, presumably headed for the Cranberry Lake section.

If the car had left the road at any spot there was no way of telling it by the time that the thoroughfare had been examined, for a heavy rain early Tuesday morning would have wiped out all traces of tracks.

Bemis, at the insistent instigation of Amos as well as several others, had investigated the gang of foreign laborers down at Gorham. But from them, he reported, nothing was to be gained; that is, none of their number was missing, none of them had been away from work on Monday, none of them had seemed at all worthy of suspicion under shrewd cross-examination.

Still—still—and Whitcher had slowly cocked an eye in a sinister manner when he had drawled this out—them fellers was a funny breed, all right, all right, and p'r'aps mebbe they was one or two things a backwoods hick had noticed that he meant t' foller up.

Porcupine Cave on Creepy Hollow Mountain, needless to state, was also thoroughly looked into. That is, Whitcher and several of the best deer men in the region—noted for their woodlore—explored the immediate vicinity with scrupulous care.

They fine tooth combed it, in other words, so exhaustively that they were able to assure themselves that no human foot had been about the place since that downpour of Tuesday morning. Of this they were certain, although Whitcher admitted that there were mighty few things about which one could feel that way in what the poets termed this vale of tears.

But on Wednesday or Thursday—whichever it was—it appeared as if some person affiliated with the so-styled Avenging Society had been somewhere in the proximity of Porcupine Cave. At least, late Thursday night Amos Crocker paid another of his visits to the sheriff of Noel's Landing. On this occasion—to do away with possibly bothersome details concerning his actions—the hardware man showed Bemis the following message:

AMOS CROCKER:

Tell everybody to keep away from Porcupine Cave. The next time they will get hurt. No, not hurt, exactly. They just won't know it, for the man who will do the shooting never misses. I guess you ought to know that we're pretty good, because the crowd of picked men that looked over the ground weren't able to even find any of our tracks. Yes, we know the woods.

We're getting more businesslike now that the time approaches. Unless the ten thousand dollars in small bills is placed in the cave by *ten o'clock Saturday morning,* God help your daughter, is all we can say. And don't forget not to try any funny business. It may be one or two or three days before we take the money, but we'll know if it's put there or not. When we get it, we'll free your daughter. If not— AVENGING SOCIETY.

As Whitcher perused the communication, written in the same printed form on the same ruled paper, he—well, he actually seemed to pale. He shook his head glumly:

"By—by Judas Priest, Amos," he breathed hoarsely, "but it sure *do* look 's if these fellers mean w'ot they say!"

"*Mean what they say?*"

Crocker almost shrieked out the words, and his hands went to the lapels of the sheriff's worn canvas jacket. He gripped them convulsively and began trying to shake that massive figure in a manner that would have been ludicrous had the situation not been so tragic.

"Why, Whitcher, they're probably one of the most desperate bands of criminals that's ever been let loose on the world. Some branch, it sort of strikes me, of that famous Black Hand, maybe.

"Why, they'ed as soon cut your throat as look at you, from all I hear and read about their kind. Why—why—can't you do *something*, Whitcher? *I* haven't got any ten thousand—I can't even dig up much more than two, say—and God only knows what those brutes will do to my little Essie, outside of murdering—"

He shook the lapels in a frenzy, as his voice broke off in a choking gasp, and he ended up his plea in a mad cry:

"Oh, God—save my Essie!"

The sheriff of Noel's Landing, with a great sigh, put out his arms and rested his hands on the shoulders of Amos Crocker. He did it gently, as if he were babying a troubled child.

"Amos," he said very softly. "I've did m' best. I—I'm right sorry I've gone 'n' failed, I am, but them dummed kidnapers seem t' be—well, a mite too slick f'r me. I got t' admit defeat, it looks like, no matter how it'll hurt me in the vote. I—well, Amos, they's on'y one thing I c'n think of, t'—t' save y'r Essie!"

Whitcher stopped, his eyes going very wide as he stared solemnly at the other.

"What—what's that, Bemis?" the hardware merchant wanted to know, after the sheriff had kept on gazing at him without uttering a word.

"Tell y' w'ot it is, Amos," elucidated Whitcher. "We got t' give in t' them devils, I guess. Well, *you* ain't got the ten thousan', like y' say, so I cal'late we'll have t' make it a sort o' fam'ly party all 'roun'.

"I—I mean, Amos, we'll see 'f the boys 'n East Chat'am 'n' Noel's Landin' 'n' Gor'am can't go 'n' c'n—c'ntribute a measly ten thousan' t' rescue the daughter o' a worthy cit'zen!"

Crocker's eyes lit up, behind his glasses, almost avidly. Then, literally, he fell on Whitcher's neck. He blabbered out his gratitude excitedly, and it was a full five minutes before the sheriff could sufficiently calm him down and make him understand that he would take over the task of collecting the ransom.

V

THE sheriff of Noel's Landing, back in the war days, had proved himself a canny individual when it came to making tightwads shell out for the Liberty Loan. He had, probably, hung up the best records of any one in the county, and he had done it from friend and enemy alike.

He showed, on Friday morning, that his gift for talking currency away from people had not deserted him. Explicitly, he had got together the ten thousand dollars shortly before the one o'clock whistle blew at the East Chatham sawmill.

Men had come down what is known as handsomely, and even Ira Colton of the First National Bank—who had, incidentally, a daughter of Essie's age—was reputed to have disgorged precisely five hundred.

And, it might be mentioned, Amos Crocker had *not* been the worthy and beloved citizen that Whitcher had told him he was; indeed, he had always been a distressingly unpopular one. But a girl in danger is a girl in danger—and men, after all, are men.

Whitcher, naturally, was subjected to numerous caustic comments, in most cases started by Chet Thomas and Boyce Hutchins. A fine sheriff *he* was, all right, all right, to let a bunch of Wops come up into his bailiwick and kidnap a person and hide her so well that a man who called himself a born woodsman couldn't find her.

They quizzed him, though, good-naturedly, for there was clean sporting blood in these men of the remote Maine logging country. They gave their money and they called it a day, that was all.

One or two of them—Ira Colton the banker, primarily—of course, suggested that Porcupine Cave be watched while the cash was being deposited—but Bemis as well as Amos Crocker hastily warned them that any such move might have dire results. Why, they might cut Essie's throat, right then and there. Hot-blooded, them foreign fellows — hot-blooded and crazy-brained.

It was agreed, anyway, that the best might as well be made of a bad bargain. The money was given to Whitcher, and he placed it in the bank for safe keeping. In the morning, he said, he would roll up in his flivver and procure it, as the cashier had consented to be on the job before eight.

After that, the sheriff said, he could drive to the trail that would lead to the stipulated place of deposit on Creepy Hollow Mountain. He would be there, he assured Amos and every one else, long ahead of the hour set by the kidnapers for payment.

Everything, he positively informed the hardware man, was what the younger generation termed hunkydory—so much so, in fact, that he absolutely and well-nigh forcefully insisted that the father who was about to regain his daughter go out and celebrate the lucky occasion with him. And, with Whitcher, what did celebrating mean, at this season of the year, but traipsing off to the Stony after trout?

VI

THERE was one remarkable thing about that fishing journey—a thing that had never happened before and that most indubitably would never happen again. It was the first time that

Whitcher had ever returned from a troutin' trip, to be exact, when the idlers about Del's store had not crowded close to him to view the luscious catch that he was known to invariably bring back.

They had no time to get to him, on this occasion, before the postmaster himself came up to Bemis and Crocker with palpably wild excitement in his eye. He was holding out an envelope, and his lips were actually quivering so badly that he found it impossible to fashion words.

"Judas Priest, Del," drawled the sheriff quizzically, "w'ot 'n all sin's the matter? Win a prize 'n one o' them puzzles y're allus writin' answers t'?"

But even this ancient and well-known slam at Del's major hobby failed to elicit any responsive laughs from the native audience. They, as well, were looking quite as tense as the storekeeper. Their eyes, indeed, were glued to that stamped envelope that was being thrust at Bemis with a trembling hand.

"Stuck 'n the mail slot, this was, W'itcher," Del finally managed to get out. "Come acrost it 'bout two 'clock, after y'd gone t' the Stony with Crocker. Reckon —reckon it's some more t' do with Essie's kidnapin', by the looks o' that there hand that's drawed 'n the back!"

Whitcher, for a moment, did not accept the proffered letter. Instead, he put his arms akimbo and stood there gazing amusedly at his old crony. He was, unquestionably, the only calm man there.

If that were so, assuredly Amos Crocker suddenly became the most nervous one. As he edged his head around Whitcher's shoulder, and craned his neck forward, he exhibited the most bewildered face it would have been possible to find.

He gazed, with terror rapidly taking the place of astonishment, at the large and crudely executed black hand that was inked on the back of the envelope Del was holding.

"What—what's it *mean?*" he gasped, his skin literally turning to that sickly putty color.

"Means y' sh'u'd ought've saw me alone 'bout this, Del, I reckon," replied Bemis somewhat sternly, ignoring Crocker.

"I—I know, W'itcher," admitted his friend, "but I been so *dummed* upset 'n' worried 'bout this here kidnap—I—well, t' tell the truth," he finished with a gulp, "I had me a peculiar feelin', I did, that even with the ten thousan' the thing wouldn' go through. Just one o' my hunches, like, that—"

The sheriff, however, stopped him with a frown—a frown that plainly said Del shouldn't rightly go on with any such glum talk in the presence of an aching-hearted father. Then, almost brusquely, he reached out and took the letter.

"Open it—for God's sake, Bemis, open it!" cried out Amos Crocker, his voice a wild shriek and his face livid.

"Aim t', Amos," explained Whitcher patiently, "after I do m' 'xaminin' like a good *dee*-tective sh'u'd ought t'!"

If the merits of a sleuth depended upon the time he took to scrutinize any suspicious object, Mr. Bemis must indeed have been an admirable one. While Del and the rest clustered about him with bated breaths —and the hardware man fidgeted agonizingly—the sheriff did his stuff.

He turned that envelope over and over —over and over—dozens of times. He held it up to the light and squinted solemnly at it, his great, china-blue eyes drawn down to mere slits.

He surveyed it, in short, from every humanly possible angle, it seemed—and then, just as he was about to slit the letter open, he raised his head and eyed his audience in a sheepish manner.

"Shucks—shucks," he said hesitantly. "Pity this *ain't* right fr'm It'ly herself, huh, w'ere them Black Handers 'rig'nally growed. Might 'a' got me a Eye-talian stamp f'r m' album. Short on—"

"God, Bemis—*open it!*"

The man who now appeared to be all philatelist, however, looked at Amos Crocker with vacant eyes that seemed to intimate his mind was far away.

A little crease came to his forehead, as if he were very gravely thinking, and his thumb and index finger strayed to his huge lip. He nursed it quite tenderly, and after quite as tenderly stretching it out he let it go back with a soft plop:

"Yep, mighty short on It'ly, I be, worse luck. Got t' r'member t' look up them stamps, nex' time I buy me any, 'nstead o' concentratin' so heavy on them early United Sta—"

But he broke off suddenly, again flashing a grin on the circle of tautened faces.

"Speakin' o' the United States, though," he chuckled, "let's open us up this here stamped envelope o' that same country. Hey, fellers?"

He did so, and he proved that he could be generous to the curious by reading the epistle aloud:

"WHITCHER BEMIS:

"Since you have seen fit to appoint yourself the manager of the Essie Crocker kidnaping affair, we are therefore naturally addressing our proposition and ultimatum to you.

"This Avenging Society, as it calls itself, is not a legitimate organization. It is composed of two or three stragglers, all discredited men who have been dismissed from our own society. We have been slightly bothered by them before this, but they have never gone to the cold lengths that they have on the present occasion—nor do we think they ever will again. Anyway, we have stepped in, as soon as our nearest headquarters was informed of the matter, and taken Essie Crocker from their hands and into our own charge. She is with us now.

"We must mention, Mr. Bemis, that we never deal in such comparatively trifling amounts as ten thousand dollars under any circumstances, twenty-five thousand dollars being our minimum. We are, however, not too greedy. We realize that your community and the surrounding country is not exactly a wealthy one, so we will demand no more than the twenty-five thousand dollars mentioned as our lowest ransom ever quoted. As we know you must collect fifteen thousand dollars more to make up the amount, we will give you a little grace, until three o'clock Saturday afternoon, precisely.

"The money, also in small bills, may be placed in the same Porcupine Cave on Sleepy Hollow Mountain already specified by the amateur kidnapers. Unless it is there by that hour, we—well, we do not stupidly threaten something that will be worse than death itself. We will kill, quickly and mercifully and positively. "BLACK HAND.

"(Chapter of Original Society).

"P. S.—By the way, Mr. Bemis. In order to conclusively prove to you that we are an efficient organization, and also that we know this locality thoroughly, we have captured both Walter Trowbridge and Jefferson Moseby. You had sent them to spy about the vicinity of Porcupine Cave, and, although we acknowledge that they are fine woodsmen, we had no difficulty in taking them completely by surprise and making them our prisoners. They are now safe, having suffered no violence, in the same hiding place where we are keeping Essie Crocker. They, too, will be freed when the twenty-five thousand dollars is forthcoming, and we believe that you will agree as to our generosity in giving you what may be called this bargain rate. B. H."

"Oh, God! Oh, *dear* God, help—"

Amos Crocker had yelled this out, as Whitcher finished, while the others looked on wide-eyed.

"Walt—Walt 'n' Jeff, too," gasped Del Noel after a moment, running a hand over his forehead. "Cripes—cripes!"

"But my Essie! These men certainly seem to mean—"

"Cal'late they *do* mean business, like pr'a'ps mebbe y' was goin' t' say," interrupted Bemis gravely. "'Nother P. S. t' the letter, there be. Says, '*Save me, father. Get the money somehow. They will kill me surely. Essie.*' Here. Better see if it's her writin', A—"

But the hardware man had already reached out a trembling hand and pulled the sheet of paper from Whitcher's fingers. He stood there, his eyes protruding almost insanely as he stared at the writing. They began to roll, then, his eyes.

They looked so frightened, so puzzled, so filled with unknown terror, that it sent a chill along more than one man's spine. He began to shake at the knees, presently—a shaking that turned into a convulsive shudder that racked his entire body. His voice, when he cried out, sounded like that of a person wakened from some ghastly nightmare in whose grip he still believes himself to be:

"Yes, it's Essie's writing, all right! What does it mean? How did they—how did she—I mean— Oh, my God, Bemis, can't you *do* something?"

There was an acute silence as every man there followed Crocker's pitifully appealing gaze at the sheriff of Noel's Landing. The latter, however, was staring up at the ceiling. Into his eyes, too, there came doubt and puzzlement, and he shook his head and spoke dully:

"I—I dunno, Amos—I dunno, boys. I'm jest all up 'n the air, sort o'. Essie—'n' now Walt 'n' Jeff. Fifteen thousan' more— Ju—Judas Priest, I'm *all* up 'n the air, f'r sure. I—I think I'll go 'n' traipse me over home, I do. Use m' brain better, I c'n, w'en I'm t' home. More com-f'table—more—"

He let his voice trail off, his face dejected and his shoulders sagging as he walked toward the door.

"Oh, God, Whitcher, don't leave me—don't leave me. I'm nearly crazy. I am. I—let me go with you, at least!"

Bemis, as the broken voice of Amos Crocker pleadingly followed him, silently nodded his head—and with a great sigh of relief the worried father hurried out after him.

## VII

THEY sat about that same red and white checked cloth on the table in Whitcher's kitchen. That is, Bemis did most of the sitting, leaning back in his chair and staring into space as he meditatively nursed his ponderous lip.

Amos Crocker, on the other hand, would seat himself, remain so for a moment, and bound to his feet to pace furiously up and down the floor. Over and over he did this, his face haggard, his fingers nervously plucking at his hair, while the sheriff stolidly stayed silent, looking as if he were miles away.

The hardware man, once or twice, was on the verge of speaking to him, but Whitcher appeared to have some telepathic sense that warned him of it, and he would slowly shake his head and tap his forehead with a finger in a manner that plainly said he was thinking and had no desire to be disturbed. At last, however, Crocker could stand it no longer.

"I—I can't bear this awful suspense much longer, Bemis," he quavered. "I tell you it's *serious* this time—mighty serious. Why, it's life or death. They'll kill my Essie—sure. We've—why, we've just *got* to do something!"

"'Tis serious, at that," agreed the sheriff, although his bearing and his voice were casual and he kept on gazing at the ceiling. "Got Walt 'n' Jeff in it, I did, I guess, havin' them help me. Ought t' feel mean 'bout it, oughtn' I?"

"Yes, yes—I suppose you should! Yes—certainly—they'll meet with the same fate as my Essie, probably, if we don't pay them! It—it's sort of up to you to save *them*, too, Whitcher. You—I— Man, man, but it's time to get busy!"

He spoke somewhat more hopefully, this time, did Amos Crocker, a slightly eager light coming into his pale, troubled eyes. Bemis, however, grimly shook his head:

"No, Amos, it won't do no good, askin' people f'r more money. Sort o'—well, sort o' like what y' call a' anti-climax, I guess. Had 'em all pepped up once, we did, w'en we got that ten thousan' this mornin'.

"Could 'a' had the twen'y-five then, had we knowed, I reckon. No more, though—no more. That's human nature. Couldn' git the extry fifteen thousan', I'll bet, was the whul o' Noel's Landin' kidnaped! Got t'—"

"But what—"

"On'y one thing t' do, Amos," went on Bemis quietly, "'n' that's t' take the money we already got t' Porc'pine Cave 'n' see 'f it'll mebbe sat'sfy 'em. 'F it does—good. 'F it don't—"

Whitcher finished with a shrug—with a shrug and a sigh as he came forward and leaned his elbows on the table.

"These people are the *real* Black Hand, though," wailed Amos. "They mean it when they say they'll murder!"

"S'picioned that Avengin' Society were a-bluffin', Amos, 'n' p'r'aps this here Black Han—"

"*The Avenging Society was bluffing!*"

Amos Crocker, shaking and livid, leaped over to Whitcher. He got his hands on his shoulders, and again he tried to move that great torso back and forth as he poured out his words:

"*I* was the Avenging Society! *I* was the one who kidnaped my Essie in the first place! I must have been crazy, that was all—crazy! I was up against the wall, with all my creditors after me, and—and that damn bucket shop down in Boston had stripped me!

"I knew I couldn't borrow any money,

locally or any other place—*I* knew I wasn't 'a popular and worthy citizen,' as they call it, damn 'em! I thought it was the only way to get some cash to pull myself together with.

"But that *real* Black Hand came in, curse 'em, and I love my girl! She's all I've got, Whitcher, and—and— Oh, God, man—use your friendship and influence!"

Whitcher Bemis, very gently yet firmly, put up his hands and took hold of Crocker's wrists, quietly shoving him into a chair. His voice soothed:

"Sot down, Amos!"

As the other did so, dazed and trembling, the sheriff reached into a pocket of his worn hunting coat and pulled out a paper.

"Know all 'bout it, Amos. Got a paper here, I have, I drawed up, a day ago. Tells all the story, more 'lab'rately, o' y'r fake kidnapin', 'cause it's got Essie's side 'n it, too. Like t' have y' sign it, 'n front o' witnesses—oh, 'n front o' Jeff 'n' Walt, let's say. Have y'r Essie back, then, y' c'n. Might's well start t'—"

He held up a warning hand, though, as Crocker started to excitedly interrupt, and shook his head fairly sternly.

"Ain't aimin' t' use this c'nfession ag'in' y', Crocker—meanin' I ain't aimin' t' prosecute y' f'r endeavorin' t' c'nspire t' procure money under false pr'tenses. Jest askin' y' t' wind up y'r business, I be, 'n' traipse out o' East Chat'am—traipse clean out o' the county, 's well. Ain't never been 'xac'ly a' ornament t' the community, 'n' I cal'late f'r all c'ncerned it 'll be the best.

"Plenty o' jobs, down Boston way, f'r a man 'at knows hardware like y' seem t' does he want t' play straight, so—"

"Yes—yes, Bemis—fine. But Essie? You're sure she's safe? You're sure you're telling the truth? I—I never knew how I loved her until—until—"

"Let's go," said Whitcher. "She's down t' Walt's with him 'n' Jeff!"

## VIII

IF it were true that Chet Thomas and Boyce Hutchins were geniuses at ferreting out information concerning Whitcher Bemis, it was likewise true that of late they had developed much efficiency in keeping out of his way after he had handled a case successfully.

As the next night was Saturday, and Del's store and post office would be crowed with both natives and summer visitors, the sheriff did not bother to wait until he had his pair of young enemies in the audience.

"Usta have a grammy, I did, w'en I were a little shaver, I'll say f'r the ben'fit o' some o' the city folk 'at ain't heered it," he was drawling out quizzically.

"She had one o' these here axioms—one o' them proverbs—she usta keep a sayin' t' me: 'W'itcher,' she'd say, 'allus remember t' give a minute regard t' detail with a' apparent absence o' zeal!'"

He had to pause for a moment, for he always seemed to find it necessary to chuckle when he told about his relative. He pulled at his lip, before going on, and allowed it to go back with a quiet plop that brought a friendly laugh from the summer people.

"Never f'rgot me that there advice, I ain't, so the very fu'st time Amos Crocker come up t' me—back 'n Monday, it were—I got me mighty 'spicious. Called me 'W'itcher,' he did, w'en f'r all the years I'd knowed him we'd been 'Bemis' 'n' 'Crocker' t' one 'nother!

"Yep, that got me 'spicious, though I couldn' say o' w'ot. See it right soon, I did, w'en he brought me that fu'st letter!"

Whitcher was forced to hesitate and smile, then, and rub his hand ruminatively over the fringe of ash-gray hair that circled his otherwise bald pate.

"One word 'n that letter was a dead give'way. Noo Englan' word it is, mostly, I reckon—'n' a Maine word p'tic'ly. Word, anyways, that Crocker's allus used some generous. Word 's 'collateral.'

"Right *pos'tive,* I were, no Eye-talian avengin' outfit 'ud write it! Yep, I guess that there false word, like y' might call it, come t' be 'bout the wuss mistake Amos Crocker went 'n' made—eh, folks?"

He winked an eye in an intimate manner, then, and scratched his head. It would be his last chance with most of this city crowd before they left around Labor Day, and it was candidly the business of Mr. Bemis to pull for votes.

Certainly, at least, he was getting good will and admiration—getting it audibly, too, and even slightly vociferously from the younger element.

"O' course," he continued, "I had t' find me out the main thing, then—'n' that was w'ere was Essie? Sort o' like that lookin' f'r the needle 'n a haystack, 'f y' ask me. Big country, 'roun' here, like y' all know—almighty big. Pretty easy f'r a lone gal t' hide herself off f'r a spell o' four-five days 'r so.

"Couldn' find no track o' the flivver. Right simple, y' see, t' run one into any o' them ol' loggin' trails. Then that rain comin'—well, *no* chance t' go 'n' discover the car, y' might say. But w'ere was Essie hidin'? W'ere *would* she hide?"

He looked almost comical, now, as he asked the question with a whimsical grin—looked, indeed, as if he were giving a burlesque of a college professor quizzing his class.

"Well," he explained, "I got me a sort o' ment'l card index, 'way 'n the back o' m' brain, 'n' I went 'n' mulled over it. Dummed 'f I were able t' drag anything out, at fu'st—'n' then spang-bang it hit me hard.

"See Crocker 'n' his gal, two week ago Sund'y, out ridin' 'n his car. Passed 'em 'n the road, t' be truthful. Allus got m' eye out f'r that minute regard f'r detail stuff o' grammy's, don't f'rget, 'n' I remember he'd said they was goin' 'n a all-day picnic.

"Seems I also remember, w'en I got to fu'ther fussin' with m' ment'l card index, that suthin' had struck me funny that day—struck me funny, it did, t' see the mess o' food they had with 'em. Beans, f'r 'nstance—w'y, they must 'a' had eight-ten cans. Yep, even though Essie allus *had* liked 'em, I remember I won'ered w'y they was luggin' sech a lot!"

He smiled a bit slyly, this time, as he paused—smiled so slyly, so expertly, that he had his audience where he wanted them. They were tense and silent, waiting.

"Plannin' the kidnapin', then, he were, 'n' stockin' the place up with food. W'ere was the place, hows'ever? Wa'n't s' hard t' figger out—'r t' make a good stab at, leastways. Ought t' 'a' hit on it the fu'st day, 'f I'd been right keen.

"He'd be li'ble t' go t' the spot where he thought they was the least chance o' other people goin' t'—'n' 'f that ol' hut up 'n Mountain Trout Pond wa'n't the best bet may I never cast me another fly! Eh, folks?"

He chuckled heartily at that—and then his face became grave as if he had suddenly recollected something.

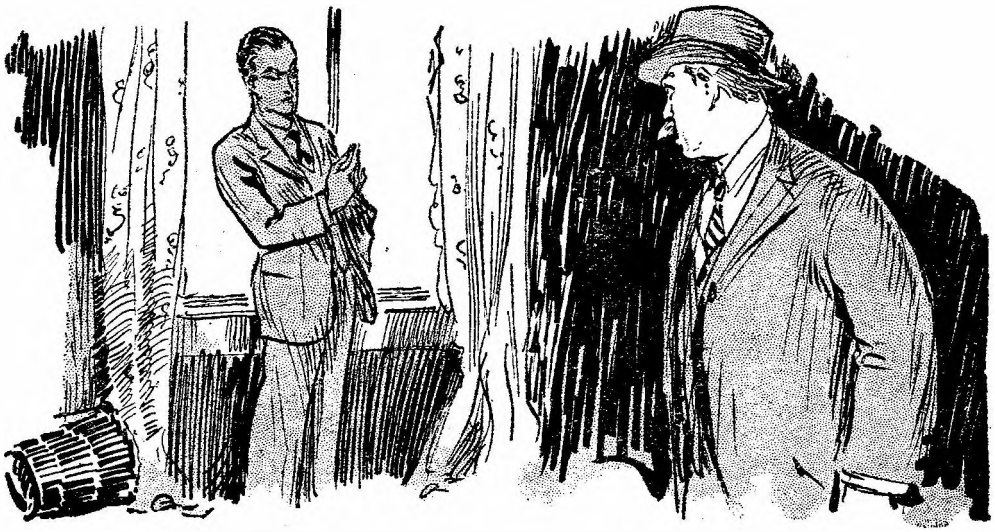
"Got t' tell some o' you more recent summer people that Mountain Trout Pond, up t' five-six year ago, come t' be about the best trout water of its kind in the whul' State o' Maine. *Too* good, it were—so good that she was fished out. Yessir, so fished out that I'll bet a man ain't been up there with a rod f'r the last five year.

"Private place t' hide, all right, all right—'n' w'en I got Jeff 'n' Walt t' go up there, yest'd'y, m' hunch that Crocker h'd chose it went 'n' proved good deducin', like the *dee*-tectives 'ud put it!"

Whitcher Bemis yawned—yawned and stretched. He spoke casually now, waving a hand:

"Had t' prove he'd went 'n' done this thing, o' course, f'r them letters he'd writ' hisself was no real ev'dence ag'in' him. Thought me, then, t' w'y not use his own weapon—kidnapin'?

"Anyways, I had Walt 'n' Jeff take Essie down t' Walt's place, 'n' then I manufactured me that Black Hand business 'n'—well, 'n' y' all know the rest! Me? I'm right tired, I be, w'ot with traipsin' all over the country t'-day returnin' that ten thousan'—'night, folks!"



"I found this button under the curtain, just now," said the detective

# NO MOTIVE APPARENT

## By J. Jefferson Farjeon

**"YOU'RE QUITE RIGHT," SAID CROOK, SMILING. "THERE'S NO RULE IN THE MATTER OF MURDERING—OTHERWISE OUR JOB WOULD BE EASIER"**

"IS the room exactly as it was when the maid entered it this morning?" asked Detective Crook.

"Nothing has been moved," replied the local inspector. "Hardly anything's been touched."

"By your orders, I suppose?"

"Yes, by my orders."

Crook nodded, and glanced round the study—at the overturned chairs, at the waste-paper basket lying on its side, at the heavy picture of a hunting scene that had come down from the wall and lay flat upon the floor, and at the splintered glass on the carpet.

"Does it *look* like suicide?" muttered the inspector. "Unless the suicide of a raving lunatic!"

"I don't suppose there was any insanity in Mr. Sherman's family?" queried Crook casually, as he walked across to the French windows.

"Not that I know of," answered the inspector. "Keen, hard-headed folk, I should say. Lunatics don't make successful business men."

"Then—not to mince matters—you suspect foul play?"

"I do, sir."

Crook pushed open the French windows, and stepped out on to the narrow balcony. A dozen stone steps led down into the garden, arching over the kitchen area; and it was in the kitchen area, battered lifeless by the stone, that Isaac Sherman had been found that morning. Crook had already seen the body. It had not been a pleasant sight.

"Easy enough to throw yourself out, if you had a mind to," observed the detective. "It's a nasty drop."

"Mr. Sherman had no troubles that I know of," returned the inspector, after a moment.

"That you know of, probably not. But why *should* you know Mr. Sherman's

troubles? Nearly every one has troubles—even a successful business man."

"Well, we've not traced any to date," persisted the inspector. "There's a total absence of motive."

Crook smiled. The local inspector was rather rushing matters.

"In the dark, one might slip here," the detective suggested.

Again the inspector countered.

"Bright moon last night," he said.

"Which rose at twelve," added Crook dryly. "Is there any reason why Mr. Sherman might not have met his death at eleven?"

The inspector admitted there was no reason to exclude this possibility.

"We can't say for certain *what* time he died," he observed. "But it must have been after ten, because before that the servants would have seen him fall—or heard him. Mrs. Sherman sleeps on the other side of the house, so *she* wouldn't have seen him."

"But wasn't Mrs. Sherman alarmed when he didn't come to bed?"

"Separate rooms," remarked the inspector succintly. "Her story is that she said good night to him at ten, and that he said he'd probably be working late."

"I see," mused Crook, glancing again down into the area, and then raising his eyes to the pretty, sun-lit lawn. "A man who was going to commit suicide might say that."

"And, also, he might say it," interposed the inspector, "if—suppose—he expected a visitor?"

"I see your point," agreed Crook, re-entering the room and gazing at the table. "One glass, unbroken, on the table, and another glass, smashed, on the floor. That *does* suggest a visitor. Any idea who it might be?"

"None," admitted the inspector ruefully. "Wish I had."

"You've questioned Mrs. Sherman about this?"

"Yes. No result. She hasn't any idea either."

"The servants?"

"No one let any visitor in."

"Then Mr. Sherman must have let the visitor in. Assuming there was one, was the front door bolted this morning when the servants got down?"

"It was. I ascertained that."

"That's interesting. You see, inspector, that means our visitor couldn't have left by the front door, if he'd murdered Mr. Sherman. He must have left by the French windows."

"And perhaps he came in by the same way," frowned the inspector. "Believe me, this isn't really a suicide case, Mr. Crook."

Crook did not answer immediately. He walked round the room leisurely, then examined the French windows. He peered at the curtains and stopped.

"What about finger-prints?" he inquired as he rose.

"Wash out. Can't trace anything useful in that line," grunted the inspector.

"Then let's try another line. How is Mrs. Sherman taking this?"

"She seems dazed."

"And upset?"

"Of course."

"I mean *humanly* upset, inspector. Not sensationally."

"Well, I can't say she seems prostrated with grief exactly. From the few inquiries I've made, I gather they'd—well, they'd got a good way beyond the honeymoon stage."

"Whom did you gather that from?"

"The servants."

"Why, then, inspector," exclaimed Crook, smiling, "Mr. Sherman did have a trouble!"

"Oh, but there's nothing special in that," argued the inspector. "That's just—well, the ordinary way of it, isn't it? A wife doesn't expect to sit on her husband's knee after four years."

"How long have *you* been married?" asked Crook innocently.

"Eight months—but that's beside the question," replied the inspector with a sudden grin.

"Then let's get back to the question. You say this isn't suicide. Can you think of a motive for the murder—if such it actually is?"

"No, I can't."

"Can you think of somebody who might *be* the murderer?"

"No idea."

"Might it be, perhaps, a man wearing a brown coat, with one button missing?"

"What?" shouted the inspector, but was calm again the next instant, and annoyed at his unprofessional emotion. "Let's hear some more about that!"

"I found this brown bone button beneath the curtain just now," smiled the detective. "First point to me, inspector."

The inspector advanced quickly and examined the button. His expression was a study: it was divided between professional delight at the clew, and personal chagrin that he had not unearthed the clew himself.

"Wonder how I came to miss that," he muttered.

"Perhaps it wasn't there when you first looked?" suggested Crook. "Perhaps it's off *your* coat?"

"Try again," growled the inspector. "We don't wear buttons like that."

"It might be one of Mr. Sherman's."

"More likely the mysterious visitor's—"

"Whose presence we merely assume from the evidence of a second wine glass," mused Crook.

"Plus a button now," added the inspector.

## II

AT Crook's suggestion, they summoned the parlormaid. She was a tall, trim girl, and, so the inspector whispered, the only member of the staff who had shown no signs of hysteria. When she appeared, the detective eyed her approvingly, and decided that he could get straight to business.

"I want you to answer a few questions, if you will," he began pleasantly. "Can you give me a list of the people who have called here during the last week?"

If the girl felt any surprise, she concealed it. She knew her place, whether in the presence of her mistress or a police official.

Yes, she thought she could give a list. Though, of course, it was difficult to remember everybody.

There was Mr. Henderson. He came Monday. Who was Mr. Henderson? Oh, just a friend of the family. Then a lady came to tea—Mrs. Edwards. Then on Tuesday there were some relations from America. A man called on Wednesday about the new car. He came from Thompson's garage. And the vicar called on Wednesday, too. Oh, and Mr. Henderson again.

Then on Thursday. No one come on Thursday. Oh, yes, Mr. Henderson come again in the evening. And on Friday the man from the garage came again, with Mr. Thompson himself, this time, and the American relations came to tea, and Mr. Price, the solicitor, and Mr. Battersby. Who was Mr. Battersby? He was Mr. Sherman's partner. He come again on Saturday with his wife, for a game of tennis.

"Did Mr. Sherman play tennis?" asked the detective.

"No, he never played," replied the maid. "Golf was his game. But Mrs. Sherman played tennis."

"Was there no fourth player on Saturday, then?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Henderson. That's all I can remember, sir."

"You have remembered very well," said Crook approvingly. "Now see if you can remember something else. Can you recall whether any of these visitors wore a brown suit?"

The girl thought. Once she even closed her eyes, as though to visualize some elusive visitor. Watching her, Crook was satisfied that her methods were very thorough, and that her reply would be conclusive. While the inspector fidgeted, he waited patiently. At last the maid spoke.

"Well, that's funny, sir," she said. "You'd think there'd be plenty wearing brown suits. But, as far as I remember, sir, none of them was wearing brown. All blues or grays—" she stopped suddenly, as a figure crossed the lawn. "Well, how silly of me! Except Mr. Henderson, of course."

"Is that Mr. Henderson?" inquired Crook quickly.

"Yes, sir. He generally wore a brown suit."

"But he's not wearing one now."

"No, sir."

There were police officials who, jealous of Detective Crook's successes, declared that he was apt to be slow; but behind all his leisurely questions his brain was always acting fast, and when he had made up his mind no man could be quicker.

"Doesn't Mr. Henderson use the front door?" he demanded sharply.

"He generally comes round the garden," answered the maid, a little surprised.

"A special privilege, eh? Where does he live?" The maid gave his address. It was half a mile distant. "Has he been here before to-day?"

"Yes, sir. Soon after breakfast."

"Whom did he ask for?"

The maid hesitated for a second, then responded a little uneasily:

"No, one, sir. He came through the garden then, too. He came to see Mrs. Sherman, I expect."

"There wasn't anybody else," added the inspector grimly, and explained that the study was not the only room that opened on to the garden. A breakfast room, on the lawn level, also had French windows.

"Mrs. Sherman uses this breakfast room?" asked Crook, turning again to the maid.

"Yes, sir," faltered the maid. "I think she's there now."

"Probably he's come to express his sympathy, and to ask if he can do anything for her," commented the inspector a little dryly. "Friend of the family—quite natural, eh?"

"One more question," said Crook. "Did Mr. Henderson enter this room this morning, or make any attempt to?"

"He didn't enter this room—I can tell you that," returned the inspector. "And, if he'd tried it wouldn't have been any use. I'd given my orders."

Crook nodded, and walked to the door.

"I'll be back in an hour or two," he said. "Meanwhile don't do anything that's not strictly necessary until I return. And you," he added, to the maid, "will say nothing about our conversation for the moment. I can rely on that?"

"Yes, sir," answered the maid in a low voice. "But—oh, I do hope I've not said more than I ought to."

Impressed by her tone, Crook looked at her a little more closely.

"What makes you think you may have?" he asked. The girl did not reply. "You've only answered my questions—and answered them well. You haven't incriminated anybody."

And then the maid momentarily lost control of herself.

"It couldn't be him—it couldn't be him!" she exclaimed. "He's much too—"

She stopped, as though appalled by her words.

"Who?" asked Crook.

But the maid had recovered herself.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she answered rather stiffly. "If you'll excuse me."

Crook did not press the point, but he cogitated over the maid's little outburst as he left the house.

"She's afraid for Mr. Henderson," he reflected, "and she cannot conceive him to be guilty. Now, is she afraid for him merely on account of my questions? Or does she think his relations with Mrs. Sherman might prejudice him? That may be so.

"But, on Mr. Henderson's side, is the faith of a maid who appears to have more than the usual share of sanity. I'll remember that, Mr. Henderson."

## III

TWENTY minutes later, the door of Mr. Henderson's flat was opened to Detective Crook by that interesting gentleman's butler. The visitor asked for Mr. Henderson, and affected mild surprise and disappointment on learning that he was out.

"That's unfortunate," said the visitor. "I am from Graydon & Henshaw's, and Mr. Henderson asked me to call about making him a new wardrobe—slightly larger than the one he has. I expect he told you?"

"It's the first I've heard of it," returned the butler rather suspiciously.

"Well, well! And I've made a special journey! I wonder if you could just show me the wardrobe? I could get some idea, and might not have to trouble to call again."

"Have you a card, sir?" asked the butler.

Crook produced one. Graydon & Henshaw's were one of a round dozen addresses which the detective was privileged to use, and had he been run over by a motor bus the contents of his cardcase would have identified him by twelve different names.

The butler looked hard at the card, looked harder at the visitor, and then, with a shrug, intimated that the business could proceed; but he kept very close to the detective's heels all the time the detective was in the flat.

"Ah—so that's the wardrobe!" exclaimed Crook when he had been ushered into the bedroom. "H'm. A nice piece, that—a very nice piece. I really can't see what he wants with a bigger one. Though, of course, it's not in the interests of my firm to dissuade Mr. Henderson. Perhaps—"

He swung open the wardrobe door, and nodded his head.

"Ah, that explains it. Mr. Henderson has rather a large outfit, hasn't he? I wish *I* could afford half as many suits!"

He dived his hand in among them, an action which brought a frown to the butler's face.

"What's that for?" he demanded.

"Yes—they go all the way back," murmured Crook to himself. "Probably the same width would do, but a little greater depth. H'm, yes. Thank you." He closed the door. "By the way, I'm not surprised that it takes some doing to keep such a large wardrobe as that in repair."

"Nothing broken, is there?" asked the butler.

"I meant the contents of the wardrobe. Before your master comes home, some one had better sew on the missing button of his brown suit."

He chuckled at his little joke, but the butler did not see any humor in it.

"I'll tell Mr. Henderson you called," he said shortly.

"Yes, please do," answered Crook. "I very nearly called last night. Would I have found him in?"

"No, he was out."

"But it was late when I passed—half past ten. He might have been in by then?"

"He didn't come in till after eleven," growled the butler as he opened the front door, "and even if he had, I don't suppose he'd have seen a visitor at that time of night."

"No, I dare say not," admitted Crook amiably. "That's really why I didn't call."

On his way back, Detective Crook's face grew grave and thoughtful.

"Well?" exclaimed the inspector, meeting him at the front door of the late Isaac Sherman's house. "Have you traced anything?"

"I have traced the home of the missing button," answered Crook.

"Where—"

"Wait till we're inside."

In the study once more, the inspector repeated his question.

"Where is the home of the missing button?" he demanded.

"On Mr. Henderson's brown coat, now hanging in his wardrobe," returned Crook.

"Ah!" The inspector's eyes glowed with gratification. "We're getting on. Then Mr. Henderson *must* have been here last night!"

"It looks like it."

"Looks like it? Is a haystack a haystack? Now, it's rather odd that Mr. Henderson hasn't mentioned his visit."

"Where is he now?"

The inspector looked grim.

"Still with Mrs. Sherman, comforting her. Staying to lunch, I take it. You'd think she'd be lying down prostrated, now, wouldn't you?"

"After four years, inspector?" reproved Crook. "Perhaps the oddest thing is that a murderer should remain so close to the scene of the tragedy?"

"No, that's not odd," retorted the inspector. "People who murder aren't normal, to begin with. You never know how they'll act. They may fly. They may stay—held by a sort of fascination, or by a belief that the police won't see what's right under their nose."

Detective Crook smiled appreciatively. "You're quite right," he said. "There's no rule in the matter—otherwise our job would be easier. What do you say to asking Mr. Henderson in here, and putting him through it?"

"Right!" exclaimed the inspector. "Sooner the better, I think. It's not going to be pleasant, but it's got to be done."

Mr. Henderson received the summons with a frown. He told the maid, who brought him the official request, that he would be in the study in two minutes, and turned to Mrs. Sherman when the maid had departed.

"I wonder what they think I can tell them?" he asked.

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Sherman dully. Her face was pale, and her eyes were heavy with unshed tears. "I suppose they'd question everybody, wouldn't they?"

"Yes. I expect so. But—surely—they can't know—"

He stopped abruptly. Mrs. Sherman's frightened eyes were upon him.

"Know—what, Fred?" she faltered.

He colored slightly and turned away; but the next moment he was by her side.

"Don't worry, my dear," he whispered. "Keep up your courage. All this—will soon be over."

He bent down, hesitated, and then, in response to her unspoken appeal, kissed her. Then, gritting his teeth, he left the room, and joined his inquisitors in the study.

"I understand you wish to speak to me?" he said.

Detective Crook regarded him quietly for a second. He saw a well set up man, of about thirty-five, with keen, rather haggard eyes, and a pleasant manner. There was no external evidence of great strength or of great weakness. If one woman saw everything in him, the majority would not have noticed him in a crowd.

"We want you to help us solve the mystery of Mr. Sherman's death, if you can," answered the detective. "Will you sit down?"

"Thank you," replied Mr. Henderson. "Is there any mystery then?"

"You think not?"

"I understood it was suicide. Surely—" A new look suddenly leaped into his eyes. "Surely, you're not suggesting—"

"We're not suggesting anything," interposed Crook quietly, "but we're exploring everything. That is just our normal job. Now, you were with Mr. Sherman last night—"

"What's that?" cried Mr. Henderson, jumping up. "I was not—I was at home."

Then he sat down again, rather weakly. He knew he had made a slip, and was wondering whither it would lead.

"Oh, then I must have been mistaken in my conclusions," proceeded Crook. "Mr. Sherman *had* a visitor—that we know. There were two glasses—one you see on the table, by your side—the other lies on the floor, broken." Mr. Henderson followed the detective's gaze fascinated. "We conclude that the visitor may have come by the French window, and that, if he murdered Mr. Sherman—"

"*Murdered him!*" Moisture rose to Mr. Henderson's forehead.

"—he must have left by the same way, because he could not have let himself out of the front door and bolted it afterward. The reason we thought it might be you, Mr. Henderson," added Crook, "was because your butler says you were *not* at home last night—he told me that himself less than an hour ago—and, also, because we found this on the floor by the curtain." He produced the button. "It is the button missing from your brown suit, now hanging in your wardrobe."

Mr. Henderson stared at the button, and did not speak for a full minute. Then he smiled, but it was not a happy smile.

## IV

"YOU know your job," he said bitterly. "Are you accusing me of having killed Mr. Sherman?"

"Not till we've heard anything you may have to say—isn't that right, inspector?" said Detective Crook.

The inspector nodded his head.

Another minute went by. All at once Mr. Henderson clenched his fist impotently.

"The devil of it is," he burst out, "if I had killed him, there'd have been a motive."

Crook frowned.

"Don't you want to let *us* find that out?" he inquired.

"No, by God, I don't!" cried Mr. Henderson. "I know something of police ways,

and I'm not going to have this matter dragged out through the mud! The quickest way will be to tell you now. I've tried to keep this quiet—for Mrs. Sherman's sake, not for mine—but, I see, you *will* have it!"

"You're not bound to say anything, you know," the inspector reminded him.

"Thank you, inspector. Isn't that what they tell a man after they've arrested him? Well, that doesn't matter. The simple truth is that I am in love with Mrs. Sherman, and she loves me. But, as God is my judge, we've done no wrong. One can't help one's feelings, but one can prevent oneself from giving way to them and being a cad."

"I admire you for your candor, Mr. Henderson," said Crook, "and, if I may say so, I think you are adopting the right tack. Did Mr. Sherman know of this position?"

"He must have. It wasn't till last night, though, that I realized it."

"What happened last night?"

"He'd asked me to come and see him here—in this room—at eleven o'clock. He said it was some private matter; that I was to let no one know, and that I could come through the garden. Perhaps foolishly—I came."

"Why foolishly?"

"Well—I half guessed what was in the wind. That was why I obeyed his request to secrecy. Mr. Sherman was an ugly man when roused. He—oh, but never mind that. The point is, I came. No one saw me come, I think.

"There was something odd in Mr. Sherman's attitude—I noticed it at once—but I couldn't make it out. We had a glass of wine together—I couldn't well refuse—and then he suddenly laughed. A—a beastly laugh. And he taxed me with—with having betrayed his wife."

The speaker paused, and covered his face with his hands. Then he raised his head again, and continued more quietly:

"I saw red. No, I didn't kill him, but I almost believe I could have. You don't know Mrs. Sherman—her patience and her purity—and when he made his foul suggestions—well, I went for him. He clawed at me, and I knocked him down. It must have been then that he grabbed off my button.

"It was all very quick. He got up, and we faced each other. And then I realized that I might do him some serious damage if I stayed—and that it would all react upon Mrs. Sherman. So I turned on my heel and left him. And this morning I heard that he had committed suicide."

"Why didn't you admit having been here?" asked Crook, "Were you afraid you might be connected with his death?"

"No—I never thought of that. That seemed too ridiculous. I accepted the theory of suicide."

"Then your reason—"

"Was to keep Mrs. Sherman's name out of it. I didn't want any chance that the subject of our interview would get around."

"I see. Were you surprised to learn of the suicide?"

"I was staggered!" exclaimed Mr. Henderson frankly. "I couldn't find any motive in it. Mr. Sherman wasn't the sort of man who would take his life, in my estimation."

"Do you think, Mr. Henderson," asked Detective Crook quietly, "he was the sort of man who might have been prepared to take the life of another person?"

"I don't understand," answered Mr. Henderson, and the inspector glanced at Crook sharply.

"What's that mean?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you in a minute. Meanwhile, did your struggle with Mr. Sherman knock over all these chairs, Mr. Henderson, and bring that big picture down?"

"Why—of course, not!"

"And if you had thrown Mr. Sherman out of the window, after a struggle of that sort, you would surely have had the sense to straighten the room a little, so that it might have *looked* like suicide?"

"I don't know—I suppose—how do I know?"

Crook smiled.

"Perhaps you don't know. But I know. It was the first thing I thought of when I saw the state of the room—"

"But damn it, man!" snapped the inspector. "If Mr. Sherman fell out of the

window, would *he* disarrange the furniture first?"

"He might, if he wanted it to appear like murder," said Crook, "and if he were not in a mood to think very clearly. If he wanted, for instance, to make it appear that his rival, whose button he possessed, had killed him."

Both the inspector and Mr. Henderson blinked uncomprehendingly.

"Can you remember exactly what happened, just before you drank your wine?" asked Crook. "Think hard."

"Nothing special happened," replied Mr. Henderson. "Well, I do remember that, just before we drank, Mr. Sherman turned away for a moment to put the decanter aside, and that I vaguely wondered whether I'd taken up the right glass."

"You didn't take the right glass," answered Detective Crook gravely. "You took the wrong glass, and Mr. Sherman drank the poison he had intended for you."

"Good God!" gasped Mr. Henderson.

"But Mr. Sherman was found in the kitchen area, with a broken head!" cried the inspector. "What are you driving at?"

"This," said Crook. "Mr. Sherman did not discover his mistake till after Mr. Henderson had left. The poison was probably a slow one, designed to kill Mr. Henderson when he had returned home. This, if his visit had been kept secret, would have diverted suspicion from Mr. Sherman.

"On the other hand, it was unlikely that Mr. Henderson would be thought to have gone to Mr. Sherman's house deliberately to poison him. He would not know he was going to be offered wine, and the purchase of the poison could not have been traced to him. So—in order that an impulsive murder should be deduced—he disarranged the room to suggest a scuffle, and then threw himself out of the window."

"That would take some courage," commented the inspector.

"I think I myself might prefer it," answered Crook, "to the torment of death by poison."

There was a long silence. Suddenly Mr. Henderson's voice broke the stillness.

"May I go?" he said hoarsely.

After he had gone, the inspector turned to Crook.

"How the devil did you get on to it?" he demanded.

"By not being in too much of a hurry to put two and two together—as you and the others did," answered Detective Crook. "Mr. Sherman's isn't the only poisoned body I've seen in my time. Come and have another look at it."

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# PAID TO BE HONEST

HOW would you like to be paid five thousand dollars per year or more just to refrain from forging checks or robbing banks? Sounds like a silly question, does it not?

Yet, until his death in Brooklyn a few months ago, Mr. Arthur P. Fennelman—this is not his real name—drew that sum from one of the largest banking protective organizations just to remain honest. Honesty in his case meant that he would neither forge nor raise checks, nor molest the banks of this country in any other way. The bonding and insurance companies, otherwise the banking protective corporations, found it cheaper to pay Fennelman a weekly salary to stay straight than to chase him around the country because he was crooked.

Fennelman was not just an ordinary forger. He was assumed by those who should know, to have been one of the cleverest penmen in the world.

Some sixteen years ago, the banks of the Middle West were startled by a series of forgery and check raising depredations which totaled many thousands of dollars. The bank protective people were first of the opinion that the work was that of a gang or group of crooks. A little close investigation, however, soon proved that but one man was profiting by the thefts.

Detectives detailed to protect the financial houses of the country set out after this

man, and after an arduous chase finally succeeded in getting him. But it took eleven years of trailing from coast to coast, and from Canada to the Gulf, before the arrest was made. Whenever they arrived in a town they were apparently just a day, or a week too late to apprehend him.

As many times as this dexterous forger was barely missed by the detectives in his criminal acts, and as guilty as they knew him to be, they still knew that it would be hard to ever obtain a conviction against him. The reason for this was because of his extreme versatility. He was not alone capable of making many changes in his methods of working, but was just as successful in altering his appearance.

Fennelman had formerly been a small actor of some ability. The knowledge of make-up gained in that profession enabled him to assume many different disguises or characters in the various towns that he worked.

It is a tribute to the capabilities of this champion forger and quick change artist that when arrested, it was almost impossible to identify him. In actual appearance he was a mild looking, gray-haired man of apparent middle-age. When "working," or when he appeared at a bank to cash a check it was never in his own natural guise. He was either a heavily bearded, swarthy fellow of apparently South European extraction, or in many cases a blond German or Swede. Occasionally he appeared as a light-haired Yankee.

In spite of all the hundreds of cases in which Fennelman was known and felt to be guilty, it was possible to bring positive identification in only two or three of them. Even after obtaining a conviction in these few cases it was not possible to send him away for a very long term. He had never been convicted before. He had never associated with fellow crooks or criminals. He was also sufficiently well-heeled with "fall money" to have retained one of the cleverest of criminal lawyers for his defense. The extreme sentence which was inflicted upon him was from five to ten years in prison. This period, with time for good behavior subtracted, really meant but a trifle over three years in jail.

The detective departments of the banking protective companies usually keep pretty close track of the discharge time of any convicted bank thief. As the time for Fennelman's discharge approached, the executive heads of the bank protectors became more and more uneasy, until finally a conference was called to consider his case.

As Fennelman stepped out of jail he was invited to the offices of the company which had formerly been most determined in pursuing him. He was invited in a cordial manner, and not told that he would have to go. When he arrived at the company's office, he was ushered into the president's private rooms, where the president himself stepped forward and shook hands with him.

After three years in jail, to have all this politeness and handshaking, Fennelman must have felt that he was in a dream. Or that there was some trick behind the whole thing. But, if he felt at first that he was dreaming, what must have been his feelings when he was offered a yearly pension for life. The only stipulation, that he was not alone to desist from forgery, but do absolutely nothing illegal which would bring him into contact with the police. His liberal pension also required that he report at least once daily so that his movements might be kept track of. The ex-forger reached out for the contract and signed it.

The suggestion of a pension was made by one of the younger executives of the banking protective company. He proved by a series of figures that this ex-crook had cost the bonding and insurance companies many thousands of dollars. The expense of the investigators and detectives who remained upon his trail for years was terrific. The younger executive pointed out how much cheaper it would be to pay a few thousands a year as a pension than to have to contend with Fennelman again.

The fact that the ex-pensioner was an entire success as a reformation, as well as a good investment was proved in his first year on the protective company's pay roll.

Fennelman lived only two years to enjoy his pension, having died of pneumonia last December. He had apparently no relatives, and willed the small estate that he left to prison help societies.

The masked men were binding the old man hand and foot—

# THE TORTURERS

## By Charles Somerville

**"GO AHEAD," SAID THE AGED WIFE. "BUT IF YOU KILL US I KNOW THAT GOD WILL SEE THAT YOU NEVER GET OUT OF THIS COUNTY ALIVE"**

**A Story of Fact**

NOT even, I am told, the wanton killing of the little Frank boy by the young human monstrosities, Loeb and Leopold, caused a greater wave of revulsion and resentment to sweep the country than did a crime committed in a small Pennsylvania town a good many years previous.

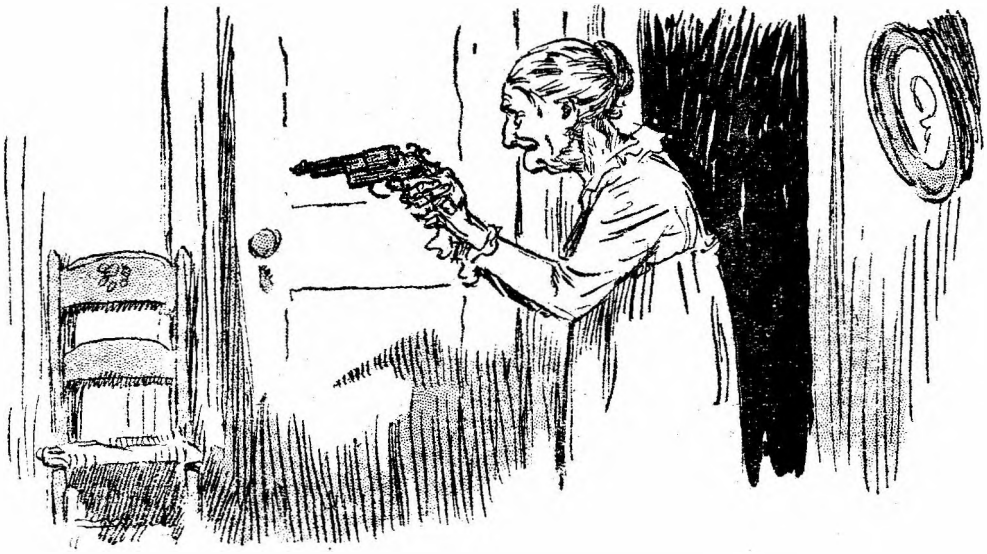
It was a robbery attended by such hideous cruelty toward the victim that there was nation-wide expression of satisfaction and relief when good detective work effected the capture of the dastardly gang and all its members were dealt heavy prison sentences—sentences ranging from twenty-three years to fifteen.

And in connection with this review of the case, it contains a highly dramatic episode, suppressed in the press reports of the day and told now for the first time in print to the readers of FLYNN'S WEEKLY DETECTIVE FICTION.

About five miles below Pittsburgh, and on the Ohio River, is situated the little town of Coraopolis. It was comprised of a short main street of shops, a post office and a one story brick village lockup, and that was about all.

Of course, I am writing of the place as it was. As to how much it may since have developed I do not know. Beyond the limits of the tiny town spread a vast area of excellent farm land all under vigorous cultivation.

The dean of the farmers of the locality and the best liked man in all the country round was Ambrose Green. His wife shared his popularity. Green was ap-



**—when Ma Green entered and leveled the old-fashioned pistol**

proaching his eightieth year, and his wife was nearly his age.

In his young manhood and prime he had been a farmer on an extensive scale, and had also turned many profitable land investments. It was estimated that old Ambrose Green was worth fully a hundred thousand dollars, a big fortune for the times in a rural community. Moreover, he was known far and wide as a man who lived up to his professions of Christianity in love for his neighbors.

Any farmer in financial trouble applied to Green for relief. The old man could always be depended upon to lend the money. He would ask interest for it, but more to take the curse of charity off the loan than for profit, because he would charge only a third or fourth the interest a bank would have demanded on the same notes. Also he accepted some notes with which a bank would have had nothing whatsoever to do.

Coraopolis had no such institution of its own and Green was a depositor in the Pittsburgh banks, but he always kept a fairly large supply of cash on hand with which to come to the swift aid of troubled farmers.

His wife was equally kind in her manner and actions toward her neighbors. She visited and comforted the sick and aided the needy. Many of the wretched squatter families along the muddy river banks had from time to time their hunger appeased from the abundance of her larders and the produce of the Green farm.

The reputation of old Green for keeping a large sum of money in his home for the relief of his fellow farmers when they fell into financial travel traveled far beyond his community, due to those who came to know of it and felt that such generosity and kindliness should be praised. And articles had been written regarding him in the Pittsburgh newspapers.

Unintentionally, however, the spread of his philanthropic reputation did aged Ambrose Green a very bad turn, for it came to evil ears.

The aged couple held to the custom of the hard-working days of their younger years and regularly retired at nine o'clock each night. This they had done, as usual, on a certain night in December, 1896, and were both just sinking off to slumber when there came a loud and what sounded like a very excited rapping on the door of their home.

Old Green got up, shoved his feet into his slippers and, going into the hallway, shouted:

"Who's there?"

"Oh, Mr. Green!" a voice high-pitched and apparently breathless replied. "There's been a bad accident over to Len Purdy's farm and—"

Len Purdy was a tiller of the soil who lived about a mile away and was one of Ambrose Green's best friends. Anything happening to Purdy demanded his instant and active help.

He unbolted and swung open the door.

Five masked men pushed in upon him. The leader, a small, lithe man, pressed the muzzle of a pistol against the old man's heart.

### *"I Ain't Got no Money"*

"Stick 'em up!" said this desperado to the aged farmer, clad only in his nightshirt, and with no possibility of being armed, since he had no weapon in his hand. "Stick 'em up or you're a dead man!"

Instead of "sticking 'em up" and in spite of the pistol prodding against his chest, old Green smashed the leader down flat on his back with a ponderous blow between the eyes. But the four others leaped upon him, and, of course, there could be only one outcome to so uneven a battle.

They soon had him down, a rope was produced, they dragged him to his big, old rocking chair in the living room and bound him in it hand and foot. He made no outcry, knowing it to be useless, for the nearest neighbor was far beyond the reach of his voice.

But while they were finishing the brutal business, one of them raised a sudden cry of alarm and pointed to the bedroom doorway. In it stood Ma Green in her nightdress. Her silver hair held to its tightly drawn and knotted bedroom arrangement, but her face was distorted and her blue eyes snapping. Steadying one hand with the other she was aiming a big, old-fashioned pistol at them.

"If you hurt my husband I'll kill you!" she cried. With no quaver in her voice either. "You take those ropes off him this instant!"

And when they didn't do so instantly she opened fire.

But she was an old woman and was using a pistol for the first time in her life, a pistol, moreover, gone stiff and difficult of trigger from years of disuse.

Her shots went wild and the robbers closed in upon her, bore her over to the bed and there bound her hand and foot as they had her husband. She screamed with rage as much as fear and fought them as hard as she could till they had stretched her prone on her back, tied helplessly.

Then they began to ransack the premises looking for the big roll of money Ambrose Green was reputed to keep always on hand in his home. Bureaus, chests and closets they rifled and an old desk they ripped apart. But none of the gang could find the money.

They cursed and grew enraged as the luck of the search went against them. Eyes glaring and glowering through their masks, they surrounded the old man.

"Where the hell do you keep that money?" the leader, a small, lithe figure of a man, demanded.

"I ain't keeping no money here," said Green.

"That's a lie, you old skinflint. Come through and tell us or things will go a damn site worse with you than they have."

"I ain't got no money here."

"Don't lie to me!" snarled the leader, and repaid old Green for the blow between the eyes he had dealt him by punching the helpless man in the face.

"Tell us where that money is! Do you hear?"

### *A Killing Deferred*

Green was silent.

"There's no use of you denying you got money here. Hell—everybody knows you keep a bunch of it in the house—that you've always got it on tap to lend out."

When Green still remained tight-lipped, the youthful-appearing chief of the gang said:

"I'm going to count three, and if by the time I do you still hold out the information from us, by God I'll shoot you dead. One —two—"

"You go to hell," said old Green. "I don't think you've got the guts to shoot."

"You—" and the leader lifted his weapon.

But one of the other masked men gripped his arm.

"Wait," he said. "Come over here a minute. Let's talk this over."

There was a consultation, in which it was decided that it would be useless to kill Green, for he evidently had some very secret place where he kept the money stored and that even if they murdered the old couple and had the whole premises to themselves they might never find the "swag."

They had already searched every likely place they could think of and been unsuccessful. There was unquestionably some secret and very cleverly thought out place of concealment.

### *To Make Him Talk*

"That old bird would rather die than give us the satisfaction of getting away with it—you can see that," said one of the gang to the leader.

"Let's try the old woman then," he suggested.

"That's better," agreed another.

"I don't know," said a third. "Gosh, how she fought back at us. She's as much of a tiger cat as the old guy."

"Let's see how good her nerve is," said the leader.

They left aged Green bound to his old-fashioned rocking chair and went into the bedroom.

"Now, mom," the chieftain of the bandits said, "you tell us this minute where your husband keeps that money hid or we'll kill the two of you and tear the house down to get it."

"I heerd you askin' my husband, Ambrose, to tell you," she said. "And threatenin' his life. And he spurned you. And so do I spurn you! I guess we'd both rather die than let our honest money get into the hands of such scoundrels—such cowardly scoundrels as you men.

"You go ahead and shoot. But if you kill us I know that God will see that you never get out of this county alive. You'll be hunted and caught and shot down like mad dogs."

Against the fearlessness of the old couple the robbers stood enraged but nonplused.

It was then that a horrible, savage, fiendish idea entered the mind of the leader. It must have occurred to him as his baffled eyes chanced to look at the reddened metal of the old, round-bellied stove alight in the living room.

"You fellows hold off," he said curtly to the others. "I've got the notion that'll make 'em come through—make 'em tell."

Old Ambrose Green's eyes were on the man as he came into the apartment where the farmer sat bound to the chair. But the leader of the robbers ignored his stare. Green saw the man go to the stove, fling open the door; then stoop, take up the poker that was at hand and push it deeply into the red coals.

While he waited for it to become hot, he turned a malicious grin on the aged farmer.

"I guess there's going to be some talking done pretty soon, you old fool," he said.

"Ain't been any done yet."

"Well, I'm going to toast the bare soles of your wife's feet till there is."

### *To the Rescue*

Streams of cold sweat started down Green's cheeks.

"Good God!" he said. "You wouldn't—couldn't do that!"

"Couldn't hey? You just wait a minute more till this poker gets good and red-hot and you'll find out whether I mean business or not."

The old man gulped.

"Well, then—" he began, but the voice of his wife came from the next room:

"Don't you tell 'em a word, Ambrose! I forbid you! They won't dare do that to me. And if they do, I'd rather have my feet burned off than to give in to the filthy cowards. Ambrose, keep your mouth shut."

The small, masked man drew the poker out of the fire. It glowed as red as the coals. He stepped on into the bedroom.

"Wait!" cried old Green. "I'll—"

"They ain't touched me yet, Ambrose. they won't dare!"

But in his avariciousness to possess himself of the aged farmer's money the leader fiendishly laid the red-hot iron against the bare flesh of the prostrate woman's feet.

Yet such was her fortitude she did not

cry out. She knew that the sounds of her suffering would be the one thing that would make her husband yield, and two of the robbers were afterward to confess that four times the red-hot poker was applied to the woman's flesh before, tortured beyond all endurance, she screamed.

At the sound of that single outcry of agony old Ambrose Green yelled to the robbers that he was ready to yield the secret of the hiding place of his money.

To the chagrin of the gang, who had toiled so hard in ransacking the place and gone to such horrible lengths to extort the knowledge, the old man said with a curling lip of scorn:

### *Virtually Murder*

"It's in my pocketbook in my coat pocket—that coat there you dumped on the floor when you was searching around back of the closet."

The leader pounced upon the coat, brushing the others back, and found there a wallet containing one thousand dollars in cash and four bonds of five hundred dollars each. These were negotiable bonds which could be realized on as easily as the cash itself.

"Well, now that you got the money untie my wife and me—you'll do that much in decency, won't you, so I can 'tend to her, put some salve on her burned feet?"

The defeated, agonized old woman said in added plea:

"Do that, you men, won't you? I'm suffering awful."

The merciless crew paid no slightest attention to the appeal, had no pity.

They hurried out of the house and the old couple heard sounds of triumphant laughter as the gang made their get-away down to the dark and deserted highway.

It was virtually murder, for it might easily have been days before any neighbor came to the Green farm.

As it happened, however, Len Purdy, the farmer, whose name the robbers had used in gaining entrance to the domicile, had need of a farm implement he didn't possess and arrived at the Green home early the next morning for the purpose of borrowing the implement.

Both Green and his wife were unconscious, but the sturdy old man soon revived. The coma into which the wife had fallen had been a mercy to the aged woman with the seared feet, and a doctor was at her bedside and oil and bandages applied to her wounds before she revived.

But the shock of her experience, coupled with the physical agony she endured, added to the symptoms of blood poisoning resulting, kept her for weeks on what appeared to be inescapably her death bed.

The press of the country rang with denunciations of the fiendish cruelty of her torturers coupled with demands on the authorities to make extraordinary efforts to discover the whereabouts of the inhuman gang of robbers.

Especially came the cry from every side for the capture of the barbarously merciless leader who had conceived and enacted the atrocity of putting red-hot iron to the feet of the bound and helpless old woman as a means of loosening the lips of Ambrose Green regarding the whereabouts of his money. It was a cry from the press expressing the feeling of the population of the entire country.

### *No Clew in Sight*

But little Coraopolis itself had no police force—a single constable befuddled at the facing of the task. In the circumstances the Governor of the State appealed to the Pittsburgh police for aid, and Roger O'Mara, then chief of the force of that city, announced that he would take personal charge of the pursuit.

A week, two weeks passed, however, and no arrest had been made. Not a clew discovered. The five men had worn masks which completely concealed their countenances and Green and his wife could only offer descriptions of the sizes and apparent ages of the men.

Both were certain—very—that they would recognize the voice of the little, lithe leader of the gang. It was curiously mild and soft, they said, for the voice of such a fiend.

The train crews of every passenger and freight which had passed through the territory that night were energetically sought,

seen and interviewed, but none had recollection of seeing such a group of men on the night of the crime.

O'Mara hardly expected any result from this step. He was certain the gang was in Pittsburgh, that they had walked the five miles into the city from the Green farm under cover of the night.

Deep disappointment had public expression in the newspapers, when two weeks had gone by and the monstrously cruel robbers were not apprehended or, even, apparently, a clew turned up to guide the police toward their capture.

### *Detectives from Headquarters*

And now I am to tell of the strange dramatic episode that didn't get into the newspapers, that is for the first time here told in print.

Police Chief Roger O'Mara was *persona non grata* in that office or any other post to Euge O'Neal, editor of the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*.

O'Neal was pacing his sanctum dictating to his young secretary a fierce philippic against the Pittsburgh police department and O'Mara especially, because of the failure to run down the barbarous plunderers of the Green farmhouse.

He was accusing the department and its chief of stupidity, laxity, carelessness, slovenliness of method, misdirection and all around incompetence.

"Lord, Mr. O'Neal," commented the secretary, "you are fairly taking the hide off O'Mara!"

"Well, by heavens," replied the editor to the young man, "they should have the hide taken off them. Those damn fiends—especially that little devil who thought of putting a red-hot poker to the bare flesh of that old woman—are at large in this town. There's no doubt of it. And this dumb department can't lay their hands on them! It's absurd. An intelligent round-up would be bound to do it."

"I guess they are a bunch of flatheads all right," said the secretary in smiling agreement.

"Worse than that," commented O'Neal. "Well, now let's see—er—what was that last sentence?"

"Why," answered the secretary, "it was—"

He got no further.

Two stalwart men, entirely unannounced, made their appearance in the doorway of the editor's office. As they entered, one in a calm, casual way drew a pistol. As he did so he said:

"We are detectives from headquarters, Mr. O'Neal."

The editor stared at man and pistol, and his face flushed.

"If that big, stuff shirt O'Mara has sent you up here to intimidate me, to keep me from giving him another blast, you can go back and—"

"We're not here for anything like that," protested the officer, but as he spoke he and his colleague advanced further into the room.

"Going to arrest me for criminal libel at pistol point?" sneered O'Neal. "You'd best be about your business of grabbing those crooks who tortured old Mrs. Green."

"That," said the second man, "is exactly what we've come here to do."

### *Morris Confesses*

And he suddenly plunged forward and gripped the little secretary by the throat while he called to his comrade:

"Frisk the dirty little rat, Jim, and see if he's got a gun on him!"

"What the devil has young Morris done to make you handle him like that?" demanded O'Neal.

"Young Morris," said the first man, "Jim," after he thoroughly rifled the pinioned secretary's pockets and found no weapon, "*is the heartless young devil who burned Mrs. Green's feet!*"

At first O'Neal roared that he didn't believe it. He saw in the episode a put up job by O'Mara to annoy him and make him look ridiculous. And he threatened to bring down every law of reprisal in the land on the head of the police chief of Pittsburgh.

But when the detectives ripped from an inside pocket of Charley Morris one of the five hundred-dollar bonds stolen from the Green home and then and there in sight and hearing of O'Neal began shaking

a complete confession out of the white, whimpering and trembling secretary, the editor did the only thing left for him to do—he flopped back into his big, revolving chair and watched and listened in dumfounded silence.

"We got the first of the gang three days ago, Mr. O'Neal," volunteered one of the detectives as he and his colleagues were about to depart with the handcuffed, sobbing Morris between them.

### *Jimmy, the Bar Fly*

"We had to keep it quiet till we made him come through with the names of the others. We've got all five bagged, counting this dog here now. There's only a woman left to take up, and we know where she is and she can't get away from us."

O'Neal stared at the slightly built, curly-haired, pale-eyed young Morris.

"And you," the astonished man said, "you little bowing and scraping, soft-voiced, mincing creature, you were the fiend that put the hot iron to that old woman's bare flesh? I can't—by God, I can't make it out!"

"This fellow was the leader of the outfit," said the detectives. "The woman and him schemed out the whole job."

The first clew to the farmhouse torturers came out of a Pittsburgh saloon. A sharp-witted bartender passed it to a precinct detective and started the machinery that was to bag the entire outfit of crooks.

It may be said here that they were all amateurs. None had ever come into the hands of the police before. All the men in the execution of the plot, excepting young Morris, were perennially hard-up alcoholics, men who earned a dollar here and there, borrowed one elsewhere, somehow scraped up the prices for drinks.

One of these, for long known to the neighborhood as a professional down and outer, sauntered into this particular saloon on a morning about ten days after the Coraopolis crime, ordered a double whisky with an air of jauntiness and confidence unknown to the bartender, from whom he had so often begged a drink with humble words and watery eyes. And when the bartender said:

"Hey, Jimmy, who made you a millionaire overnight?" Jimmy replied:

"That's just what's happened, old kid."

He tendered a one hundred dollar bill across the bar in payment.

"G'wan," said the bartender, "pull back with that stage money and let me have some real change."

"That bill's as real as the nose on your face," said Jimmy Kramer.

The man behind the bar took a closer look at it and was convinced.

"Where in God's name did you get one hundred bucks all at once?" he demanded.

Jimmy Kramer winked.

"I'll bet you'd give a lot to know," he said. "But treat me nice now, because there's more where that one came from. Give me another double hooker, and throw me a quart bottle of the best into a paper wrapper. I'm giving a little party to some friends this afternoon."

When Jimmy had departed with his bottle and his pockets stuffed with the bills he got in change for the hundred, the bartender pondered. Jimmy Kramer he had known as a shiftless, jobless "bar fly" for nearly ten years.

### *No Arrests Yet!*

Of course, somebody might have left him some money. But if so, Jimmy Kramer was the sort that would have been around with his chest out, bragging about it, because he was always boasting of having wealthy relatives.

It came to the saloon man's mind that he hadn't seen Jimmy around for some days. A week—no, more than that—ten days. He wondered where Jimmy, the saloon's "regular," had been for ten days. But his conjectures ended only in perplexity.

There being no other customers at the time, he picked up his morning newspaper, not yet perused. It was the *Dispatch*. And in large type this headline stared him in the face:

**TENTH DAY SINCE CORAOPOLIS OUTRAGE AND NO ARRESTS YET!**

*Tenth day!*

Could it be possible that Jimmy Kramer,

the worthless rummy, was in that cowardly crime? Jimmy Kramer—with one hundred dollars to spend!

Well, if Jimmy Kramer was one of the gang who burned that plucky old woman, who was dying from the deal she got, he ought to be turned in. The bartender knew crooks who, with an easy conscience, he would protect. But not that kind of a crook.

### *Some Easy Money*

So he spoke to the precinct detective. And the detective watched Jimmy all day as Jimmy got gloriously drunk with a group of sordid guzzlers like himself. The detective waited until four o'clock in the morning, when he knocked on the door of Jimmy's squalid furnished room, and when Jimmy opened it and stood quaking and trembling from his debauch, the detective seized him.

He gave him no opportunity to bring back his nerves through a deep drink from the bottle beside his bed. He wouldn't let poor, whining Jimmy touch the bottle, but made him hustle into his clothing and called a patrol wagon and took him to headquarters.

And there huge-bodied, hard-jawed, steel-eyed O'Mara took Jimmy in hand and demanded an account of where he had come into possession of so much money.

And Jimmy, who hadn't earned more than a half dollar or a dollar at anything in more than fifteen years, was totally unable to pull his scattered wits together to formulate any sort of a reasonable lie. Within half an hour O'Mara had made an abject pulp of him, and a complete confession was forthcoming.

He said that he and three other men like himself, social discards who yet had never been apprehended for serious crimes, were approached by a young woman named May Lang, with whom all had a sporadic acquaintance.

May Lang, he said, when she was flush with money, liked to appear in the back rooms of the resorts Kramer and his kind frequented and play the "good fellow." She would stand them all three, four, sometimes five rounds of drinks.

Once or twice on these expeditions she had been accompanied by a young fellow to whom they were finally introduced by her under the name of Morris. On this last meeting May told the four men that her friend had a big scheme for picking up some easy money, and lots of it. Then she had let Morris do the rest of the talking.

"He told us about this old fellow that lived way off from anybody else and kept a potful of money in his house all the time," Kramer went on to say.

"There was only this old geezer and his old wife living in this lonesome house, without even a dog to protect them. All we'd have to do was to put on masks, and if the old boy saw five men come in on him at once, why there'd be nothing to it. He'd give up all the money he had in the house in a hurry.

"When he told us he was sure this old boy was eighty years old, and said how he had studied out the lay of the land and how he would get the old man to open the door by telling him one of his friends was sick—well, it looked pretty good to the bunch of us."

### *The Editor's Pill*

Then Jimmy Kramer went on to relate the stubborn opposition they had unexpectedly met from the old couple. And he whined and whimpered that if he had ever known to what revolting lengths Morris would go in order to extort the money from the old man he would never have joined the expedition.

Morris, the handler of the red-hot poker, collapsed as pusillanimously as his hirelings.

Like Judd Gray in the recent Snyder murder, he sought to cast the blame for it all on the woman—in this case, May Lang.

"She put it into my head," he whined. "She could make me do anything. She has won me away from my wife, made me forget my home and two babies. I met her in a dance hall. She's a wicked, wicked woman.

"She's had me starving my wife and children, and I was on the verge of losing the little home I've paid installments on—all on account of her, of her demands for money to satisfy her silly and expensive

whims. That's how it all came to happen in the first place.

"She brought me the newspaper clippings that told about old Green running a sort of a bank in the little village for his neighbors. She said how easy it would be to go down there some night and get his money. She said she had heard he kept as much as ten thousand dollars in the house at a time.

"I kept telling her I wouldn't dare do such a thing. And she kept taunting me with being a coward. And then she said she could round up four men who would go down there with me and would not expect much of the loot. She said if five of us showed up masked it would scare the old couple so hard they'd give up the money without a struggle.

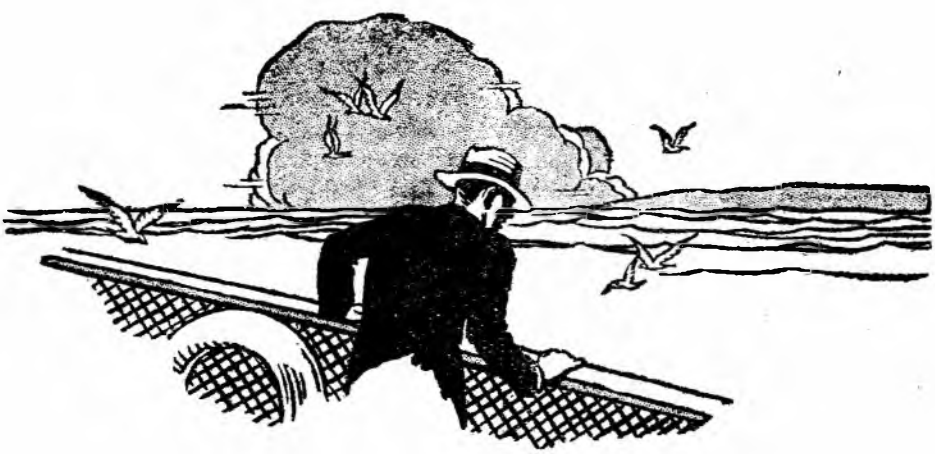
"It was her that went down there and got the name of Len Purdy for me to use to get the old man to open the door. She threatened if I didn't go down there and get the money she'd never see me, never speak to me again on earth, and I couldn't do without her—I was so blind in love with her I felt I couldn't live without her. But it was her put up the whole job—May Lang, she did it."

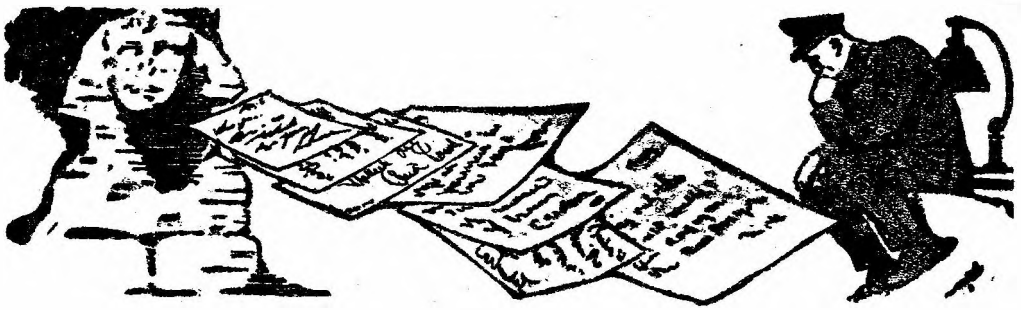
"Was it May Lang," demanded O'Mara, "who told you to burn old Mrs. Green's feet?"

Twenty-three years at hard labor was the little fiend's prison portion; May Lang got fifteen. And fifteen years each was meted to the others in the dastardly affair.

And Editor O'Neal manfully swallowed his pill. No higher praise was given O'Mara's achievement than was contained in the editorial on the subject which appeared in the Pittsburgh *Dispatch*.

## Watch for Mr. Somerville's "'Bad Bill' Wright" in an early issue





# SOLVING CIPHER SECRETS

**Edited by M. E. Ohaver**

**INCLUDING A NEW METHOD OF SIMPLIFYING THE MYSZKOWSKI TRANSPOSITION CIPHER—ALSO, "JUMBLED CRYPTS," A NEW KIND OF CIPHER-PUZZLE**

THE Myszkowski transposition cipher, described last week, is somewhat impractical in use because of the extreme care which must be exercised to prevent error in the various manipulations.

Fortunately, however, the very same order of transposition can be easily effected, and with little chance of error, by another method about to be described. To facilitate comparison of the two methods, the same message *(a)* and key word *(b)* employed with the Myszkowski cipher will again be used.

By this improved method it is unnecessary to repeat the key word, the numerical key *(c)* being derived from it as before, however, by numbering the letters in alphabetical order, and taking repeated letters, if any, from left to right.

The message is then transcribed in lines of the same number of letters as the key word, forming that number of columns, each of which will be headed by one of the key numbers, as illustrated at *(d)*. Encipherment is completed by taking these columns downward and in the order indicated by the numerical key, and grouping by fives *(e)*.

*(a)* SEND REINFORCEMENTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *(b)* | R | E | D | A | N |
| *(c)* | 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| *(d)* | S | E | N | D | R |
| | E | I | N | F | O |
| | R | C | E | M | E |
| | N | T | S | | |

*(e)* DFMNN ESEIC TROES ERN

*(f)*

| R | E | D | A | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| . | . | . | . | . |
| . | . | . | . | . |
| . | . | . | . | . |
| . | . | . | x | x |

To decipher a cryptogram in this system, having the key, first count the letters in the communication, and prepare a diagram showing the exact lengths of the columns for the particular key used. Here, for example, there are eighteen letters in the message, and five in the key. Consequently, the first three columns must contain four letters each, and the last two columns, three each. The empty spaces in the last line should be filled with *x*'s, as shown at *(f)*, to minimize chances of error.

The cryptogram *(e)* can now be written into this diagram by descending verticals in the same order in which it was taken out, as indicated by the numerical key, restoring the letters to their original message order *(d)*.

In trying to decipher a cryptogram in this system without the key, the procedure would ordinarily be, first, to determine the length of the key word or number of columns in the diagram, and, second, to find the order of transposition in these columns. Suggestions along these lines will be given in subsequent installments of the department, as space permits, beginning next week. In the meantime see what you can

do with the subjoined cipher No. 73, which is of the type under discussion.

Cipher No. 64, published in the September 3 issue, conveyed the following quotation from Poe's *Marginalia:*

> "It is by no means an irrational fancy that, in a future existence, we shall look upon what we think our present existence, as a dream."

Like the original athbash canon of the Kabbalah, this cipher employed an alphabet of consonants only. The vowels *A, E, I, O, U,* and *Y,* were omitted, and the first ten of the remaining twenty consonants were used as substitutes, respectively, for the last ten in reverse order, and *vice versa, B* being used for *Z,* and *Z* for *B; C* for *X,* and *X* for *C;* and so on, as follows:

M L K J H G F D C B
N P Q R S T V W X Z

In enciphering the message *(a)* the vowels were first omitted *(b)* and the consonants substituted *(c)* according to the above alphabet. These consonants were then written in reverse order, from right to left, and without spaces between words, as shown at *(d).*

*(a)* It is by no means . . .
*(b)* T S B N M NS . . .
*(c)* G H Z M N MH . . .
*(d)* . . . H M N M Z H G

The main difficulty here lies in supplying the missing vowels, by different selections of which it is obvious that a number of interpretations might be possible in many cases.

How do you like the "Q. and A." cryptograms? The solution to No. 68, published last week, is as follows:

*Question:* How can any cat have nine lives?

*Answer:* No cat has eight lives; any cat has one life more than no cat; therefore, any cat has nine lives!

Solutions to Nos. 69 and 70 will be published in two weeks.

Taking up this week's puzzlers, besides transposition cipher No. 73, already mentioned, we are offering in No. 71 a new kind of cipher puzzle which we have christened "jumbled crypts."

The problem consists of two or more messages of the same number of words—two messages of thirteen words each in this case—enciphered with different simple substitution alphabets, some of the cipher words occupying similar numerical places in their messages being then interchanged between the cryptograms. The messages are in ordinary, everyday English. Can you "unshuffle" these jumbled crypts?

Last, but by no means least, we have No. 72, which is not hard, but may keep you guessing a few minutes.

CIPHER No. 71.

*(a)* TXN LHWW RXU YIV TE BKY QVIHUM YIV TVXQH CXAYARHY BKY IXOY WHQARAT.

*(b)* BKY FYQHVXQY KHUM UBDVYF DHZZHUJ UVPFWRPV MJWV JF WRAJV RYXWJFM HU YIV WJFM.

CIPHER No. 72 (John H. Rosa, Bronx, New York).

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| OOKLA | UTOAO | RFAHE | TAIRL |
| GAITII | WAHET | AEARL | SPAHE |
| SANOW | SKAUR | OAAME | GA |

CIPHER No. 73.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| TVYIE | TRROR | EHNIA | EUDSR |
| IEONI | ORENA | EEORP | TEALO |
| LTSUH | LHQNO | UCADD | CSAAE |
| TDVFU | GNNYC | YI | |

The solutions to this week's ciphers Nos. 71 and 72, also No. 67 of September 10, will be published next week.

No. 73 will be used in the next two or three articles in demonstrating the methods of solving this kind of transposition cipher. But the full translation will be withheld until the explanations have been quite completed.

Keep your answers pouring in, fans. And don't forget to include answers and explanations with ciphers submitted for publication.

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